

YorkshireDales
Rivers Trust

Impact Report

2025/2026



River re-meandering and wetland creation
Credit: Ousewem

About the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust



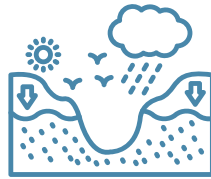
14

full time
equivalent staff



6690km

river length



5

major river
catchments



635

volunteers

We are a registered charity looking after the rivers, streams and catchments of the rivers Swale, Ure, Nidd, Wharfe and Ouse. We are also part of the national Rivers Trust movement which brings together 65 river trusts throughout the UK and Ireland.

Our aim is to restore and enhance the freshwater environments of our rivers and beyond for the benefit of people and wildlife, and to inspire others to do the same.

Working at grassroots level, we aim to tackle the causes of deterioration in our river habitats and water quality from habitat degradation, physical modifications, pollution and the effects of climate change.

We work with partners and the public, encouraging all to value, enjoy and conserve their local rivers.

You can find out more about our work in 2025-26 in the pages that follow:

- Working with nature
- Supporting farmers and landowners
- Reducing pollution from metal mines
- Inspiring generations
- Engaging with communities
- Collaborating in partnership
- Harnessing data and technology
- Restoring nature



A member of
The Rivers Trust
movement

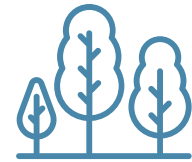
Working with nature



improved
27km
river



created
10ha
wetland habitat



planted
13,271
trees

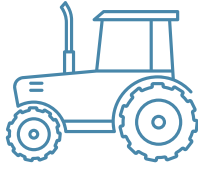
Natural flood management (NFM) uses natural processes to reduce flood risk by slowing the flow of water and increasing storage across the landscape. This helps reduce the risk of flash flooding and the speed and volume of water entering rivers downstream.

During 2025–26, we delivered 11 Natural Flood Management projects through the Ousewem programme - a multi-partner, catchment-scale initiative led by the City of York Council focused on reducing flood risk while delivering wider environmental benefits. The programme is funded by Defra as part of its Flood & Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme. Key outputs included the planting of over 10,000 trees and the creation of more than 10 hectares of wetland habitat, alongside the implementation of a range of measures to reduce surface water runoff and downstream flood risk. Delivery has been underpinned by strong collaboration with landowners, including the introduction of alternative livestock watering systems where watercourses have been fenced, and appropriate compensation arrangements where land has been taken out of production.

A significant milestone during the year was the Trust's first river re-meandering project, restoring a historically straightened watercourse to a more natural form. This has reconnected the channel to its floodplain, increased water storage capacity and created a dynamic wetland habitat. Early monitoring has already recorded positive ecological responses, including breeding waders such as curlew and lapwing.



Supporting farmers and landowners



worked with

97

farmers & landowners



delivered

2

farmer events

We work closely with farmers and landowners to improve agricultural practices and farm infrastructure, helping to reduce chemical use, enhance soil health and prevent animal waste from entering our rivers.

In November 2025, we launched the Yorkshire Agricultural Advice Rivers Network (YAARN)—a new partnership between the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust and Yorkshire Water, delivered in collaboration with all five of Yorkshire’s Rivers Trusts. The programme is focused on providing practical, trusted advice to reduce agricultural runoff and improve water quality across the Wharfe and Nidd catchments – in particular upstream of the bathing areas in Ilkley, Wetherby and Knaresborough.

During the year, a dedicated Farm and Conservation Officer was appointed to lead delivery, with 67 farmers already engaged. Activities have included site visits, mapping and farmer events, helping to identify opportunities to improve nutrient management, build soil health, strengthen riparian buffers and implement natural flood management measures. A new farmer group, *Root Returns*, has also been established to support peer learning and ongoing engagement.



Early success in securing funding for on-farm improvements highlights the programme’s strong potential to turn advice into action. It has already built trusted relationships with land managers and identified significant opportunities for future environmental improvements.

Photo: Heather Challis, Farming and Conservation Officer, showing the diverse species found in a traditional hay meadow grass ley. Deep-rooting species such as ribwort plantain, pignut, yarrow and sorrel help aerate the soil, while a rich mix of grasses and clovers enhances the meadow’s diversity and resilience.

Reducing pollution from metal mines



created

27

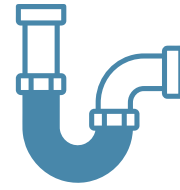
research plots



established

8,500 m²

vegetation



installed

90m

drainage

We continue to play a leading role in addressing the legacy of historic metal mining across the Tees, Swale and Nidd catchments, where contaminated mine waste impacts river water quality. Approximately 200 km of rivers in Teesdale and Swaledale and 38 km in the Nidd catchment are affected by diffuse metal pollution. This work contributes to the Government's statutory target to halve the length of rivers impacted by metals from abandoned mines by 2038, through the national Water and Abandoned Metal Mines (WAMM) programme, a partnership between the Environment Agency (EA) and the Mining Remediation Authority (MRA).

The Tees-Swale Diffuse Metals Project is funded through WAMM and the National Lottery Heritage Fund as part of Tees-Swale: Naturally Connected Programme. This is led by the North Pennines National Landscape in collaboration with the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, with YDRT leading delivery in collaboration with Tees Rivers Trust. During 2025–26, delivery works progressed in Swaledale and Teesdale. In Swaledale, the project built on earlier work to trial innovative vegetation establishment techniques designed to stabilise bare, metal-rich mine waste, reduce water infiltration and limit mobilisation of contaminants. A total of 27 research plots were established using site-specific microbiome treatments to support the development of specialist calaminarian grassland, with further plots planned.

In Teesdale, practical stabilisation works included the installation of 90 metres of drainage and 20 metres of stone revetment to reduce the interaction between contaminated material and watercourses. In addition, 8,500 m² of vegetation establishment was completed following monitoring of earlier interventions.

Monitoring undertaken in partnership with the Environment Agency has demonstrated measurable reductions in lead concentrations downstream of treated sites, providing early evidence of the effectiveness of these approaches.

Ecological monitoring at Marl Beck has also recorded encouraging results, including the presence of rare bee species and black grouse. Complementary habitat works, including the planting of approximately 300 trees and over 1,500 calamianian plug plants—specialist species adapted to metal-rich soils typically found on former mining sites—are supporting long-term stabilisation and biodiversity enhancement.

Work has also started in the Nidd Catchment. Funded by the Water Restoration Fund (administered by the Rural Payments Agency) with match funding from the MRA, we employed a Senior Project Officer to lead a feasibility study on Providence and Prosperous mine sites, Ashfoldside Beck. Activities have included water, sediment and microbiome sampling, alongside archaeological investigations and ecological surveys to inform design development. Concept designs have been agreed in principle with the landowner and steering group, and statutory bodies have been engaged to support progression to the next phase.



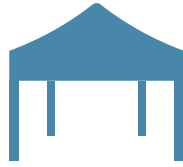
Inspiring generations



worked with

36

schools



delivered

21

community events



engaged with

1369

children

At the end of 2024, a funding bid to The National Lottery Heritage Fund was successful in securing £245,000 to run a 3-year education and engagement project, Rivers4Life. Thanks to National Lottery players we have been able to extend our education programme to work with local schools and communities in delivering an exciting programme combining the arts and science, to inspire everyone to get involved with caring for our rivers and wildlife.

From April 2025, we embarked on an ambitious programme of workshops, collaborating with a wide range of artists, schools and community groups. From stop-frame animation with primary school children, to reminiscing about rivers through creating a collaged banner with care home residents, we connected people to our mission to achieve wild, healthy, natural rivers, valued by all.

Through the Rivers4Life project and continuing with visits using our Rivers2U mobile classroom, we ran 45 school visits, working with 59 classes from 36 schools, engaging with 1369 children. We also delivered 21 community events including agricultural shows, guided walks, a series of art workshops with refugees from Afghanistan and pop-up events with the Rivers2U classroom.

A summer exhibition, hosted by the Dales Countryside Museum in Hawes, is the culmination of the work which has been undertaken during the first half of the Rivers4Life engagement project. The exhibition is open from 6th June to 27th September 2026, presenting a superb opportunity to connect a wider audience with our work, telling the story of the challenges faced by our rivers and the solutions addressed by our project work. Rivers4Life is a celebration of our beautiful rivers and wildlife, with films, music, art, soundscapes and drama, combining important facts with amazing artwork and photography.

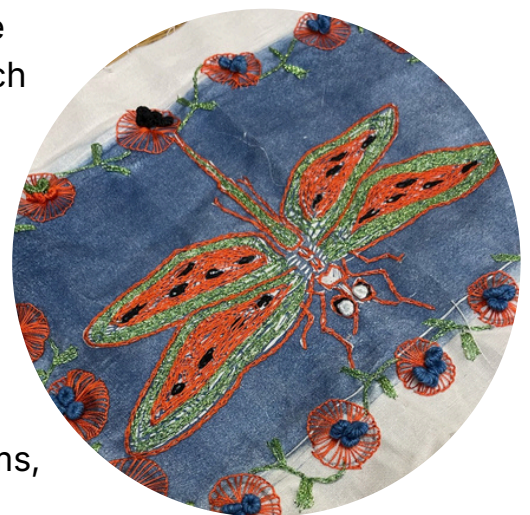


Photo: Rivers4Life artwork

Working with communities



635

volunteers



conducted

282

River surveys



cleared

5km

of invasive species



identified

29

pollution sources

Volunteering activity has continued to grow during the year, both in scale and the range of activities undertaken. In total, 635 volunteers contributed 2,143 hours of support, alongside six corporate volunteering days.

Volunteers played a key role in citizen science and monitoring activities, including 197 Riverfly surveys and the collection of 85 water samples as part of two Great UK WaterBlitz events. Outfall Safari surveys on the Nidd, delivered with trained volunteers and partner organisations, assessed 64 surface water outfalls across Harrogate. Of these, 29 (44%) were identified as polluting, including 11 high-risk sites requiring further investigation. Data collected through the project has been verified and shared with regulatory bodies, directly supporting investigations and early remediation actions

Practical conservation work undertaken by volunteers included the translocation of *Ranunculus* (water crowfoot) in Skeeby Beck - moving this native aquatic plant to suitable river sections to improve habitat and biodiversity. Volunteers also constructed 10 leaky barriers in Arkengarthdale and carried out invasive species control across multiple catchments, including 1km of giant hogweed treatment on Bedale Beck, removal of American skunk cabbage along 2km of Oak Beck, and coordinated balsam control in Skeeby Beck, the River Burn, and Timble Gill Beck. Additional work included buddleia control near Great Langton, river clean-ups on Crimble Beck and lower Oak Beck, tree planting as part of the Ousewem Project and on the Skirfare, and 200m of hedgerow planting in the Skeeby catchment.

In addition to practical work, volunteers contributed to data analysis and research activities, including mapping sampling locations on the River Nidd, analysing WaterBlitz data, and developing improved methods for presenting Riverfly data.

Photo: One of our volunteers tackling giant hogweed on Bedale Beck



Working in partnership



contributed to

4

local and national
environmental strategies



worked with

6

community groups



supported

11

partnership projects

Hosting the Dales to Vale Rivers Network continues to play a key role in enabling us to build strong partnerships with organisations, communities and businesses, delivering benefits for our watercourses at both strategic and local levels.

At a strategic level, the partnership has contributed to the Environment Agency Evaluation of the Water Environment Improvement Fund (WEIF), supported the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and progressed a strategic approach to Natural Flood Management in the Wharfe catchment. We have also continued to host the Yorkshire CaBA Hub, support partner project development, and engage in preparations for the next River Basin Management Plan and water company planning cycle, while responding to developments arising from the Cunliffe Report and Water Industry White Paper.



Photo: Catchment Partnerships Manager Vanessa Barlow collecting samples as part of the University of York AQUA project.

Project delivery has included three biodiversity-focused initiatives funded through the Catchment Biodiversity Fund, alongside involvement in the University of York AQUA project to develop citizen science approaches to water quality monitoring.

The partnership has also continued to support community groups, including work with Ilkley Clean River Group and Addingham Environment Group to assess the impact of wastewater treatment upgrades, and participation in the RiverKin project on the River Nidd, exploring community relationships with rivers and the concept of river rights.

Harnessing Data and Technology



assessed

160

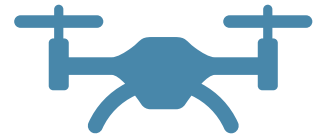
water bodies



developed

1

suitability model



invested in

3

survey drones

During 2025–26, we significantly advanced our approach to identifying and delivering Nature-based Solutions (NbS) across the Swale, Ure, Nidd, Ouse and Wharfe catchments. Funded through the Water Restoration Grant and supported by The Rivers Trust, the Solutions for the SUNOW project combined GIS-based spatial modelling with strong landowner and partner engagement to target high-impact restoration opportunities.

A multi-criteria suitability model covering over 160 waterbodies was developed to assess key environmental pressures, including temperature, sediment, nutrient pollution and flood resilience. This has enabled consistent prioritisation across catchments and informed decision making.

Engagement with 59 stakeholders and the formation of 19 partnerships supported delivery of initial works, including riparian planting and habitat creation. In addition, a substantial pipeline of future projects has been developed, including tree planting, fencing, natural flood management features and river restoration.

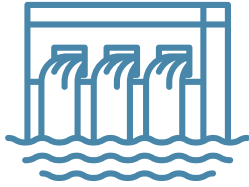
To further strengthen delivery, we are investing in new technology to enhance how we assess, design and monitor our work. Our new drone capability allows us to rapidly survey sites, capture detailed spatial data and track project progress over time. In parallel, we are using modelling software to test restoration scenarios virtually, helping us refine designs and maximise impact before work begins on the ground.

Together, this work has strengthened the Trust's evidence base, enhanced collaborative working, and created a strong portfolio of prioritised, deliverable projects for the years ahead.

Photo: Solutions for the SUNOW Project Officer Lucy Hyde training to use our new drone "Joan".



Restoring Nature



identified

2000+

barriers to fish passage



developing

10

schemes to restore nature connectivity

'Weir Today Gone Tomorrow' is a Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust project delivered as part of the Great Yorkshire Rivers partnership, working to restore fish passage and reconnect fragmented rivers. Removing barriers is critical to allow fish and other wildlife to move freely, reach spawning and feeding habitats, and improve the overall health and resilience of river ecosystems.

Formed in 2022, the partnership builds on over a decade of collaborative work that has already addressed more than 100 barriers across Yorkshire. Together, partners including the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Water and Rivers Trusts are working towards an ambitious goal to tackle all significant barriers by 2043. Dedicated funding enabled the Trust to recruit a Project Manager to lead this work from November 2025.

Across our catchments, nearly 2,000 potential barriers have been identified using national datasets. These are being systematically reviewed through desk-based assessment and site surveys, with data collected to prioritise sites based on ecological benefit, feasibility and the length of river reconnected.



Photo: River Restoration Manager Kate Colledge assessing a potential barrier to fish passage

Alongside this strategic work, delivery is planned for the next financial year. Projects at Hundwith Beck will remove and improve multiple fords, while a ford replacement on Skeeby Beck will restore natural river connectivity. Further "quick win" schemes with supportive landowners are progressing, with additional projects expected to move into delivery during 2027.



Support us with a donation



Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust
8 Kings Court, Pateley Bridge, Harrogate,
North Yorkshire, HG3 5JW



www.ydrt.org.uk



enquiries@ydrt.co.uk



@YorkDalesRT

If you are concerned about a pollution incident on a river, please contact the Environment Agency on their 24-hour Incident hotline: 0800 80 70 60