

## **Declaration for River Recovery**

Healthy rivers are the lifeblood of biodiversity and ecosystems, providing essential habitats for wildlife and promoting vibrant natural communities. We need our riverscapes and the water environment to thrive and be places that enhance our lives, with clean water that supports life and industry, whilst being a great place to relax and play. Rivers, streams, and other watercourses provide a wide range of benefits, but are increasingly degraded. We need to protect and restore resilient, vibrant riverscapes that benefit wildlife and people for whole catchments and down to the coastal waters and seas.

This Declaration demonstrates the commitment of the organisations that sign it to work in partnership, and contribute to the recovery of the rivers, streams, and other watercourses in their areas (subject to the availability, and approval, of additional resources and budget).

### **The Rivers Arun and Adur**

This Declaration relates to the rivers Arun and Adur and their associated streams and watercourses, the river Rother (which flows into the river Arun), as well as Teville Stream and Ferring Rife which are chalk streams located in Worthing.

The river Arun is the longest river (60km) located entirely within Sussex. It starts in St Leonards Forest as a series of small streams, and then flows westwards towards Horsham. It then joins the North River and flows south through the Arun valley between Pulborough and Arundel, which contains internationally important wildlife. It finally arrives at the river mouth in Littlehampton. It is one of the fastest flowing rivers in England and is tidal up to Pallingham Quay, near Wisborough Green. The river Rother is a chalk stream which is the largest tributary of the river Arun. It does not flow out to sea but travels along the foot of the South Downs, joining the Arun at Pallingham, near Pulborough.

The river Adur has a catchment area of approximately 500km<sup>2</sup>. Inland the river has two branches, with the Western Arm rising at Slinfold, flowing through Shipley and West Grinstead. The Eastern Arm rises at Ditchling Common and flows north and west between Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill. The two arms meet about 2km north of Henfield, where it then flows south to Bramber. The river mouth is at Shoreham-by-sea, where the estuary salt marsh contains a nationally important wildlife habitat containing rare wading birds and plants.

### **The need for a Declaration**

The rivers and streams related to this Declaration are impacted by a range of historical and contemporary pressures which are reducing water quality, changing water quantity and, hence, their function. Historic management practices have degraded the rivers' natural processes with further deterioration resulting from modern day pressures including climate change, population growth and unsympathetic development, underinvestment in infrastructure, intensive land management, and hard engineering approaches to water management. These are complex issues which must be addressed through an integrated catchment management approach, requiring government agencies, local authorities, non-governmental organisations, landowners, businesses, water companies, and communities (including schools, Parish/Neighbourhood and Town Councils) to work together in the co-design and delivery of projects that will regenerate these rivers and watercourses.

Restoring river systems requires a catchment scale approach which looks beyond administrative or operational boundaries, to identify and mitigate the source of pressures on rivers. The requirements and mechanisms for improvement are well understood and documented through plans and strategies which span geographical scales from river basins, river catchments, local authority boundaries through to project delivery. Improvements to the water environment is vital for nature recovery, particularly as rivers and streams are natural wildlife corridors. Landscape scale nature recovery

needs to be part of a cohesive and collaborative response to restoring rivers. However, solutions entail thinking beyond standard political and business planning cycles, requiring long-term, structured investment which enables those striving to deliver positive change to do so faster and at a larger scale.

This Declaration does not have the force of legislation, but it signals the commitment from the organisations that adopt or support it to play their part in encouraging the long-term recovery of rivers and watercourses. It aims to complement existing plans, providing context to discussions focused on the issues that impact our rivers and provide support to those working towards restoring the rivers' ecosystems and biodiversity. This is important as it requires a multi-organisational and cross sector response, which includes the active involvement of local communities, to draw together local policies and strategic ambitions of a wide range of stakeholders, on biodiversity and climate change, to support and encourage sustainable regeneration of river catchments.

## **The Declaration**

The Declaration expresses the shared values of those that adopt or support it on the need to co-steward the protection and enhancement of the water environment in our catchment(s) and establishes a commitment to work in partnership with statutory bodies, landowners, local communities (including schools and Parish/Neighbourhood/Town Councils), and other stakeholders to deliver tangible improvements. It does not give rights to people, nor guarantee economic investment but provides a framework to enable and support a sustainable water environment for future generations.

A healthy river is one which enables nature to thrive and is safeguarded for future generations. We agree that this can be achieved by: -

- Prioritising nature-based, over grey engineering solutions within environmental and infrastructure decision making, to address biodiversity loss, improve water quality and quantity of rivers and watercourses, as well as societal challenges.
- Increasing connectivity within the river channel, with the floodplain, and across the wider landscape.
- Encouraging sustainable land management practices, reducing the reliance on chemical inputs, advocating for regenerative agriculture, and providing advice and support to those seeking to change.
- Inspiring communities and individuals to take pride in their waterways and act to help with their recovery, providing opportunities for people to connect with high quality environments.
- Ensuring that planning policy and decisions promote water efficiency in buildings, seek to find nature-based mitigation solutions that take account of wider catchment targets and where, it is possible to do so within the remit of planning law, reduce pressure on sewage networks.
- Consideration of the impacts of climate change on the water environment, with a particular emphasis on reducing risk of drought and flooding from extreme weather events
- Working through the Catchment Partnerships to ensure greater collaboration and integrated working between stakeholders to achieve catchment targets as set out in various regulations, strategies, and plans.

- Encouraging all communities and stakeholders to maximise water efficiency, reducing pressure on the public water supply network and minimising abstraction from rivers and aquifers.

## River recovery actions

There is already a wide range of projects being delivered across the rivers and watercourses of West Sussex, alongside strategic thinking through the Adur & Ouse Catchment Partnership and Arun & Western Streams Catchment Partnership. The Catchment Partnership Management Plans reflect the challenges and solutions to improve these rivers at a catchment scale, involving a range of organisations, groups, and agencies, as well as individuals that are committed to working together. Whilst it is not feasible to cover every action taking place, a summary of the high impact projects on the Adur and Arun are presented below, as well as a project that relates to the river Rother which flows into the Arun.

### River Adur

**The Adur Estuary Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI)** Partnership, a sub-group of the Adur Catchment Partnership, collaborates on a range of smaller interventions in the estuary. Whilst the Friends of Adur SSSI raise awareness of the important intertidal habitat within Shoreham-by-Sea.

**The Adur River Recovery Project** is a partnership between Knepp Wildland Foundation, Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust, Wilder Horsham District, Adur District Council and Horsham District Council working with 27 landowners to deliver large scale restoration to the river valley over the next 30 years through a range of interventions including embankment removal, river realignment and wetland creation to increasing landscape connectivity of hedgerows, meadows, and woodland. (<https://www.adur-river-recovery.org/>).

**The Adur Adaptation Project** is a partnership between the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust and the Environment Agency, covering the whole catchment and based on the outputs of three years of planning. This project seeks to reduce peak river flows by 10%, improve water quality and boost freshwater biodiversity through the delivery of a wide range of nature-based solutions. (<https://oart.org.uk/project/adur-adaptation-project/>).

### River Arun

**River Guardians** are citizen scientists monitoring water quality for early pollution detection, and to identify trends to enable targeted actions to improve water quality. The River Guardians are supported by the Western Sussex Rivers Trust (<https://wsrt.org.uk/get-involved/water-monitoring>).

**The Arun Landscape Recovery Group** has evolved from the Arun Valley Vision - a group of landowners committed to investigating land management to build biodiversity and climate resilience in the Arun Valley.

**The Rother Partnership** is a collaboration between the South Downs National Park Authority, South Downs Trust, Southern Water and Chichester District Council. The objective is to develop and fund a shared action plan for landscape-scale change to improve the health of the Rother. Shorter term practical interventions will also be delivered through this partnership. A short stretch of the Rother borders the Horsham District. (<https://wsrt.org.uk/about/our-projects/the-rother-partnership>).

**Downs to the Sea** is a multi-partner project, led by the South Downs National Park and South Downs Trust, to bring together farmers, landowners, and communities to create and restore priority wetland habitats in the National Park and beyond. Focusing on 'Water in the Landscape' and 'Water in People's Lives', this project will also engage with schools and parish councils to inspire a variety of actions to protect and restore rivers, ponds and wetlands. (<https://southdownstrust.org.uk/downs-to-the-sea/>).

## **Across both rivers**

**Two Catchment Partnerships.** The Adur & Ouse and Arun Catchment Partnership and the Arun and Western Sussex Catchment Partnerships collaborate across each catchment. Each of the Partnerships has a group of diverse stakeholders, with a broad and detailed knowledge of catchment management. They are working together to improve rivers and the surrounding landscapes. Catchment Management Plans are written collaboratively and guide the Partnerships practical interventions on the ground. More details of the two Partnerships and the Management Plans can be viewed at <https://adurandousecatchment.org.uk> and <https://awscp.org.uk/>.

**Weald to Waves** is establishing a 100-mile nature recovery corridor across Sussex to connect fragmented landscapes. The corridor contains both the Adur and Arun catchments and is farmer and land manager led in collaboration with councils, businesses, services, charities, and community groups. Habitats and landscapes across the river valleys of the Arun and Adur will be restored and connected alongside sustainable farm businesses with greener communities, gardens and greenspaces helping to join the dots. (<https://www.wealdtowaves.co.uk/>).

**Wilder Horsham District** is a partnership between Horsham District Council and the Sussex Wildlife Trust that has been established in response to the urgent pressures on biodiversity. Its main objective is to initiate the development and delivery of the Horsham District Nature Recovery Networks. Rivers, streams, and watercourses form natural corridors and, therefore form the basis of creating Nature Recovery Networks, as well as being valuable habitats in their own right. (<https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/wilderhorshamdistrict>).

**Two Farm Clusters** (Upper Adur and Arun to Adur) operate in the catchment. These are led by the farming community, to drive forward co-operative and sustainable land management which considers the health of the environment.

**Sussex Bay** aims to unlock funding to accelerate the recovery of Sussex Seascapes and Rivers. It is supporting marine, riverine, and intertidal recovery projects, prioritising nature's recovery and optimising the positive impact this has on people's lives and livelihoods (<https://www.sussexbay.org.uk/>).