

## **Impact report: Everyone's Evenlode**

September 2025

### **Introduction**

Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) is a member of the Evenlode Catchment Partnership (ECP). As a key member, we helped shape the funding bid to the Thames Water Smarter Water Catchment initiative. In summer 2021, we found out that we were successful. The ECP was awarded a significant grant that covered four key themes: Water Quality, Biodiversity, Natural Flood Management and Education, Access, and Recreation. CNL was responsible for the Education, Access, and Recreation theme. As the main public facing part of the project, we needed a memorable name that encompassed the inclusive nature of our theme, and in late 2021, Everyone's Evenlode was launched. The "Everyone's Evenlode" team was made up of:

- Ros Marsden, Education Officer
- Rowan Wynne-Jones, Education & Community Officer
- Ruth Rudwick, Community Outreach Officer (to Sep 22)
- Jennifer Lanham, Community Outreach Officer (from Nov 22)

The team were supported by James Webb, Partnerships Lead at CNL, the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens, a Working Group made up of ECP members, and the Smarter Water Catchment Steering Group.

To successfully deliver Everyone's Evenlode, we had to complete annual project milestones. These included:

- Delivering river-based sessions for schools, universities, citizen scientists, and communities both inside and outside the catchment
- Developing a programme of guided walks, presentations, training and events to engage members of the public with the work of the ECP
- Delivering at least one large river-based event per year
- Creating a library of on-line resources



*Children identifying insects during a 'Wild Wednesday' event at Combe Mill © JL*

## Education

Year	Schools involved	School sessions	Children	Young People (16-25)	Children & Young People	Volunteer hours
2021-22	10	9	299	11	310	29
2022-23	17	35	934	81	1,015	66
2023-24	20	39	849	110	959	155
2024-25	20	39	925	45	970	248
2025-26	14	23	601	0	601	148
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>3,608</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>3,855</b>	<b>645</b>

\* Note that 2021-22 and 2025-26 were not full years, amounting to approx. four months each

It was clear from the start that our education offer should include schools in the catchment area, as well as those outside. We recognised that many children who live within the Evenlode catchment area attend schools located outside the catchment boundary. This pragmatic approach was the best option for the widest number of children to benefit from the project. Teachers didn't have the capacity, resources or the confidence, to create bespoke outdoor learning opportunities. As a result, demand was strong, and our delivery figures were very high relative to the size of the team.

The project engaged with Primary, Secondary, Higher Education and Special Educational Needs schools and Colleges to get as many children as possible into the outdoors in river and stream-based locations throughout the Evenlode Catchment. This included bespoke walking tours to local water courses from the school gate; GCSE river fieldwork at Combe Mill; and A Level catchment tours focused on hydrology and flood mitigation. There has also been PGCE teacher training. Many of the pupils were experiencing wading in rivers for the first time, a profound sensory connection to the aquatic environment that they were highly unlikely to experience outside our project. Frequently, children voiced the fact they had never been in a river before.

Schools benefited sustainably and financially from local delivery, either by having no travel costs on their walking tour or by doing fieldwork twenty minutes from their secondary school gate when previously they had been bused on a seven-hour round trip to the coast for the mandatory fieldwork study for GCSE Geography. By allowing children to gain confidence in outdoor environments close to where they live, our belief was that they would come to love them and introduce family members and friends, making the project truly wide-reaching and multi-generational.

High quality delivery was a hallmark of the project throughout its lifetime. Monitoring and evaluation was conducted through customer feedback surveys at the end of each session. These were completed by the teachers and gave the opportunity to suggest changes and improvements. Consequently, the sessions were often refined to give the best outcome for the children and the teachers.

We also signed up a number of primary and secondary schools to be the first citizen science schools in Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire working on water quality through Earthwatch's Freshwater Watch Programme. This involves schools engaging monthly with water quality issues and scientific recording, establishing an important legacy for the project.



As the project matured, Everyone's Evenlode became the 'go-to' for schools in west Oxfordshire and east Gloucestershire for GCSE Science and Geography field trips. The river surveying and flow experiments that were conducted on these sessions enabled students to see and understand river and hydrological processes first hand. We had a wide selection of waders so students could get in the river and have a hands-on experience.



*Students from The Cherwell School, Oxford on a Geography GCSE field trip © RWJ*

We also partnered with University of Oxford to offer PGCE training for postgraduate students. The training provided new teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver field trips when they began teaching the following year. Data from the University showed that about half of the PGCE students joined schools in the local area – creating a lasting legacy.



*PGCE students from University of Oxford with Ros demonstrating the infiltrometer experiment © RWJ*



The team were able to achieve exceptionally high levels of delivery because of the support from the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens. They worked alongside the team in all weathers, helping to set up, deliver and pack up at the end of the day. The volunteer hours in the table above demonstrate their considerable commitment to the project. Working with the Wardens also enabled them to contribute their own skills and knowledge to the sessions, increasing the quality of the experience for the children. The support from the wardens allowed schools to bring out whole year groups by coach, keeping the cost for individual pupils very low and affordable. Schools with high FSM numbers were especially grateful for this provision.

Another successful aspect of the project was the Duke of Edinburgh Awards (DofE). Small groups of young volunteers completing their DofE participated in conservation activities across the Evenlode catchment once a month on a Saturday morning. They took part in hedge laying; tree grafting; bird box building; pond clearing; leaky dam building; and willow weaving. In addition to practical activities the participants also completed topical homework research projects. Their work not only helped improve the local environment, it also provided them with important life skills and inspiration to pursue interests in this field. In total 31 young people took part with 21 gaining their bronze, 5 silver and 5 gold awards.



*DofE volunteers barrowing woodchip to improve access paths at Combe Mill © JL*

Several young people opted to continue volunteering with us after they completed the required number of sessions, whilst others went on to volunteer with other organisations, becoming citizen scientists. Many volunteers assisted with our community outreach events, educating the public about the decline of river health, improving their confidence and communication skills, and acting as mentors (consciously or not) for other children.

## Community Outreach

Year	Guided walks	Community visits	Events, fairs, festivals & shows	Knowledge Exchange	Total events	Children	Adults	Volunteer Hours
2021-22	0	3	0	1	4	12	88	23
2022-23	7	2	11	5	26	618	860	206
2023-24	5	17	13	10	46	873	1,664	352
2024-25	5	14	8	29	57	896	1,635	181
2025-26	0	5	4	6	15	54	381	58
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>2,453</b>	<b>4,628</b>	<b>820</b>

\* In addition to the events listed above, a large river event was delivered in 2022-23, 2023-24 & 2024-25

Over the life of the project, the community outreach offer was incredibly wide ranging. The headings in the table above reflected our annual milestones so there was consistency in this respect. However, the team honed their engagement as the project developed, taking a much more proactive approach, often co-creating bespoke events addressing specific community need. This is perhaps best demonstrated in the number of **Events, fairs, festivals and shows** the team attended, which peaked in the first half of the project. These events usually experienced high footfall so were a great way to introduce the project to members of the public at scale and raise the profile of the ECP. The team typically set up a pitch with activities on offer to entice people over. Once engaged in the activity, the team would be able to talk about the project, river health and the work of the ECP. Whilst not an especially deep level of engagement, participation at these events was an effective way to reach large numbers of people. As the project matured, there was less need to raise awareness of the project/ ECP as many communities were by now not only aware of us but working with us. In the second half of the project, the team still attended events, fairs, festivals and shows but were doing so in a much more targeted way.

**Guided walks** proved a powerful engagement tool. Routes were designed to showcase rivers and biodiversity projects, while also incorporating water-quality testing. These walks provided participants with a rich, immersive experience. The number of walks delivered each year was consistent and they usually attracted between 10-20 adults. While initial walks were open to the general public, the team later prioritised reaching out to under represented groups creating guided walks for Refugee Resource for refugee families from Oxford and a Muslim women's walking group from the Friendship Café in Gloucester. Both walks were very well received and resulted in requests for further engagement opportunities. Getting 'the foot in the door' with unique groups like this, alongside building a trusting relationship for sustained outcomes requires time, dedication, and the right staff. Our genuine, friendly and adaptable approach has proven we have the right formula.

**Community visits** are defined as presentations, events etc that have been specifically set up with and for a community. Whilst most of the community visits were delivered for residents of a given town or village, a good number were provided to special interest groups. This included the Women's Institute, uniformed groups like scouts and guides, and sector leads. Consequently, these events were diverse. Community visits would often start with a talk in a village hall or community centre, followed by an activity like a walk. In better weather, the session would start at a venue like Combe Mill where an activity like pond dipping or a bat walk would take place. The team also delivered in libraries, attractions and historic sites! Water related education is fundamental to overall community outreach, and meeting people where they live is key. These events significantly contributed to our engagement figures. At the same time, they offered the potential for some very deep engagement in the project themes. These events are fundamental to building community awareness and resilience.





*Wild About the Wychwoods – a community visit in July 2024 that was attended by 66 people. The event included a screening of the ECP short film followed by a River Action Presentation © CNL*



*Refugee Resource, bringing groups from Oxford, visited Blenheim Palace twice during summer 2024 © JL*

Every year we offered one **large river community event**:

FY	Date	Event name	Children	Adults
2022-23	05/11/2022	Eco-Youth Conference at FarmED	37	52
2023-24	22/04/2023	Earth Day at Wigwell Nature Reserve, Charlbury	125	139
2024-25	15/03/2025	Exhibition event at FarmED	10	110

The Eco-Youth Conference was delivered just one year from the inception of the Everyone's Evenlode project. The programme was youth led with presentations and discussions from young people on topics such as river pollution and the Duke of Edinburgh scheme. The event also showcased entries from the creative writing competition. After lunch, there was a practical session making bat boxes and willow weaving bird feeders. The event concluded with a talk on bat conservation by a local expert, complete with a demonstration of live bats and their echolocating abilities. The event was really successful and attracted families who stayed for the whole day.

To recognise and celebrate Earth Day, we delivered a large event at Wigwell Nature Reserve and Scout Hut, Charlbury. There were two parts to the day: a family-friendly open-air event; and a ticketed event with ECP partner presentations and hands-on citizen science opportunities for adults. The event provided an opportunity for collaboration across the ECP, CNL and local community members. Volunteers, artists, scientists, activists, conservationists and educators worked together to create a successful day that appealed to all people of all ages.

Throughout the day a variety of interactive, nature-based activities were on offer, including arts and crafts, beaver dam building and stream-dipping, as well as talks and presentations. Delicious refreshments were provided by Charlbury Scouts, and Charlbury Primary School performed some emotive river-themed songs. 250-300 people attended the event over the day, and more than 17 people volunteered their time and expertise to the day. The dwell-times were extraordinary, particularly at the beaver dam in the Wigwell Nature Reserve.

To mark the end of the project, we held an exhibition event to celebrate all the amazing work of the ECP during the Smarter Water Catchment project. Representatives from Wild Oxfordshire, Earthwatch, CNL and Thames Water all gave presentations and used the opportunity to thank the volunteers and communities that had supported the project. The event was supported by eight Duke of Edinburgh students, who also presented along with students from Enstone Primary School.



*Young people presenting at the Eco-Conference*  
© JW



*School choir and spectators at Earth Day* © RWJ



The final aspect of community outreach was **Knowledge exchange** events. These included training and information sharing events. In the first half of the project, the focus was on training opportunities for volunteers and citizen scientists, to build capacity in the catchment area, and increase sustainability. As the project matured, we increased the amount of information sharing events. These were really important for educating the public on the key issues within catchment. Under this milestone, we developed the Outdoor Learning Network that brought together a wide range of outdoor providers from non-profits, schools and attractions. In the final year of the project, Jennifer Lanham established the Voices of the River webinar series. Experts were invited to discuss topics with the panel and take part in a Q&A. The number of 'live' attendees was modest but the recorded versions available online received hundreds of hits and reposting's. The high-quality webinar series is a key part of the projects digital legacy.

### Conclusion

The Smarter Water Catchment pilot project was an overwhelming success. A dynamic and hard-working team took our education and outreach work to a new and professional level. The team got off to a strong start and never looked back. Throughout the project, we invested in training and qualifications to build their expertise.

The education offer was in huge demand – the continuity over four summers was important to the success, as was the fine tuning. Listening to teacher feedback and constantly improving. Schools also responded well to the local, bespoke nature of sessions. Community outreach also developed and diversified over the project lifetime. In the final year, it was a sophisticated programme of delivery that catered directly to community need. Continuity was important but the critical bit was building relationships and becoming a trusted partner to other organisations, as well as communities. The team were very visible, present and local – they were part of the community as well. In the second half of the project, the team increasingly reached out to under-represented groups such as ethnic minority communities and people living with disabilities, which is only possible with sustained and sensitive engagement.

A project highlight was connecting with Rushmore Primary School, London in late 2024. Initially, the team delivered a session for the school on their local stretch of water. Then they accompanied the schools eco-committee to the Houses of Parliament to deliver a 'message in a bottle' campaign. The students met Emma Hardy, Under Secretary for Water and Flooding. The students presented Minister Hardy with hundreds of postcard messages written by children on river pollution, in addition to voicing their own concerns for the future of our rivers. In summer 2025, we invited the school to the Cotswolds, and the students enjoyed an idyllic residential at Sarsden Glebe. This is one example of the innovative, high-quality and impactful delivery the team achieved, which will have long lasting benefits for the children.

The project received incredible support from the Cotswold voluntary wardens, who were instrumental to our delivery. We were also fortunate that the catchment is well served with some excellent locations. Most of our delivery took place at locations such as Combe Mill, FarmED and Blenheim Palace. This continuity and familiarity helped increased the quality of the sessions and the overall experience.

We have created a library of high-quality digital resources in the form of field guides, information sheets, and recorded webinars. These are freely available and easy to access. These resources create a legacy to facilitate ongoing delivery and learning beyond the life of the project. There is also a full record of project comms, in the form of professional newsletters that project partners can reference.

The collective sum of all this activity has benefited thousands of people. Schools, community leaders, specialist groups and members of the public have all been incredibly receptive to our programme of education and outreach. We know there is significant demand for our brand of education and outreach in the catchment and beyond.