

Article for the Exmoor Panel July 2019

The Headwaters of the Exe Project was launched in 2016 and forms part of South West Water's Upstream Thinking programme, offering an innovative way to improve the quality of drinking water being abstracted from rivers in 10 catchments across the South West.

It costs South West Water more to treat water that contains silt, fertiliser or pesticides to make the high quality water we expect from our taps. The idea behind Upstream Thinking is to lower this cost by improving the quality of 'raw' river water. On this basis South West Water is currently funding three projects on the River Exe, of which Headwaters of the Exe is one, which will run until March 2020.

'Headwaters of the Exe' is a partnership project with South West Water, Exmoor National Park Authority, Exmoor Hill Farming Network and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest. It has a steering group comprising local landowners and organisations including the Exmoor Society and the Exmoor Rivers and Streams Group. Exeter University and volunteers carry out monitoring to ensure that the project is having the desired effect.

The Headwaters of the Exe Project covers an area of 27,559 hectares, including the upper Exe, the Rivers Barle, Quarne, Pulham, Haddeo and smaller tributaries, as well as Wimbleball Lake.

The programme is delivering a range of work, including:

- Advice to farmers, foresters and game shoot managers;
- A capital grant fund;
- Training events, site visits and demonstrations to promote good practice;
- Rights of way maintenance to reduce erosion and run-off in high risk areas;
- Monitoring to identify any localised water quality issues relating to sewerage; and
- Control of invasive species.

The possibility of continuing the project into the next round of Upstream Thinking, which would run from 2020 to 2025, is currently being looked into. South West Water has asked the Headwaters of the Exe project to identify issues and propose options for a future project on Exmoor. One issue which has been brought to the team's attention is the impact of roads on water quality, for instance through the deposit of mud and silt, as well as oil and other pollutants, into watercourses. The farm advisory work for the project is currently undertaken by FWAG SW which is already working with county highways teams in some areas, including Somerset.

As part of the scoping process, the Project would very much like to know whether Parishes have situations where road runoff may be having an impact on their watercourses. If there are any areas which Parishes would like to let the Headwaters of the Exe Project know about, or for more information, please contact Programme Manager, Heather Harley by email:

hjharley@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk or phone 01398 322277.