



THE VOICE OF ANGLING

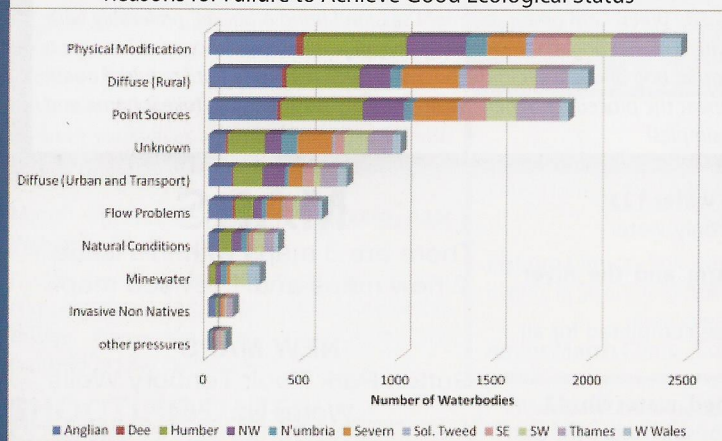
Why we are taking the government to court

19 NOV

The Angling Trust, Fish Legal and WWF-UK are in the high court today fighting a judicial review of the government's failure to stop agricultural pollution degrading 44 rivers, lakes and estuaries which are specially protected areas in England. We believe that the government was required by the EU's Water Framework Directive to stop this ongoing pollution in these sites by 2015.

Agricultural pollution is fast becoming the most significant reason why our rivers are failing to support healthy fish populations. The Environment Agency has, over the past few years, analysed the reasons why 83% of our rivers are failing to achieve the European standard of Good Ecological Status across the country. Rural diffuse pollution (i.e. from lots of small sources, rather than from the end of a big pipe, which is known as point source pollution) is now nearly topping the list.

Reasons for Failure to Achieve Good Ecological Status



This pollution takes many forms. Rain landing on wet, compacted fields runs off the surface of the soil and into rivers, carrying with it slurry, soil, pesticides and fertilisers, all of which are lethal to fish and the invertebrates they eat. Badly maintained gutters allow rainwater from roofs to wash farmyard muck into drains. Broken pipes divert filthy water into streams. All these trickles add up to a mighty load of pollution. Just because it doesn't come out of a big pipe doesn't make it any more deadly to our aquatic wildlife. It's often referred to as causing death by a thousand cuts.

A big contributor to agricultural pollution is the proliferation of maize production, which has increased from 8,000 hectares in England in 1973 to 183,000 hectares in 2014. Much of this growth has been to power anaerobic digesters which receive generous subsidies from the government in addition to existing farm subsidies. Maize is harvested late in the season and it leaves bare, compacted fields exposed to heavy rainfall which washes soil, pesticides and fertilisers into our rivers. Other crops like potatoes and asparagus disturb the soil and make it much more susceptible to erosion as the pictures below show.



Just add rain!

Potato field washing away
The after effects of rain – several feet of soil have washed into the nearest river



Agriculture is facing a sustainability crisis. Nearly all soils in fields are compacted and lacking in humus, making them vulnerable to erosion at a rate far higher than new soil is being created. You can see in the picture below the slabs of compacted soil removed from a field in Herefordshire. Even though there was standing water in the field, the soil below is bone dry. Compacted soils stop water soaking into the ground, so not only do they cause flooding and pollution, they also stop the recharge of underground aquifers and make us more vulnerable to droughts in the summer.



Slabs of compacted soil

Many farms cause more pollution than badly-performing sewage treatment works that would face tough regulatory action. Voluntary measures such as the Catchment Sensitive Farming scheme, designed to address these problems have not achieved their objectives, but the government has not implemented a single Water Protection Zone to tackle agricultural pollution – the mechanism it said it would use in the



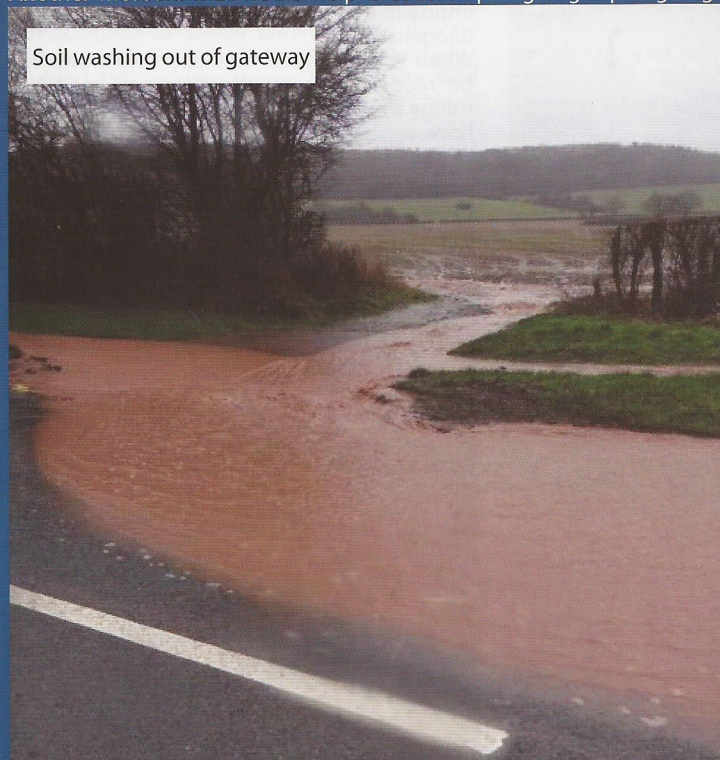
Dry soil beneath compacted soil
Bone dry soil beneath, despite water standing in the field

River Basin Management Plans (published in 2009) alongside voluntary measures. These zones would involve implementation of local solutions tailor-made for each area suffering from pollution; as opposed to national, top down binding rules that all farmers have to follow.

The poor management of our soils has released about as much carbon and nitrogen oxide into the atmosphere as burning fossil fuels. It contributes very significantly to flooding. The vegetables grown on these soils have a much lower nutritional value. "A nation that destroys its soils destroys itself", so said Franklin D Roosevelt. Protecting our soils would have huge benefits for society, and would be relatively easy to do. It just requires a few changes to the way we grow food.

We need to stop growing the wrong crops in the wrong places. Maize, potatoes and asparagus grown on slopes need winter cover crops to keep water and soil from running off the land in the winter. Government rules often require farmers to grow buffer strips along the side of watercourses, which is all very well, but I've seen countless examples of surface run-off coming out of gateways and into drains, which carry the polluting soil and other nasties straight into rivers.

We need buffer strips along roads and farm tracks as well as rivers
Another measure that would help is contour ploughing – ploughing



Soil washing out of gateway

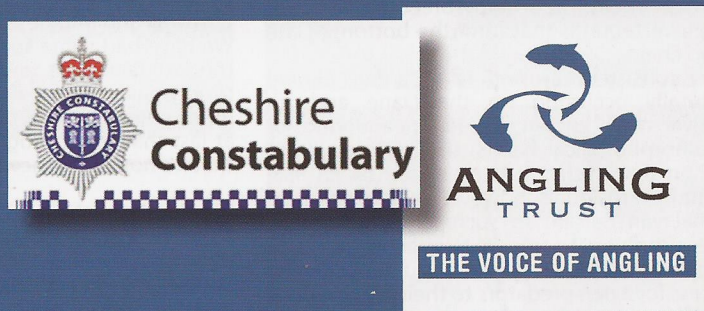
horizontally across slopes and not vertically to stop water, sediment and pollution running down the slopes straight into the water course. New farm technology is available to break up the hard, compacted tram lines from tractor wheels to stop water running off the surface. A vital key to solving this problem is returning organic matter to our soils and allowing earthworms and fungi to restore healthy soil structure and function. The less we plough, and the more cover crops and compost we use, the stronger the soil becomes. This would capture vast amounts of carbon from the atmosphere, reduce flood risk, produce healthier food, safeguard the future of our soils and reduce the impact of pollution.

Just a few hundred pounds invested around the farmyard can divert clean water from roofs into drains and keep the muck and other pollutants on the farm where it can be used productively.

So why aren't we rushing to do these things? We believe that the government has taken an ideologically-driven decision not to regulate farmers, against the advice of its own agencies. They have cut and cut again the budgets of the regulators and have instructed them not to take a hard line with farmers who are causing pollution.

This is why the Angling Trust & Fish Legal, in partnership with WWF, are fighting a judicial review in the Royal Courts of Justice over the next two days. We want to see firm but fair regulation of an industry which receives billions of pounds of taxpayers' money every year; it seems only right that if we pay them lots of public money, they should not cause pollution of water supplies and contribute to flooding villages and towns. Good farmers need to see that their neighbours and competitors are receiving sanctions when they cut corners. There must be proper regulation of this sector, given that it has such a massive influence on the health of our environment and the services it delivers to society, including the health of our fish stocks.

Please support this case by making a donation to the Angling Trust & Fish Legal, or better still by joining up as a member. We need more support if we are to take on huge battles like this, and win. Visit www.anglingtrust.net to give us your support.



A Knutsford man found guilty of fishing illegally at a mere has been fined £400.

On 9 November 2014 Joshua Egerton, 19, from Knutsford was caught and later charged for illegally fishing at Booths Mere, a private fishery managed by Angling Trust members, Altrincham and District Angling Club.

Egerton appeared at Macclesfield Magistrates on 15 April 2015 and was found guilty for 'unlawfully attempting to take fish in water in which there was a private right of fishery'. He was also found guilty as he 'fished or took fish otherwise than in accordance with a licence by means of a rod and line'.

Egerton was fined £400 and ordered to pay a victim surcharge of £40 and pay costs of £85.00 to the Crown Prosecution Service.

Cheshire Police Wildlife Crime Officer PC Jim Day said: "Police are taking positive action to support both the Environment Agency and the Angling Trust to tackle illegal fishing in the UK."

Dilip Sarkar Angling Trust National Enforcement Manager said: "This is an excellent result and a great example of what we are all collectively achieving through the Fisheries Enforcement Campaign: raising awareness within the police service and beyond to the wider public, increasing confidence and intelligence - and all involved working together.

Cheshire Police have done a first class job with this - as too have CPS and the magistrates. This sends a very strong message out to would-be poachers: persist and you will get caught, be punished and have a criminal record.

Times have changed - and all responsible, law-abiding, anglers welcome this."