River Basin Management Planning

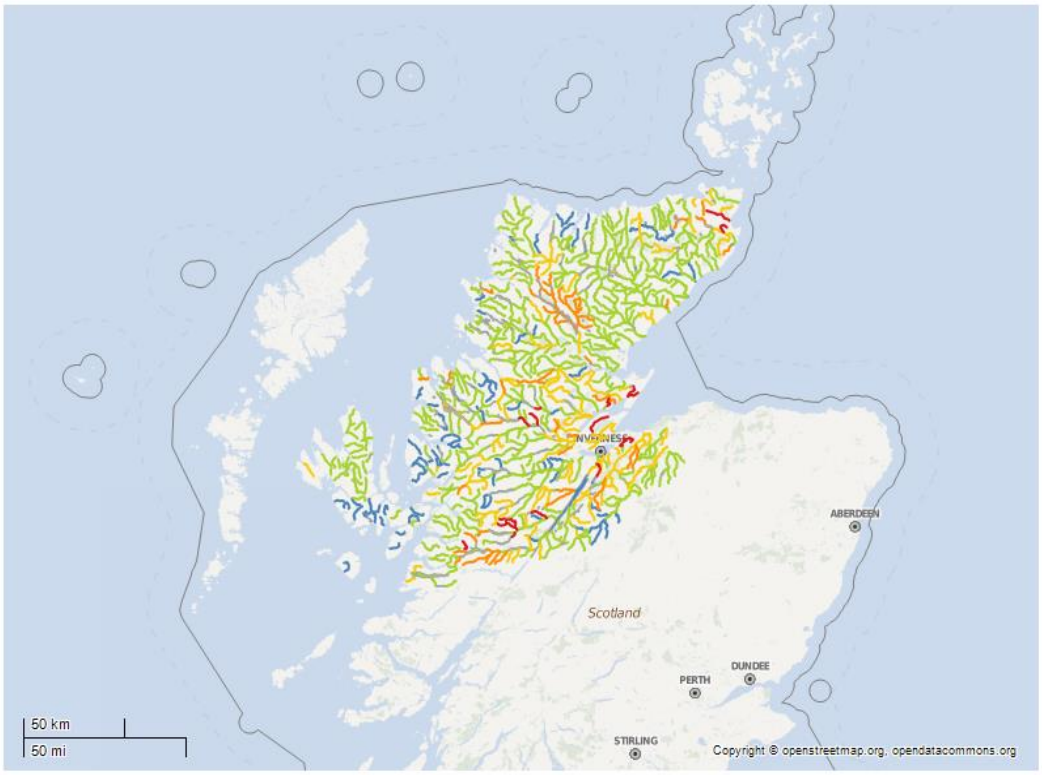
Highland update May 2016

The river basin management plan – what does it say about Highland?

The river basin management plan (RBMP) for the Scotland river basin district was published December 2015. It is made up of the plan document, technical appendices and an online data tool, the Water environment hub, which provides information on current condition and future targets for rivers, lochs, coastal waters and groundwaters. The tool has easy filtering options and the ability to export data, maps and charts.

The RBMPs show that the majority Highlands's surface waters are at good or high ecological status. The majority of the downgrades are associated with barriers to fish migration, modification to the physical condition of the water environment, rural diffuse pollution and pressures associated with hydroelectricity generation. The map below demonstrates the distribution of the pressures impacting the current condition of surface water bodies, there is more information on these waterbodies and protected areas on the Water environment hub.

This map displays the overall condition of bodies of surface waters in 2014



Please contact us if you have any questions or queries about how to use the application, or to arrange a training session, via NHighlandAAG@sepa.org.uk

Engagement with stakeholders to support delivery of objectives

The publication of the river basin management plans provides the opportunity to turn the focus onto delivery. Our engagement with external stakeholders will concentrate on:

- Raising awareness of RBMP2 publication – so that people understand the plans, what it means for them and how to access information. This will enable stakeholders to use data relevant to them to inform decisions and take action to improve the water environment.
- Supporting the delivery of actions through partnership working –by creating new structures with delivery partners or making use of existing ones.
- Coordination with other strategic planning processes and funding mechanisms – for example, flood risk management, land use planning, marine planning, forestry and the land use strategy.

To achieve this we intend to create a wider communication network through the already established area advisory group members. We will also move away from formal AAG meetings to having smaller meetings focused on delivery projects.

Please contact NHighlandAAG@sepa.org.uk for further information about how you can become involved.

The second river basin management plans

The river basin management plan for the Scotland river basin district 2015 – 2027

Appendices to the river basin management plan for the Scotland river basin district 2015 - 2027

Water environment hub

The **Water environment hub** is a comprehensive online data tool that provides information on current condition and future targets for rivers, lochs, estuaries, coastal waters and groundwaters. The system has been designed to be user friendly with easy filtering options and the ability to export data, maps and charts. An updated version with waterbody sheets and all relevant data is now available.

Please contact us if you have any questions or queries about how to use the application, or to arrange a training session, via NHighlandAAG@sepa.org.uk

Delivery of objectives for river basin management planning

SEPA and responsible authorities are currently assessing the objectives set within the plans to create a properly managed, efficient and effective plan to deliver measures based on the current resource available. Lessons learned from the first cycle have informed the development of existing, and introduction of new, measures to expand and achieve the “step change” in delivery needed to meet the ambition set out in RBMP2.

Some theme specific updates are included below. Further information about the delivery mechanisms are available on the SEPA web pages; http://www.sepa.org.uk/environment/water/river-basin-management-planning/actions-to-deliver-rbmp/

Bathing water protected areas

This year we report the first European water quality classifications under the Bathing Water Directive and in 2015 our expectation is that 80% of Scotland's 84 designated bathing waters meet at least the sufficient classification with 65% of bathing waters meeting the good or excellent classifications.

These new classifications give a more consistent picture of water quality condition at each location and can be viewed in the table below with more information on the Scotland's Environment Web.

It's good news. However, there are 17 bathing waters in Scotland that will have a poor classification displayed in 2016 and we realise this is important to the local communities. Our aim is to bring all of them up to at least sufficient by 2020. Our two key strategies to achieve this are to:

- Reduce the levels of pollutants entering the bathing water
- Use the provisions detailed in the Directive to inform and advise on occasions when bathing is not encouraged.

Further information can be found at; http://apps.sepa.org.uk/bathingwaters/Index.aspx

Rural diffuse pollution

Measures to address rural diffuse pollution will co-ordinated and managed by the national diffuse pollution management advisory group, DPMAG. During the second cycle, resources will be targeted on improving the condition of protected areas, such as bathing waters (see above), special areas of conservation, drinking waters and shellfish water.

DPMAG are leading a 2 tiered approach. A national campaign of awareness raising will include land manager workshops, promotion of 'Farming and Water Scotland' messages; training courses, best practice guides, and engagement and inspection by SEARS partners on land out-with our targeted areas. This approach will aim to prevent deterioration of water bodies and improve some that are close to the good-moderate boundary.

We will also expand upon the first cycle targeted catchment approach for Priority catchments and the new Focus areas. In the priority catchments there will be awareness raising, 1 to 1 farm visits and if required revisits to non-compliant farms. Focus areas will involve evidence gathering and monitoring, local awareness raising and land manager visits similar to priority catchment delivery. Both processes should deliver significant change in land manager behaviour over time resulting in improvements in water quality.

In the North Highland area this work will be starting in the Inverness, Nairn and Cromarty coastal priority catchments in the next few months.

The water environment hub provides more details on these targeted catchments.

Water environment fund

The WEF is the main delivery mechanism for non-regulatory work to improve fish passage and the physical condition of Scotland's water environment. SEPA administer the Fund on behalf of Scottish Government who make an annual grant for restoration projects that deliver prioritised environmental improvements.

In the financial year 2015/16 WEF has used third party grants to improve 16 km of river for morphology and fish access with one water body improved to good status. Control and eradication of Invasive non Native Species has also been funded along 281 km of rivers, in 43 water bodies. Restoration plans and designs have been produced that will achieve good status in 40 water bodies in future years and improving over 1000km of river for fish or morphology. The Scottish Government has awarded SEPA a grant of £3.7 million for the financial year 2016/17 for restoration projects to improve the water environment.

Pilot catchments

Over the last year the agreed work plan for the South Esk, Dee, Nith, Glazert Water and Leven pilot catchments has continued to be delivered with the objectives of improving physical condition and contributing to natural flood management. At present we are working on 15 water bodies across the catchments: three are at the landowner engagement stage; five at options appraisal; six at the point where third parties are engaged and leading on design; and one where we have taken on the design role. For the Leven, catchment scoping has been completed and the catchment plan agreed in December. This will result in the inclusion of a further three water bodies within the pilot catchment work.

If all the projects progress to construction in future years then five water bodies are expected to improve to good condition. Of those that won't achieve good, four will improve by two status classes and five by one status class. One water body is a non-baseline and not classified but has been included for natural flood management benefits. All will deliver localised natural flood management benefits, with two potentially delivering benefits to downstream potentially vulnerable areas.

Further information is available from the catchment coordinators listed on the Pilot catchment web pages.

Funding opportunities

The Environmental Co-operation Action Fund (ECAF)

The Environmental Co-operation Action Fund (ECAF) is a new Scottish Government Scheme set up to fund the delivery of landscape-scale environmental projects by groups of farmers, foresters or other land managers, including local authorities and Fishery Trusts. ECAF supports the costs of planning, facilitating and overseeing cooperative projects, principally by funding the activities of a facilitator.

There are 8 environmental priorities that applicants can apply for; the most relevant for RBMP being control of INNS, catchment management for water quality and physical restoration of water bodies.

The next application round has still to be specified and RBMP co-ordinators will notify you when the date is known.

Full details of the scheme can be found here

Good news

Congratulations to the Spey Catchment Initiative, SCI. They won the innovative project category and made the final 4 for the overall 2016 UK River Prize and Nigel Holmes Trophy at the recent River Restoration Centre annual conference that was held in Blackpool last month.

Their project on the Allt Lorgy (Spey Catchment) was focused on restoring the morphology and habitats on a 1km stretch of river and its adjoining floodplain. The long term vision is for the Allt Lorgy and its surrounding site to re-establish its natural wandering morphology through the operation of natural river process. Read more about the project and watch their video here.

Next update

The next update paper will be out in the summer. If you would like to see a specific topic covered or add a feature please contact NHighlandAAG@sepa.org.uk with the details.