

FORCE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2014 THE RESPONSE TO RIVER CRANE POLLUTION EVENTS

To re-cap. There have been two catastrophic pollution events on the river in the last three years. The first, in October 2011 killed around 10,000 fish and virtually wiped out the river ecology. In October 2013, just as the system was recovering, a second major incident killed virtually all the nascent fish population and the river was returned to a largely lifeless state.

It is only now recovering again – the invertebrate population has returned, small fish are coming back and kingfishers can again be seen on the river. The Environment Agency is re-stocking the river in December.

Responding to these events has been a major learning curve for FORCE. The main findings so far are as follows:

1. The river is vulnerable to pollution events – and its modified character (straightened and divorced from its natural flood plain) - means that these events are more likely to be catastrophic
2. The river is vulnerable to polluting discharges from Heathrow, following extended periods of cold weather, due to the use of glycol as a de-icer at the airport
3. This vulnerability to pollution is a long term phenomenon – with 17 major incidents in the last 27 years
4. the river is also subject to chronic every day pollution inputs, from road run-off and domestic missed connections in particular
5. In June this year Thames Water were found guilty of negligence in relation to the October 2011 incident and fined £75000 plus costs. FORCE registered its dissatisfaction with this fine
6. Thames Water noted during the court case how it has instituted risk assessment and risk mitigation works following this incident. FORCE has asked for a report from TW about how these affect the Crane.
7. Thames Water has also pledged £400,000 in support for the Crane through the Thames Water Fund. This fund is helping to pay for Ilse's role at the Crane Valley Partnership as well as several major improvement works
8. The Environment Agency has investigated the 2013 incident and stated it was the result of illegal acts by persons unknown. FORCE has requested clarification as to the current status of the investigation
9. There are around half a dozen projects along the Crane that will introduce new marginal habitat into the river, improving the ecology as well as the resilience of the river to pollution
10. The Citizen Crane project has provided an enhanced level of monitoring for the river. This improves our understanding of the river chemistry/ecology and provides an early warning for pollution problems
11. Thames Water has a programme of work to reduce missed connections around the catchment – whereby domestic waste and washing machines are tapped into the surface water drainage, feeding this waste water directly into the river. There are around 150 surface water drains into the Crane and TW has targeted missed connections for 45 of these over the next five years, possibly the most intensive approach to the issue across London
12. We hosted a public meeting on 31st October to debate the issues and we felt this went well. We have now written to all the participants setting out requests for action moving forwards
13. The Environment Agency has confirmed that the first round of fish stocking, comprising 5500 fish, will take place at Baber Bridge on 3rd December
14. The EA has also proposed a work shop in the New Year to debate the means to move the Crane to "Good Ecological Status by 2021

In summary, we believe that good progress is being made, and all the key parties are on board, but a lot of work is still required to reach Good Ecological Status for the river.

Rob Gray
Chair of FORCE
November 2014