

New Forest Biodiversity Forum

The Freshwater Network

Naomi Ewald (Freshwater Habitats Trust)

Freshwater Habitats Trust has been championing freshwater conservation for the last 35 years, using research to underpin policy and practice.

The Freshwater Network unites important new ideas from research with traditional conservation concepts to better protect life in freshwater.

Key aims of the Freshwater Network are to:

- 1) ***Protect the best.*** Strengthen within and build out from existing freshwater biodiversity hotspots at both national and local levels.
- 2) ***Use smaller waters and wetlands as ecological engineers.*** About 80% of the freshwater environment is made up of smaller waters. The Freshwater Network is focused especially on small waters and wetlands because of their power to regenerate freshwater landscapes.
- 3) ***Treat freshwaters as a network of interconnected and interdependent habitats.*** The majority of freshwater species (c.2/3rds) use multiple waterbody types in networks of habitats, not just rivers or ponds or lakes or wetlands; managing these waterbodies as a whole, as freshwater landscapes, is essential for effective biodiversity conservation.
- 4) ***Bring back clean water.*** Clean water is vital for biodiversity. It is now a very scarce habitat and so restoring it to the landscape is a critical step for freshwater protection.

The Freshwater Network has already been adopted by key partners and will be rolled out across the country over the next 15 years, completing an audit of where the existing high biodiversity is found and opportunities for restoration. The New Forest has been part of the research and development of the Freshwater Network from the beginning, and will be at the forefront of demonstrating the concept as we roll out the Network nationwide.