



A clear solution for farmers

CATCHMENT SENSITIVE FARMING

Wetland creation to minimise stock poaching in Northumberland

Tweed, Aln, Coquet & Coastal Streams (25)

CSFO: *Stuart Moss*

Farm description

John Wokey is the owner of Blue House Farm at Unthank. It is a 93ha (230 acre) arable farm with small areas of permanent or rotational grassland on land adjacent to the Allerdeanmill Burn and Slateford Burn. The whole farm lies within the North Low target catchment area.

The current management of the farm has a focus on winter cereal rotation, established by a combination of ploughing and minimal tillage. This maintains a crop cover through most of the season and presents a relatively low risk of diffuse pollution.

Pollution issues

Following on from CSF 1:1 visits, it was highlighted that there were issues around stock access and poaching of the Allerdeanmill (a trib of North Low). Cattle could graze unfenced stream bank sides where access is



Fig 1 Evidence of poaching

shallow and easy. These points had some bank side damage and evidence of soil structure damage (Fig 1). The fields concerned were either too steep or wet to be included in the arable rotation.

Solutions

Exclude stock from Burn and provide alternate drinking water. During farm visits Stuart identified that this could be achieved by fencing the burn or creating wetlands or woodlands as buffers.



Fig 2 Pond just after completion



Fig 3 The pond in spring (wetland behind cattle)



Fig 5 Pond in 2014



Fig 6 Drinking trough

Farmer Engagement and Motivation

John Wokey was keen to reduce stocking levels, and would consider completely removing stock from the farm, but only if the costs stacked up. Initial plans were to use the England Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) to create fenced woodland buffers between the grass fields and the burn. After joint meetings with the Forestry Commission and CSF, John applied and was successful in getting a grant.

When John reviewed the cost implications of the EWGS, he felt that the farm would be suffering a financial penalty, so he withdrew his EWGS application. The catchment had been enlarged and the target areas for the Capital Grant Scheme moved, so it looked like there would be no way forward to protect the burn. At this time the Natural England local team had set up a

ponds project as part of Wetland Visions. Stuart thought the area along the Allerdeanmill Burn would provide some suitable sites.

Stephen Bell, the project officer and John developed a plan to create a pond and wetland. These features would act as sediment traps for field drains and over surface flow. To protect the pond and wetland fencing was put up, that would create a buffer to the watercourse (fig 2-3 and 4). As part of the scheme water from field drains that fed the pond was captured and fed into a trough to ensure stock drinking water (fig 5). This has reduced the stock poaching (fig 6).

The work carried out at Unthank Blue House is a very good example of partnership working. NE Wetland Vision, CSF and farmer objectives have been met.



Fig 6 Vegetation recovery on bankside

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