

Morning News Country

Inspiring film shows benefits of creating wetlands

Martin Hesp reports on how farmers prevent agricultural run-off from polluting a river system

What happens to mud? It might not sound like the most intriguing or magical question in the world, but what actually happens to mud – and all the top-soils along with sometimes not-so-pleasant sediments that go with it – is that much of it ends up in our rivers and seashores...

Now a surprisingly fascinating new film shot in North Devon tells the story of what can happen to mud, water-run-off and all the agricultural sediments that, until recently, have poured off high land in to the River Yeo, and then passed down through Barnstaple to the sea.

Creating New Farm Wetlands is a short film which anyone can watch for free on the internet – and it was made for North Devon's Biosphere by the company behind a popular series of videos called Boat Stories, shot in the same area.

Following the success of that series, Jo Stewart-Smith (producer) and Simon Vacher (director of photography) have formed the partnership Butterfly Effect Films to make more powerful short films which they hope will fly far and wide.

'By digging a simple sediment trap, we can return this nutrient-rich soil to the farm'

Farmer Phil Morrish

The new film on recently formed wetlands covers a topic of huge importance across the British countryside – how to prevent agricultural run-off from polluting a river system. Such pollution can force closure of fledgling shellfish businesses in an estuary and lower water quality on bathing beaches.

The production team decided to follow the Boat Stories format and ask farmers to explain the narrative in their words.

Jo Stewart-Smith told the *Western Morning News*: "I did wonder whether farmers working in the hills would want to talk about pollution in the estuary, but as soon as I listened to them, a different picture emerged and I realised we rarely hear their side of the story."

As Phil Morrish, from Stoneyard Farm, near Barnstaple, says in the film: "The last thing we want to do is lose precious sediment and nutrients into the river. By digging a simple sediment trap, we can actually return this nutrient-rich soil to the farm."

Jo said: "Initially the farmers may have felt outside their comfort-zone speaking on camera, but their passion for the project overrode any worries and they were walking and talking us through like professional presenters."



Simon Vacher filming Chris and Phil Morrish for Creating New Farm Wetlands which was made for North Devon's Biosphere by Jo Stewart-Smith



As Phil digs a series of ditches, he explains: "The important thing I learned is slowing the flow of water gives the sediment and nutrients time to settle out and at the same time reduces the flash-flood risk to nearby Barnstaple."

The result is a positive, inspiring film which reveals that creating new wetlands brings numerous other benefits to the farm, like saving electricity on the dirty water pumps or needing less bedding in the sheds.

Upstream along the River Yeo, the

video also witnesses the creation of a couple of impressive new ponds which will form wetland on Andrew Mather's Hallsdown Farm high on the fringes of Exmoor.

Andrew is able to show the camera how the new wildlife area will not only help prevent mud and sediments from entering the river below, but will also form a new environmental attraction for the small caravan park he runs.

Tom Hynes, biodiversity officer for the biosphere, is seen towards the end of the ten-minute film outlining the long-term gains for the area as the patchwork of new wetlands matures and the water quality in the estuary improves.

As Phil Morrish says: "This project benefits the farm and the river environment so it's a win-win situation."

Director of photography, Simon, told the *WMN*: "To make the link between the hills and the estuary we followed the course of the river Yeo weaving its way through some of the most scenically beautiful parts of North Devon to the wide open ocean."

The film can be viewed on the biosphere's estuary project page <http://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/estuary-project.html> or on butterfly effects <http://www.butterflyeffectfilms.com>

It was made to inspire other farmers to create wetlands and take up available grants so do not forget to watch and share.