

TINY SYMBOLS OF MASSIVE RESTORATION

Forestry Commission ecologist Simon Weymouth says rescuing tiny creatures from a muddy New Forest stream bank has been a fitting finale for LIFE 3.

The mission to remove the mudsnails to a new home along the re-routed Black Water was just a small part of a transformation of the river system.

Reinstating meanders straightened out in Victorian times has slowed the water's flow, halted harmful erosion and is now revitalising the floodplain.

Now not only have the snails been given a new and sustainable home, more habitats are being created across the area for countless more of their kind, as well as many other species.

Mr. Weymouth, said: "Sustainable restoration of the area's wetlands and the complex interconnections between their habitats and wildlife is what LIFE 3 has all been about.

"The Black Water scheme has just been the last element in the four-year, £2.9 million European Union-funded project.

"Marking its success seems to be an excellent way to celebrate the conclusion of the initiative whose practical phase will end this month."

Mr. Weymouth said the Forestry Commission, Environment Agency, English Nature, Hampshire County Council, National Trust and RSPB had all been partners in LIFE 3.

more...

He said that since 2002 they had succeeded in restoring 261 hectares of riverine woodland and 184 hectares of mire.

He said they had also restored 18 hectares of bog woodland, together with 141 hectares of alluvial grassland and ten kilometres of river channels and associated floodplains.

The restoration work has resulted in more than eight per cent of the New Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest being restored to a 'favourable' condition.

That has put the Forestry Commission on target to meet its commitments to ensure that 95 per cent of the SSSI is in good health by 2010.

Although LIFE 3, the biggest conservation project of its kind in the country, has finished, more conservation work is being planned.

Proposals are already being drawn up for the restoration of another 4,000 hectares of New Forest land.

This time the focus is going to be on removing 'alien' species, like Turkey oak, from the Ancient and Ornamental Woodlands, and more wetland restoration in the area's forest inclosures.

Anyone wanting information about the LIFE 3 project should ring 023 8028 3141, or log on to the www.forestry.gov.uk/newforest website.

...end

NOTES TO EDITORS

For further information please contact Miss Emma Stevens, Forestry Commission New Forest Communications Manager, on 023 8028 6828.

...-FCNEW/6605/01