

Upstream Thinking

A catchment management scheme



SUMMARY Upstream Thinking is an environmental programme, funded by South West Water and delivered by several Non-Governmental Organisations. It was set up to protect tap water quality at the source by working together with farmers and landowners to improve agriculture, restore wetlands and reduce pollution. The project leads to direct savings and reduced risks for the water company, while making a positive contribution to biodiversity and improved carbon sequestration.

Contract Type



PES contracts including AECM

Public Goods

CLIMATE REGULATION

SOIL

WATER

BIODIVERSITY

Field of action



Basis of Payment



Action-based

Involved contract takers



Individual

OBJECTIVES

- Reducing diffused agricultural pollution
- Improving catchment resilience to extreme weather
- Improving the natural capital stock in its catchments

CONTRACT DETAILS

Participation, involved parties & requirements for participation

Participation, involved parties & requirements for participation South West Water (SWW) has established the conservation projects in partnership with a group of regional conservation organizations, including the Westcountry Rivers Trust, the County Wildlife Trusts for Devon and Cornwall and the Exmoor National Park Authority. They work with the National Farmers Union, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group and with farmers in the target catchment areas. A prerequisite for cooperation is therefore the location of the farm within the watershed.

Working across 11 catchments, the programme aims to help 750 farmers to put 1,300 ha into revised management.

Nature of cooperation & payment Upstream Thinking is an action-based approach, based on prescribed improvements to farm infrastructure that should reduce diffuse pollution to waterbodies. Each farm receives a detailed and individually tailored farm plan, which outlines options for measures focusing on land and water protection, soil, nutrient and pesticide management. Capital grants are made available to enable the implementation of a wide range of measures, from fencing off watercourses to the storage of manure.

The level of payment depends on the necessary measures to reduce diffuse pollution. The management measures are locked into 10- or 25- year covenants. SWW funds the improvements through its capital works programme. The company has had catchment management plans approved by OFWAT (The Water Services Regulation Authority) to deliver preventative measures on land it does not own.

Funding mechanism In this project the ‘provider is paid’ funding mechanism is used. SWW recognized that it is cheaper to help farmers provide clean raw water (water in rivers and streams) than to pay for the expensive filtration equipment needed to treat polluted water after it has been drawn from the river for drinking. Accordingly, the SWW have charged their water consumers a small part in the water bill for the restoration of the catchment area instead of charging a larger part in the long run for water filtration.

Advice & support The intermediary Westcountry Rivers Trust plays an advisory and supporting role towards the farmers. In recent years, they have developed a close relationship with the farmers in the catchment areas by providing advice on best practices and helping farmers access grants. The trust between the intermediary and the vendors was crucial to the success of the project. Moreover, Upstream Thinking offers for example soil surveys to understand and plan nutrient application, detailing steps to reduce the risk of erosion and mobilization and identifying compaction.

Environmental monitoring & control Westcountry Rivers Trust carried out catchment investigations for 17 catchments across the region, including detailed pollution risk assessment and source apportionment evidence and targeted and fully costed catchment intervention strategies.

SUCCESS FACTORS

- A shared vision for dialogue and action
- Trust in and acceptance of farm advisors and the intermediary
- Conservation and biodiversity are part of the living working landscape rather the preserve of nature reserves
- Farmers are reliably and fairly paid to deliver all sorts of essential services for society in addition to food
- Advantages for the entire water cycle, from the moor to the sea, so that everyone and everything along the riverbank can benefit

Further information:

www.southwestwater.co.uk/environment/working-in-the-environment/upstream-thinking/



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