

NRA

NORTHUMBRIA AND YORKSHIRE REGION

CONSERVATION ANNUAL REPORT

1994/95

FRCN
Regional Technical Dept'
Rivers House
Park Square
Leeds

CONSERVATION ANNUAL REPORT 1994/95

CONTENTS

Introduction			
THE ROLE OF CONSERVATION	2		
Survey/data gathering			
Appraisal			
4.			
Advice and Assistance			
Data Management			
Site Management			
Promotion			
Research and Development	3		
NRA CONSERVATION DUTIES	4		
Section 1 FLOOD DEFENCE WORK	5		
1.1 Southern Yorkshire			
1.1a Capital			
1.1b Maintenance			
1.2 Dales			
1.2a Capital			
1.2b Maintenance			
1.3 Northumbria			
1.3a Capital			
1.3b Maintenance	8		
Section 2 PROJECTS	9		
2.1 Southern Yorkshire			
2.1a Habitat Improvements			
2.1c Farming and Wildlife Advisory Groups			
2.1d Barn Owls			
2.2 Dales			
2.2a Habitat Improvements			
2.2b Otter Projects			
2.2c Farming and Wildlife Advisory Groups			
2.2d Barn Owls			
2.3 Northumbria			
2.3a Habitat Improvements			
2.3b Otter Projects			
2.3c Farming and Wildlife Advisory Groups			
Section 3 SURVEYING	14		
	14		

Others	14
Section 4 LANDSCAPE DESIGN	15
Section 5 ENVIRONMENTAL APPRAISAL	
	15
Environmental Reports	15
Environmental Statements	
Section 6 NATIONAL INITIATIVES	16
River Habitat Surveys (RHS)	
Environmental Appraisal	
 Recreation and Conservation Database	
Research and Development	16
Section 7 TRAINING	16
Section 8 MISCELLANEOUS	17
Appendix 1	1 Q
Staff	10
Appendix 2 Output Performance Measures Output and Performance Measures	19
1994/95	19
Plates	
 Plate 1.	
Barn Owl box on the River Nidd	
g the c	
Plate 2.	
Barmby Barrage wetland area, River Derwent	
Darinby Darrage welland area, rever Derwent	
Plate 3.	
Log wave breakers installed on the High Esk Reserve	
Plate 4.	
21st Avenue Scouts, Tree planting at Princess Elizabeth Playing Fields, Barmston Drain.	
Dien Bresten Hell Berk Landssons Brenessis Diver Tees	
Plan - Preston Hall Park, Landscape Proposals, River Tees	
20.0	

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CONSERVATION ANNUAL REPORT 1994/95

Introduction

This annual report outlines the work under taken by conservation staff within the Northumbria and Yorkshire Region of the National Rivers Authority during 1994/95.

The work of the conservation section is mainly directed through sections 16 and 2(2) of the water resources Act (see page 5)

The work of conservation is underpinned by three main strategic objectives.

- assess and monitor the conservation interest of inland and coastal waters and associated lands.
- ensure that the NRA's regulatory, operational and advisory activities take full acount of the need to sustain and further conservation.
- promote conservation to enhance the quality of the aquatic and related environment for the benefit of wildlife and people.

Resources

In 1994/95 the total national grant in aid for conservation was £3.46m of this an allocation of £582,000 was made to Northumbria ad Yorkshire Region.

In addition to this the Northumbria and Yorkshire Region was very successful in attracting extra grant in aid from Head Office, a total of £430,000 was made available for projects within FRCN of which approximately £227,000 was for conservation projects.

Barn Owl Box on the River Nidd



Barmby Barrage Wetland Area River Derwent



THE ROLE OF CONSERVATION

CONSERVATION WORKS WITH ALL FUNCTIONS OF THE NRA.

Conservation undertakes a variety of tasks which include the following:

Survey/data gathering

- ♦ Reactive River Corridor Surveys for revenue and capital schemes
- ♦ Strategic River Corridor Surveys
- ♦ Other Surveys such as River Habitat Surveys
- ♦ Landscape appraisals

Appraisal

- Environmental Assessment expertise and training
- Environmental Reports for capital and revenue schemes
- ♦ Comments on authorisations such as planning applications, discharge consents, abstraction licences and Land Drainage Consents

Advice and Assistance

- Internal advice to all functions particularly Flood Defence on all stages of maintenance and capital schemes. This involves work with external consultants where these are used.
- Promoting best environmental practice throughout the NRA
- On-site specialist advice to capital and maintenance schemes
- Planting schedules for small sites, organising supply of materials and supervising the planting.
- Expert advice to interested bodies and general public on conservation matters and issues.
- ♦ Expert advice and project management for collaborative projects.
- Expert advice on changing/new legislation such as The Habitats Directive.

Data Management

• Developement and maintenance of databases on SSSIs, English Heritage Sites etc.

Site Management

Drawing up site management plans for NRA owned sites in conjunction with other interested parties.

Promotion

- Promotion of conservation and the NRA through exhibitions, talks, seminars, leaflets, media work.
- ♦ External liaison promoting the NRA and collaborative projects with organisations such as The Wildlife Trusts, RSPB and National Parks.
- Promotion of conservation in protected areas and in the wider countryside where it is associated with the watercycle, such as fringe habitats, stewardship schemes, whole farm plans.
- The promotion both internally and externally of river rehabilitation and general environmental enhancements.
- ♦ The promotion of conservation and the NRA through educational work

Research and Development

Management of national R&D projects and regional operational investigations for example ponds; river rehabilitation and cormorants.

NRA CONSERVATION DUTIES

Section 16 and Section 2(2) of the Water Resources Act 1991, sets out the NRA's conservation duties.

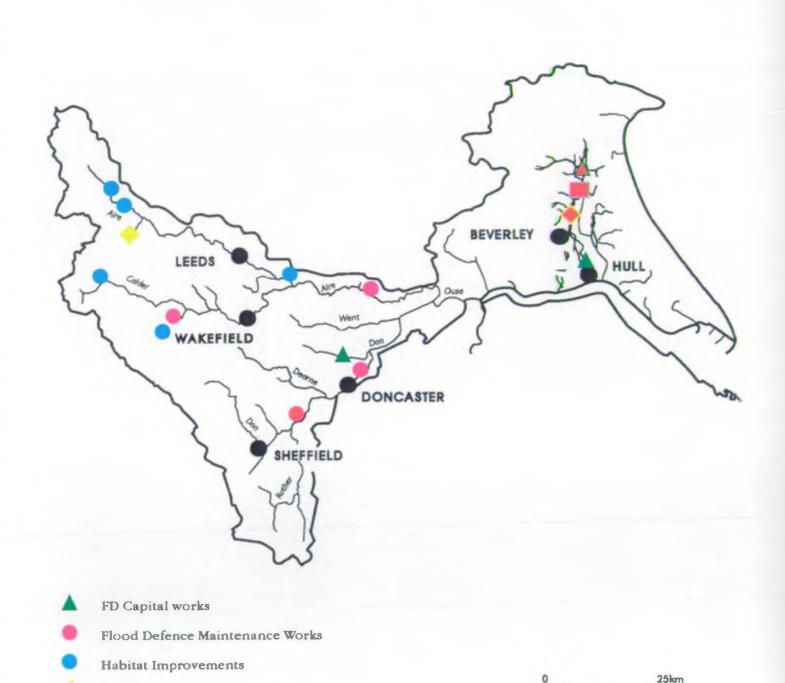
Section 16 obliges the NRA in formulating or considering any proposals relating to any of its functions to:

- further the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and the conservation of flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features of special interest;
- have regard to the desirability of protecting and conserving buildings, sites and objects of archaeological, architectural or historic interest;
- take into account the effect which the proposals would have on the beauty or amenity of any rural or urban area or on any such flora, fauna, features buildings sites or objects

Section 2(2) imposes a more general conservation duty which is not linked to other NRA functional activities and that is generally to promote:

- the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty and amenity of inland and coastal waters and of land associated with such waters;
- the conservation of flora and fauna which are dependant on an aquatic environment.

SOUTHERN YORKSHIRE AREA Location of Conservation works as identified in the report



FWAG Projects

IN RED REFERS TO THE WHOLE CATCHMENT

Barn Owls

Section 1 FLOOD DEFENCE WORK

The work for flood defence can be split into Capital and Maintenance. The majority of capital projects are in the Southern Yorkshire Area where approximately £10 Million is spent each year on new or upgrading works. Maintenance operations cover a wide variety of activities including anything from new fencing to grass cutting or the maintenance of pumping stations to clearing wrack.

Very close contact with flood defence is essential. The conservation section scrutinise job sheets for maintenance works which may be followed by advice, a site visit and possibly a survey and report depending on the potential impact of the work. Similarly for capital schemes an input from conservation staff is required at a very early stage this may involve a site survey, production of a report, and close liaison with the project design team and/or consultants if these-are employed plus on site advice when construction begins. Conservation also liaise with English Nature and other conservation bodies on behalf of Flood Defence.

1.1 Southern Yorkshire

1.1a Capital

Catchment: Hull

River: Hull

High Eske Nature Reserve

A borrow pit which is now a nature reserve, willow planting has taken place to stop erosion of the banks and a small weir has been incorporated into the Reserve.

River: Barmston Drain Easingwold Borrowpits

A wetland berm was created along 500m of the drain varying from 1 to 3m wide. Around the borrowpits bare ground and gravel areas for nesting waders were created. the work was done as part of the River Hull Comprehensive Scheme.

River: Beverley and Barmstone Drain Beverley and Barmston Drain

This project to rehabilitate 0.5Km of a degraded drain, by creation of a meander, and wetland was completed this year, with landscaping works and tree and shrub planting.

Catchment: Calder River: Batley Beck Batley Beck Phase 4a

Landscaping where possible to this heavily urbanised river is essential. Phase 4a includes a pocket park which has been further enhanced by new blocks of trees and shrubs and a woodland

ground flora.

River: Spen Beck Spen Phase 3

A heavily urbanised river which where ever possible can be enhanced by landscaping. At Union Street Alders and Willows have been planted together with creepers to screen a wall.

Catchment: Don River: Ea Beck

Ea Beck Phases 2a & 3

A flood defence improvement scheme to renew and repair existing banks on Ea Beck which is a highland carrier, landscaping proposals include hedge planting, riverside willows, bankside shrubs, a gently sloping berm and the management of the retained scrub and trees. In addition fisheries have proposed boulder placement within the channel to improve in stream fisheries habitat.

1.1b Maintenance

Catchment: Aire

River: Aire

Airmyn, Carlton and Chapel Haddlesey

Replacing blocks of trees and enlarging planting areas to create more cover for wildlife(Airmyn) and planting new blocks of trees in a rather denuded area.(Chappel Haddlesley and Carlton)

Catchment: Don

River: Don

Barmby Dun and Bentley

New planting of blocks of trees to create more cover for wildlife.

Catchment: Calder

River: Calder

Calder Tree Management

Conservation have been involved in the tree management at various sites on the river Calder. On Fenay Beck in the Calder Catchment management of the extensive landscaping associated with the recently completed Flood Defence capital scheme has been continuing.

ALSO

Aire and Don Catchments

DALES AREA Location of Conservation works as identified in the report



Change in practice of grass cutting has involved conservation advice and will it is hoped lead to more diverse flood banks.

Oulton Beck - dredging programme

River Aire - rotational programme for willow cutting

1.2 Dales

1.2a Capital

Catchment: Tees

River: Tees
- Fish Havens

To help mitigate the negative effects of the Tees Barrage a number of fish havens were designed and constructed at The Holmes, Preston Park Hall and Black Bobbies Field. This was a joint effort with Fisheries, Flood Defence and Teeside Development Corporation. The havens and surrounding areas were designed with very a strong conservation element.

Catchment: Wharfe

River: Wharfe

Collingham Flood Alleviation Scheme

Flood Wall and embankment to protect dwellings, Landscape Design undertaken for a garden area. Also Thistle Broom Rape recorded in adjacent field so discussions on future maintenance with EN/FD

Catchment: Ouse

River: Ouse

Floodbank Reinstatement Riccall Ings

Design of Borrow Pits by conservation in association with Fisheries and recommendation of grass seed mix for new bank.

1.2b Maintenance

Catchment: Derwent

River: Hertford

Aquatic Weed Control

The amount of aquatic weed on the River Hertford has caused considerable problems with loss of channel capacity and causes maintenance problems a report was commissioned through conservation. The aim being to produce a management plan for the river and the surrounding land.

NORTHUMBRIA AREA Location of Conservation works as identified in the report



River: Derwent **Dredging**

2.5 Km of river dredged by Flood Defence, conservation argued against completely dredging this section of the river and it was decided to create a sinuous desilted channel within the broader design of the bed width.

River: Derwent/Hertford Management Plan

A management plan has been put together by conservation following a request from flood defence, it combines ecological ideas with the necessity of maintaining the land drainage priorities. The plan looks at: the siltation problem and possible solutions; weed cutting regime and possible changes in practice; bank management practices; Tree management and suggestions for the rehabilitation of canalised sections of the river.

1.3 Northumbria

1.3a Capital

Catchment: Blyth

River: Pont

Ponteland Flood Alleviation Scheme

A Written Justification was produced by conservation to consider the potential environmental effects of these flood alleviation works. Advice was given as requested during planning and construction.

Catchment: Wear River: Chester Burn

Chester Burn Flood Defence and Landscape Improvement

Conservation provided advice in the production of a design Stage 1 report looking at feasability of removing the burn from its culvert and reprofiling.

1.3b Maintenance

Catchment: Wansbeck

River: Wansbeck

Landscape Improvements

A feasibility study to look at landscape improvements which could be carried out to existing flood defences in the town of Morpeth to reduce their impact.

Catchment: Tyne

River: Team

A pond at lamesley was designed by conservation and incorporated into the flood defence maintenace works

Section 2 PROJECTS

a. Habitat Improvements

Habitat Improvement Projects tend to be associated with successful extra grant in aid bids, or collaborative projects. These are often the projects which raise the profile of the NRA in terms of River improvements and may have a large impact on sections of river.

b. Otter Projects

The decline of the Otter population in this country has been well documented. This population is of international Importance and is a protected species. The NRA is committed to:

- ♦ Protect existing Otter populations
- Assist in the recovery of otters through improvements in riverine habitats and water quality
- Raise awareness of Otter conservation
- Contribute to the pooling of resources and advice by all organisations with an interest in or responsibility for otter conservation.

c. Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group

The farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) was founded in 1969 and plays an important role in the countryside, through its Farm Conservation Advisors FWAG provides expertise, advice, education and training to the farming community. Through close liaison and support with NRA real benefits to river systems can be achieved.

d. Barn Owls

Barn Owls were once a widespread species, but have suffered serious decline due to changes in the farming practices and the loss of nesting sites. 82% of the breeding barn owl population are found within 1km of a river. The river environment is therefore crucial to their survival. With sympathetic riverside maintenance and other habitat improvements together with increased nesting and roosting opportunities it is hoped that the survival of these birds can be ensured.

2.1 Southern Yorkshire

2.1a Habitat Improvements

Catchment: Calder

River: Colne

Environmental Improvement Scheme with Kirklees MBC removing invasive weeds replanting and pollarding.

River: Hebden Water

Cleaning and restoring Gibson Mill Pond at Hardcastle Crags in conjunction with the National

Trust.

Catchment: Aire

River: Aire

Wetland creation and aquatic and tree planting have been undertaken in conjunction with fisheries for the Snaygill off river spawning unit.

River: Silsden Beck

Environmental Improvement in conjunction with Fisheries on an On line pond - widening and deepening to provide havens for fish.

River: Aire

In conjunction with the Groundwork Trust work has been undertaken in the Lowther Washlands alongside the River Aire. This has involved new hedgelaying and fencing and improving public access.

2.1c Farming and Wildlife Advisory Groups

Catchment: Hull

A collaborative project sponsoring an officer to look at farms which impact upon the Hull Catchment. The project will improve the conservation value of farms using the "whole" farm approach with sympathetic management techniques. In future this may allow the Hull Barn Owl project to expand even further. Resources £15,000

Catchment: Aire

River: Worth

Collaborative work with FWAG on the River Worth sub catchment to advise and encourage farmers to take up Countryside Stewardship Grants. Six farms were successful resulting in over £90,000 in Grants being allocated over the next ten years.

2.1d Barn Owls

Catchment: Hull

This project involves the extension of the existing Barn Owl scheme further upstream. The scheme in conjunction with the Hawk and Owl Trust is building upon the success of previous years which saw 11 out of 16 boxes used by Barn Owls.

Cost £10,000

2.2 Dales

- 2.2a Habitat Improvements

Catchment: Swale

River: Swale

Middle Swale Habitat Restoration Project

On a twenty mile section of the Swale work has been undertaken to improve wildlife habitat. This work has included fencing off approximately eight miles of river and planting with willows and other trees.

Catchment: Ure, Swale, Wharfe Dales Rivers Erosion Project

This project focused on the related problems of riverbank erosion, tipping and lack of habitat diversity. Erosion tends to be most serious where livestock are damaging or over grazing riverbanks.

Catchment: Derwent

River: Derwent

Lower Derwent Project

Habitat improvement works have been carried out on the Lower Derwent within the National Nature Reserve This project involved the creation of a shallow bird scrape and the sculpturing of the river foreshore to valuable feeding habitat for waders.

River: Derwent

Barmby Barrage Recreation Project

The Barmby Barrage sites recreation potential has been increased through the provision of public facilities. Conservation have been heavily involved in this work and a wetland area for conservation (especially birds) has also been developed together with a bird hide.

2.2b Otter Projects

Catchments: Swale, Nidd, Wharfe.

River: Swale, Nidd and Wharfe

A collaborative project with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust involves the surveying of rivers for signs of otters, and specialist advice into CMPs and operational activities. Giving talks and carrying out liaison work with local landowners.

2.2c Farming and Wildlife Advisory Groups

Catchment: Dales Area

2.2d Barn Owls

Catchment: Nidd

A collaborative project involving North Yorkshire CC, Harrogate BC, FWAG, EN and CoCo. The project aims to improve the wildlife potential of a stretch of the Lower Nidd this work includes putting up seven Barn Owl boxes along the River Corridor in conjunction with the Hawk and Owl Trust.

Cost £3800

2.3 Northumbria

2.3a Habitat Improvements

Catchment: Tyne

River: Don

South Tyneside

Collaborative Project with South Tyneside Council to improve wildlife projects along the river Don. A number of small scale works including ponds, reedbeds, saltmarsh creation, channel reprofiling.

River: Ouseburn

City of Newcastle

This work has included the excavation of a pond at Prestwick Burn and tree planting at Killingworth Lake and a clean up programme with the Tidy Britain Group

River: Ouseburn

Killingworth Lake

Fencing and tree planting in association with North Tyneside Council.

River: Rede

West Woodburn And Otterburn

Pond excavation, fencing and tree planting has been undertaken at West Woodburn whilst at Otterburn fencing and tree planting has been carried out along the river bank.

Catchment: Blyth

River: Pont

Prestwick Carr Water Level Management Plan

Production of a Water Level Management Plan to manage water Levels within Lowland Peat SSSI at Prestwick Carr.

River: Sleekburn Earth Balance

A collaborative project with Earth Balance to create ponds within an environmental demonstration project.

2.3b Otter Projects

Catchment: Tweed

River: Till

A collaborative project with Northumberland Wildlife Trust to promote Otter Conservation on the River Till catchment. 3000 trees planted at Amerside Law, 28 Artificial Holts built and the excavation of a derelict oxbows at West Weetwood and West Fenton. Promotion of otters has involved talks with landowners and local groups and leading guided walks.

Catchment: Tyne

River: Tyne

A collaborative project with Northumberland Wildlife Trust, Durham University, English Nature Northumberland National Park and Forest Enterprises to assess the current distribution of otters in the Tyne catchment and to identify factors controlling that distribution.

2.3c Farming and Wildlife Advisory Groups

Catchment: Tyne

A collaborative project sponsoring a Farm Conservation Officer to concentrate on farms which have a direct impact upon the River Tyne.



Log Wave Breakers Installed on the High Esk Reserve



21st Avenue Scouts. Tree Planting at Princess Elizabeth Playing Fields
Barmston Drain

Section 3 SURVEYING

River Corridor Surveys (RCS)

River Corridor Surveys have been undertaken both strategically and reactively. The surveys follow the standard methodology as layed out in the National Guidelines. Reactive Surveys are usually in response to a request from Flood Defence, or involved in other development proposals.

Ea Beck Phase 2a and Phase 3 (SY)

This was carried out to provide baseline data prior to engineering works and to identify impacts and mitigation and enhancement possibilities.

River Derwent (D)

This was undertaken on the River Derwent between Forge Valley Woods and the confluence with the River Hertford. This survey was undertaken to provide baseline data to help with determination of the problems of the natural swallow holes at East Ayton. 11.5Km surveyed.

River Skerne (D)

A reactive river corridor survey was carried out for the River Skerne Restoration Project.

River Wear (N)

A strategic river corridor survey was undertaken between Stanhpoe and the Browney confluence

River Coquet (N)

A strategic river corridor survey and phase one habitat survey of the floodplain was undertaken from Clennell to Warkworth as a joint project with English Nature.

Others

Stoning Sites on the River Aire (SY)

Site surveys were carried out prior to stoning work being undertaken on the tidal Aire, enhancement proposals were usually included in the survey report.

Water Vole survey on Ea Beck Phase 2a (SY)

A water vole survey was carried out prior to the commencement of this phase of the capital scheme.

Section 4 LANDSCAPE DESIGN

Until September 1994 Ros Walmsley Landscape Architect was employed on contract within the ecology and recreation section Southern Yorkshire. Ros worked on a number of projects throughout the region primarily on Flood Defence Schemes preparing drawings and planting schedules liaising with consultants and overseeing the work of a Landscape term consultancy employed by the flood defence.

Sites included - Fish Havens on the River Tees, River Spen FAS, Batley Beck FAS, York FAS and a Fish Haven on the River Rother.

Section 5 ENVIRONMENTAL APPRAISAL

Environmental Reports are completed for a number of projects to look at the environmental impacts of that project. The report usually follows a format similar to an Environmental Statement but is not legally binding. The report will provide recommendations for mitigation and enhancements, and may recommend that a formal Environmental Statement is undertaken.

Environmental Statements are legally binding and must follow accepted procedures and format, they must also be made available to the public. Usually these are undertaken by external consultants but Conservation staff should be involved in the consultations and have a role quality assuring the Statements.

Environmental Reports

Kirk Bramwith, River Don, (SY)

An environmental report has been produced on the proposals for a new flood wall.

Tilts Bridge, Ea Beck (SY)

An environmental report has been produced on the proposed bridge reconstruction.

River Sheaf Phase 4 (SY)

An environmental report for phase 4 of this flood defence capital scheme in Sheffield.

Ponteland Flood Defence Scheme (N)

A written justification was produced by conservation for this flood defence scheme.

Short reports have been written prior to dredging works on the River Hull, Market Weighton Canal, Winstead Drain and Foulney Drain. (All SY)

Input into Environmental Reports for Water Resources for Abstractions at Tickton and Scarcroft depots.

Environmental Statements

Conservation staff quality assured the **Salt End** and **Full Humber Strategy** Environmental Statements for Flood Defence.

Comments were also made on the initial proposal for the West Beck Environmental Assessment.

Section 6 NATIONAL INITIATIVES

River Habitat Surveys (RHS)

River Habitat Surveys were carried out on 153 sites throughout the region during May, June and July 1994. This was a trial of a new system of surveying and to build up a nationwide database for rivers. Regional staff coordinated the initiative whilst the majority of the surveying was carried out by area staff. The RHS should enable a river typing system to be developed based on river habitat features.

Environmental Appraisal

Regional staff took on the role of EA coordination which involves the dissemination of information and training of staff. Training is being undertaken for over a hundered and fifty staff in the region and the training is part of a drive to raise awareness of environmental appraisal and promote best practice.

Recreation and Conservation Database

The NRA is required to report annually to the DoE Standing Committee of the code of Practice on Conservation, Access and Recreation. In 1994 the first stand alone report was produced, this included information on the number of NRA land holdings; activities at NRA sites and the status of these sites and collabrative projects carried out.

Research and Development

Involvement in a number of R&D projects and regional operational reports including Ponds, River Rehabilitation and Cormorants.

Section 7 TRAINING

Flood Defence and conservation workshop including biologists and fisheries staff to look at problems and conflicts and discuss solutions.

IDB Training Days; three one day courses were organised titled "Managing small rivers and drainage channels for conservation" for IDB and Flood Defence Staff. 37 people were trained

in total. Course Tutor was David Patrick (Conservation Officer for Grantham Blundell and Farran).

Section 8 MISCELLANEOUS

The Need for Continueing Partnership Seminar -

a one day seminar between NRA (N&Y) and the local wildlife trusts, looking at issues such as Finance within the NRA, the Otters and Rivers Campaign, Nature Reserve management EC legislation and Evage.

Conservation Input into Catchment Plans

This work has continued across the region with consultative documents and final plans being prepared.

Planning Applications

Have continued to be processed with detailed and complex inputs to some schemes such as the A1 widening through North Yorkshire and the A69 Haltwhistle Byepass which included two bridges over the South Tyne.

Estuary Management Plans

Conservation have represented the NRA on the Steering group for estuary plans for the Aln and Coquet in Northumbria.

Archaeology Project

During the summer of 1994 an Archaeologist was employed by The Dales Area to work on an archaeological data base and build up links with local archaeologists and heritage organisations. The result was an increase in awareness regarding archaeology and a short report was also produced.

Way Up Stream (Southern Yorkshire)

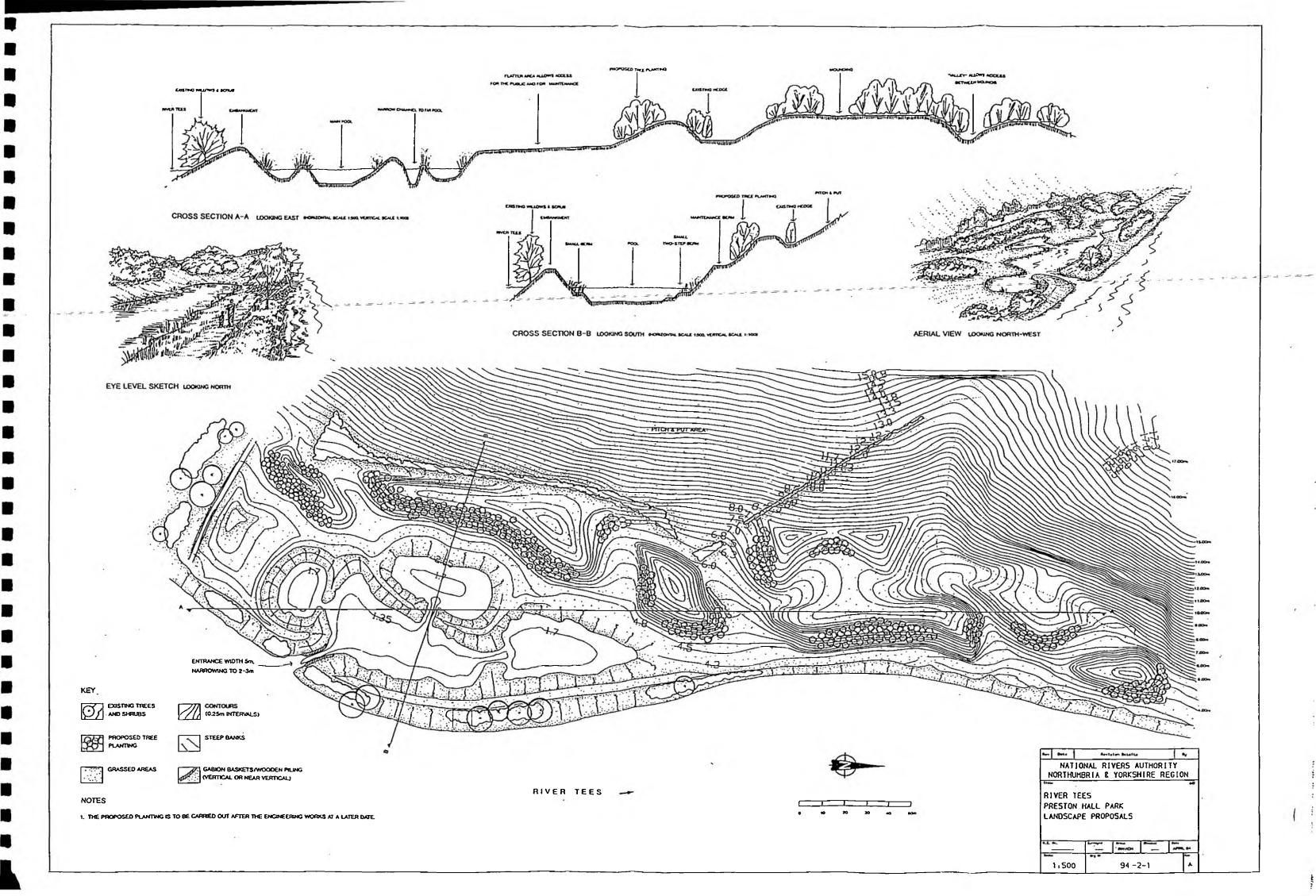
A collaborative project with Kirklees MBC Countryside unit involves a coordinated approach to visiting schools giving talks and carrying out pond dipping.

Pageant Theatre Company (Southern Yorkshire)

Environmental Awareness through theatre and roleplay with the Pageant Theatre Company originally to school children in Sheffield now inner city schools throughout Southern Yorkshire

Wheldrake Ings Bird Hide (Dales)

This collabrative project with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT) and English Nature to replace an old bird hide on the internationally important nature reserve of Wheldrake Ings. The two storey



Appendix 2 Output Performance Measures

Output and Performance Measures 1994/95

site management plans implemented	2
length of river corridor surveyed	255(Km)
number of river habitat sites completed	153
number of conservation projects involving external collaboration	75
total number of conservation projects completed	97
local authority consultations dealt with	1432
consent applications handled	654
NRA works	546
Planned Capital Works schemes (all functions) screened for conservation implications opportunities	40
New Capital schemes incorporating conservation works	14
Number of Flood Defence Maintenance works assessed by conservation for environmental impact	506