

Halt the Invasion!

Avon Invasive Weed Forum - AIWF

Forum Core Group Meeting 3rd March 2009

Minutes

Present:

Victoria Freke - Environment Officer (Environment Agency)
Paula Spiers - The Avon Frome Partnership
Charles Halliday
Kathy Derrick - Bristol Living Rivers/Env. & Sustainability Dept (Bristol City Council)
Daniel Marshall - Bristol Environmental Records Centre (BRERC)
Paul Hurd - Environmental Advisor (ecology) (British Waterways)
Sara Chapple - Volunteer with Env. & Sustainability Dept (Bristol City Council)

Absent:

Caroline Hollies - Parks Dept (Bristol City Council)
Melissa Clarkson - Fisheries, Recreation & Biodiversity (Environment Agency)
Matt Hamilton - Avon Wildlife Trust
Arthur Barker - Shirehampton Greens
Ed Hall - Bristol Ferries Company
Sue Douglas - Network Rail

1. Welcome and Apologies.

Welcome and apologies. Minutes from the last meeting were not discussed in full. However the outstanding actions from previous meeting that were discussed were:

Action 1: VF to contact North Somerset Council to invite to next meeting and ask them to put forward a representative to attend core group meetings - VF explained that she had contacted someone from North Somerset Council and they had proposed that a representative from their parks department may be the best person to be involved and she would pass on the contacts - no contact as yet. Will need to chase this up.

PH mentioned that he may have a contact with North Somerset and would pass the information on to VF.

Action 7: VF still has to draft the word content of leaflet and send to forum members for review. Draft has been started but is not yet completed due to other work pressures.

The forum group welcomed a new member Mr Paul Hurd an Environmental Advisor (Ecology) from British Waterways, South West Region. Paul introduced himself and explained his role and the geographical area that he covers at British Waterways. Paul described the issues that his organisation has with invasive weeds on the banks of the stretches of water that are under their control and described their control programme. In particular that of Himalayan Balsam.

2. Update since last meeting

Not a huge amount of work to update on due to Christmas and New Year and other Annual leave. Calls reporting weeds has reduced due to the die back of weeds in Winter.

AIWF Website - VF has arranged edit/write access to the Invasive Weed Forum website and can now edit the content of the site on a regular basis. VF will update with any news and events as and when but no less than monthly. See website: www.aiwf.org.uk. Forum members should email vicky.freke@bristol.gov.uk if they have anything that they would like to add.

Drafting of leaflet for householders on Japanese knotweed underway.

VF has been dealing with AIWF correspondence. Including queries regarding Japanese knotweed control on private land, a documentary film about Knotweed, and enquiries from groups wanting to volunteer.

VF and KD have been discussing and scoping out potential plans for events and surveying this year (to be discussed in meeting).

VF has been in touch with Defra and the Non-Native Species Secretariat regarding the Convention on Biological Diversity's International Biodiversity Day which is being held on 22nd May 2009. The theme of this day is Non-Native Species and the AIWF have been invited to be involved and hold an event on this weekend in support of it. In return Defra will provide co-ordination, publicity and provide advice and resources to help us target communication of the key messages on the day and to ensure consistency.

3. Events

Collitors Brook Events

VF explained that the South Bristol Riverscapes project is running events at the Collitors Brook, Ashton Vale in March and in May 2009. Hopefully plans can be made so that at one of the events there will be a walk along the stretch of Collitors Brook and a litter and invasive weeds survey as they go.

ACTION - VF will be going along on Sunday 29 March 2009 to the Collitors Brook event as an EA Rep and will gauge support for an invasive weed event there. Invasive Weed Survey form will be developed for the walk at a later event.

Weed Pulling Events Summer 2009

Members of the forum discussed the potential for events in the summer months similar to the 'Halt the Invasion' day that was successfully held in July last year at Three Brooks in Bradley Stoke and Manor Woods Valley in Bishopsworth (Malago). The forum generally agreed that the previous event with the Himalayan Balsam pulling was good and that it would be good to do it again.

PH mentioned that at British Waterways they cut the Himalayan Balsam rather than pulling it out and it is most effective. As HB is widespread on canals and rivers in the area. British Waterways carry out a programme of cutting of HB to keep it under control. Beginning in March the HB is cut (below the 1st node) to help prevent further growth of the

weed. This cutting of each stand of HB is continued on a 6 weekly-ish basis through until June/July. PH believes that this has helped the problem that they have and also gets rid of the problem of waste disposal.

KD raised the issue of health and safety of us adopting this technique with volunteers at halt the invasion days. PH suggested that this technique could be used if funding was available to get BTCV involved as they may be able to do cutting. In addition, CH and PH raised the point that weed pulling could contribute to soil erosion and PS added that Himalayan Balsam must be pulled for three consecutive years to eradicate it successfully.

VF suggested that with current volunteer and staff resources/time we may be able to hold events at 1 or maybe 2 locations this year.

VF asked for opinions from the forum on whether we should hold events at the same locations as last year (Manor Woods and Three Brooks) to follow up the good work from last years efforts.

PS suggested that it may be an opportunity to get community groups at these sites to continue on with the weed pulling and hold their own events this year (and in years to come hopefully) and that the forum could concentrate on an event in a new location this year.

KD suggested that we could promise that 1 member of the AIWF is available on site to help the previous groups at Manor Woods and Three Brooks on the day if they did arrange their own events or carried on the weed pulling without a specific event.

Consensus among the forum was that PS had a very good idea and it may be the best way to make the project long term and sustainable, if there was absence of the forum in the future.

ACTION - contact needs to be made with the community groups at Manor Woods (Malago conservation group etc.) and at Three Brooks at Bradley Stoke to see if they are willing and able to run their own events or do some weed pulling at their sites this year. VF to discuss with PS and Helen Adshed of the Riverscapes project as perhaps PS and HA are in a good position and could make initial contact with the groups to gauge their interest and availability.

New locations for weed pulling events was discussed:

CH suggested that wherever is chosen it would be good to choose a site where a good community group is already in place to help the forum 'drum up' support.

Various locations were discussed but it was established that some scoping was required to find a suitable target for our attentions.

VF suggested that it may be good to do one event in the BANES patch as previous events were in Bristol and South Glos.

Potential new sites - Colliters Brook, Arnos Vale (by paintworks), Keynsham Park (River Chew), Site in North Somerset?.

ACTION - arrange provision of current mapping of Himalayan Balsam around the area - DM.

ACTION - Search out the lists of environmental/community groups and see if any of the HB sites coincide with the location of community groups. Ask in the Environment Agency if they have any ideas of suitable locations - VF.

ACTION - Research or at least keep an eye out for suitable HB stands/areas and suitable communities to engage. Report to the forum and VF any findings. - ALL

International Biodiversity Day (22 May 2009)

VF suggested that the halt the invasion event(s) could be held as our role to mark the Convention on Biological Diversity's International Biodiversity Day which is being held on 22nd May 2009.

The forum generally agreed that this would be a good idea and that we would be able to make use of the publicity from Defra and other events going on the same day. I.e. Create a bit of a buzz!

ACTION - contact Defra with details of the event once decided on locations and dates etc. - VF

Festival of Nature (Bristol Harbourside) 5-7 June 2009

KD/VF explained that there will be a festival of nature on Friday 5th to Sunday 7th June 2009. BCC will be having a wild tent with other partners. EA (Ecology and Fisheries) also having a tent. Potential for the AIWF to attend one or both of these tents.

Discussed that we are considering producing a weed costume (either a Japanese Knotweed or a Himalayan Balsam) that we can get someone to wear and parade around the event telling stories about invasive weeds to the visitors. It was generally agreed that it would be an interesting way to get our message across and the costume could also be used for all kinds of events later on.

ACTION - Look into contacts for costume makers to see if making this type of costume is possible, how long it will take and how much will cost etc. - KD

Bath and West Show Event (4 to 6th September 2009)

SC explained that we would be able to book a slot to attend for a small fee. Either a 2m x2m or a 4m x 4m section of big marquee.

VF thought would be a good idea to reach landowners, farmers, gardeners etc with our message. KD questioned whether this event would target farmers and landowners in our patch. VF - will get input from EA Agricultural lead to get perspective on who attends.

Angling Event Keynsham Park (11 July 2009)

CH explained that he is running a angling participation event at Keynsham Park on River Chew on 11 July 2009. The site at Keynsham has got Himalayan Balsam and so potential to drum up support for doing some HB pulling there and to reach angling clubs members.

ACTION - CH to liase with VF to discuss arranging a weed pulling event in Keynsham either before or after the angling event?

Other Events

SC said that she had done some research and found some other potential events that the

AIWF could attend. Such as the Bath Flower Show and Vegan Fayre.

ACTION - SC to provide details of the suitable events that she has researched and the costings and locations etc. to be discussed at next meeting.- SC

PH suggested that we could do a talk for a group such as PROBUS or the Merchant Venturers as they are very influential and get projects moving/have contacts.

4. Volunteers

VF mentioned that she had had several emails from corporate groups wishing to volunteer for the AIWF. Please can forum members have a think about suitable jobs that can be done by a group eg. Sites that need HB pulling or small river stretch that should be surveyed.

CH suggested that we could approach universities and colleges about someone doing a BSc or MSc dissertation project on invasive weeds. Perhaps offer them some funding for the best project proposal. They could in turn do some surveying or other relevant work for the AIWF.

Forum agreed is a good idea.

ACTION - contact Bristol, UWE, Bath and Bath Spa Universities about support of dissertation project. - to be thought about and checked with Defra's approval and action allocated if appropriate. VF to approach Defra to find out if something they can support.

5. Surveying

Undertaking the surveying?:

VF explained that last year three rivers (Malago, Pigeonhouse and Three Brooks) were surveyed by consultants from the Wildlife Trust. This survey was expensive. Defra's funding could be better spent?

KD pointed out that Defra would like any money they have given to be used as 'seed funding' to kick start the project. It may therefore be better to use the funding to support local community groups to do the surveying instead and get them involved so that it may be a sustainable thing to do in the future.

Overall it was agreed that a better use of community volunteers could be employed. KD and PS believed that this could be achieved by community volunteers for the 3 river stretches that were done by the WT last year.

It was also discussed that universities and colleges could be approached to help with surveying.

Where are surveys required?:

VF suggested that we need to identify which watercourses might be a priority to survey. We would only be able to survey as many stretches as our time/resources allowed.

ACTION - AJ to think about which watercourses may be priority to survey this year.

Meeting Concluded