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## Green Letter Day for Marine Conservation

The long-awaited Marine Act which passed into law in November has been welcomed by environmentalist everywhere. Conservation groups will be able to map sites of nature preservation for the first time. Damaging practices such as scallop dredging and trawler fishing will be banned in protected areas.

At present, only one small piece of coastline is heavily protected - the sea around Lundy Island, off Devon. In unprotected coasts, species such as spiny sea-horses, found in Studland Bay in Dorset and basking sharks, seen in Britain's coastal waters in the summer, have been under serious threat. Rare corals too are being destroyed and there have been alarming depletions of sea birds such as puffins and kittiwakes, as food sources disappear because of global warming. This is also great news for walkers as the UK's entire coastline is opened up. Anybody who has walked even a little of the 630 mile south-west coastal path knows what a joy it is.

Ray Cobbett

## Flood Risk Management in the 21st Century

The Regional Flood Defence Committee for the Southern Region of the Environment Agency covers the area from the Thames Estuary to the New Forest and the Isle of Wight. This Committee looks not just to the next storm to hit the coast, but over the longer term to ensure that the public resources put into flood defence deliver real value for money, and more importantly protect lives at risk.

The Environment Agency spends £800m annually on flood risk management. Some £250m funds new projects - but money is also needed to maintain existing systems, to run flood forecasting and flood warning services, to respond to planning applications, and of course to deploy staff across the country whenever the risk of flooding is high, to close flood gates or erect temporary defences to protect communities in danger.

In return for its funds, up from £500m five years ago, the Environment Agency must secure the optimum financial benefit for the massive investment being made, meet targets to lower the flood risk for thousands of homes (145,000 in the period 2008/13), and to protect natural habitats which are themselves under pressure often from the work undertaken to lower flood risk. But the main driver for investment is to protect homes and the people who live in them.

Of course, projects to lessen flood risk must be sustainable in a world where climate is changing. The science from the IPCC (Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change) and from our own recent UK Climate Predictions 09 (see <http://ukcp09.defra.gov.uk/> for more details) all point in the same direction - more extreme weather events, with hotter drier summers and warmer wetter winters. For the south coast a rise in sea level of around one metre by the end of the century is being taken into account in forward planning.

The policy towards flood risk has changed from constructing hard defences wherever possible to one of working with natural processes. It may make sense to create a new realigned coast, when defending the existing line fails to make economic sense. An example is along the coast at Medmerry near Selsey, where instead of repairing the shingle bank after every major winter storm, a new more defensible coastline will be adopted further inland, bringing with it opportunities to recreate valuable habitats which have been lost - in this case newly created saltmarsh on the seaward side of the new coastline.

It is not possible to eliminate flood risk but major resources are being deployed to reduce that risk, or to help reduce the consequences of a major flood event, for instance through an enhanced flood warning service. Perhaps our greatest challenge will be to maintain that work as public expenditure comes under renewed pressure whatever the result of the 2010 election.

Dr Mike Bateman

Chairman, Southern Regional Flood Defence Committee

## South Downs National Park confirmed at last!

On 12 November, the South Downs finally became England's 9th and the UK's 14th National Park after more than 60 years in the making.

Robin Crane, Chair of the South Downs Campaign, commented, "Today is a fantastic and historic day: the final milestone on the long path to a South Downs National Park. The South Downs will now have the protection and recognition that this landscape so richly deserves."

"We are pleased that our evidence on Green Ridge has convinced the Inspector and the Government that its exclusion was a mistake and that this has now been rectified. In West Sussex, the inclusion of Castle Goring is a victory for local people who have fought long and hard to have this area included. We also welcome the inclusion of Alice Holt Forest, which will bring new opportunities to that part of Hampshire."

"Overall we are delighted and look forward to working with our partners to ensure that the new National Park Authority will be a great success."

Taken from a press release submitted by David Jones

## Slipper Mill Pond Bank Repairs

The pond and the popular footpath along the western bank are under threat. It was repaired in the 1980s and now sections have reached the end of their life. In 2006, the Slipper Mill Pond Preservation Association commissioned a geotechnical investigation of the whole bank which confirmed fears that two sections needed urgent attention.

Some 40m of the southern end is being inexorably destroyed by the sea and, halfway along, the core is being washed out. They are only just stable at the moment and their foundations and outside faces need to be replaced carefully. Such work requires a methodical approach particularly to maintain stability of the remaining bank during the construction process.

The project has taken a long time to be developed as early estimates were in excess of £100,000 - well beyond the resources of the Association and potential sources of funding to be identified.

Lengthy discussions with the authorities, contractors and potential funders have now confirmed the viability of the project and planning approval has been obtained.

So far grants for the consultant's design fees have been promised by Chichester Harbour Conservancy, West Sussex County Council, Chichester District Council, Solent Protection Society and Emsworth Business Association - all of whom have recognised and support the valuable resource the pond and its footpath are to the residents and the public.

Detailed design and tender documents have now been prepared specifying that work should not be carried out during the breeding season, due care taken of the environment, especially Chichester Harbour, the River Ems and the pond itself. By next spring, a contractor should be appointed and fund-raising for the main works can begin with a potential start on site in the autumn 2010.

Nick Modena



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