Restoring Healthy Rivers

People have been been altering the flow of water for thousands of years, but more recent canalisation and dredging have over-widened and over-deepened many watercourses. Today, rivers are far removed from the natural processes that created and sustained them. While these modifications may facilitate navigation, maintaining rivers in this unnatural state is both financially and environmentally costly.

River Users' Best-Practice Guide

East Anglian Rivers

Water is the lifeblood of East Anglia, home to globally-rare chalk rivers, fenland and the famous Norfolk Broads. Norfolk Rivers Trust works to restore, protect, and enhance Norfolk's water environments for all.

Experiencing nature alongside, on, or even in a river can be incredibly powerful, and we aim to inspire more people to enjoy these natural wonders. We must also remember that our recreational activities can have negative impacts on rivers and their wildlife.

We hope this guide will encourage you to explore the region's rivers, while equipping you with all the information required to look after them.

The area a river influences, and is influenced by, is beyond its channel. When we turn our attention to natural river systems and processes, we can begin to appreciate how our modern-day memory limits the wonders these waters could be once more.

On The Water - Top Tips

- **Tread & paddle carefully** - Give wildlife space, especially in bird nesting season and fish spawning season. Always avoid contact with river gravels, damage to vegetation, and causing erosion to banks. Follow the Codes of Practice.
- **Leave the river exactly as you find it** - Fallen trees and blockages may seem an inconvenience, but are vital to natural processes which shape rivers, create habitat, and reduce catchment-wide flooding. Permissions are needed for management. Avoid disturbing or moving material on, or near, the banks. Instead, report concerns to the Environment Agency or your local authority. If a route is blocked, it is best to go back and find an alternative.
- **Do not litter** - Natural or unnatural, it is an offence to leave anything behind.

Key Species and Habitats to See and Protect

Benefits of More Natural Rivers

- **Better water quality** – contributing to improved river health for wildlife and us
- **Varied flows and river features** – making for an interesting paddle and better habitat diversity
- **Improved habitats increase biodiversity** - providing more opportunities to spot wildlife

Wood is Good

Woody debris in rivers and streams provides numerous benefits by "slowing the flow" including: reducing downstream flood risk; increasing groundwater volumes; and improving water quality as pollutants and sediment have more time to settle out and be filtered by plants and soil.

Did you know it may be a legal offence to adjust, add or take away any materials from watercourses without a permit? Please leave fallen trees, debris and blockages as you find them.

- **Avoid the undergrowth** - Riverbanks should be full of slippery, tangled greenery. Enter and leave the water from designated slipways, steps or pontoons to stay safe, and to protect wildlife.
- **Promptly report concerns of pollution, blue-green algae and wildlife in distress** - Pass location and details of suspected pollution and invasive species concerns on main rivers to the Environment Agency (0800 80 70 60). If you spot any issues, stay away and report immediately. Avoid contact to limit spreading elsewhere.
- **Check, clean and dry** equipment and clothing before and after each outdoor visit. Following this guidance prevents the spread of invasive species.
- **Dive into river restoration** - Volunteer to enhance and protect your local watercourse… such as events organised by **Norfolk Rivers Trust**.

A weedy good river bed - perfect for aquatic wildlife

River Navigation Rights

Permissions and passes are essential considerations for recreational activities on rivers: anglers must obtain a valid rod fishing licence; and paddlers may need permissions such as waterways licences, permits and tolls. Rights of navigation along main rivers are subject to local byelaws and navigation limits.
Registration and access fees help fund river improvements, and can include benefits like insurance.

As you navigate a stretch of water, you may need various permissions.

In England, it is trespass to paddle, swim or wade without permission from adjacent riparian **landowners**, **Navigation Authorities**, and/or another **Local Licensing Authority**. In East Anglia, these include the Environment Agency and the Broads Authority.

Muddying the Waters

Bare soil is vulnerable to being washed into rivers, contributing to bank erosion and excess siltation.

Excess soil or silt in rivers can smother invertebrates and fish eggs, as well as driving excess growth of aquatic plants - which can lead to biodiversity loss.

Bankside vegetation is crucial in protecting both watercourses and soil from rainfall. Roots uptake nutrients from runoff and stabilise banks.

Plants and trees stabilise soil, keeping it together

Bare soil is at high risk of erosion

Bank and soil erosion are worsened by:

- **Dragging equipment along the ground** - This damages vegetation and creates pathways for water to gather. It also increases the risk of picking up invasive species. Carry your kit to avoid harming it and the environment.
- **Pets unleashed** - Pets scrabbling in and out of rivers can erode riverbanks. Instead, use designated access points to allow pets to play.
- **Walking the edge** - Straying from paths can be unsafe, and detrimental to river protection. Steep-sided banks make egress tricky. Stick to designated paths to minimise disturbance.

Following this best-practice reduces the risk of damage to rare bankside wildlife, spread of invasive species, and disease transmission.

Remember

- Enjoy spending time in the outdoors, leaving no trace. Take only photos and memories.
- Do not trespass or undertake activities on the river, banks, or channel without permissions.
- Respect other river users. For useful links and Codes of Practice, scan the QR code.

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