

# Appendix 1

## Background to the River Otter Beaver Trial

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## **Background to the River Otter Beaver Trial (ROBT)**

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Following the discovery of breeding beavers on the River Otter in East Devon, and a subsequent campaign for them to remain by local residents, conservation and land management organisations, and wildlife enthusiasts, Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) on behalf of the River Otter Beaver Trial partners was granted a licence by Natural England (NE) under section 16(4) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, to release Eurasian beavers (*Castor fiber*) into the River Otter catchment in East Devon.

The release followed the capture and health screening of all adult beavers living on the river to ensure that they were healthy, free of the tapeworm *Echinococcus multilocularis* (a parasite not found in the UK) and confirmation that they were indeed Eurasian beavers.

The five-year licence was granted on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2015 following the submission of a detailed licence application.

The objectives of the ROBT were outlined in the licence application and are as follows:

1. **Identify and assess impacts of beavers on habitats, wildlife, built infrastructure and local communities.** In particular this will concentrate on recording any impacts on farming, wildlife, fish populations, water management infrastructure, roads, paths and the people that live and work in the valley.
2. **Identify wider public benefits associated with beaver activity in the landscape.** This includes the potential benefits of beaver dams storing floodwater, reducing pollution, which will be the subject of a PhD with Exeter University. This objective also includes investigating other benefits such as increased economic activity for local tourism businesses.
3. **Develop an effective management process for a free-living beaver population.** Protecting important structures, trees and trialling flow devices in any dams will form the basis of mitigation measures. These techniques and the decision making steps that will be taken are introduced in the “Beaver Management Strategy” published in January 2016.
4. **Understand the ecology, behaviour and population dynamics of a beaver population in a lowland productive agricultural landscape.** Research will seek to understand how the beavers colonise the catchment and utilise the resources within it and will enable the carrying capacity for the catchment to be calculated. Monitoring the population of the beavers and how they form territories will be a key aspect of this objective.
5. **Increase knowledge and awareness with local communities and other key stakeholders of beavers and their interactions in the landscape.**



Public engagement and local education work will seek to explain the ecology and behaviour of beavers to local people and ensure decisions about their future are based on factual information.

- 6. Provide data and evidence to augment national knowledge base re beaver re-introduction.** The knowledge gained as part of the ROBT will be disseminated to various national and international audiences. There are numerous projects around Britain seeking to restore beavers to wetlands, and advice and experience will be provided to these where appropriate.

The River Otter Beaver Trial is led by Devon Wildlife Trust working in partnership with The University of Exeter, the Derek Gow Consultancy, and Clinton Devon Estates. Expert independent advice is also provided by Dr Roisin Campbell-Palmer, Professor John Gurnell, Professor Alastair Driver, and Gerhard Schwab, an international beaver expert based in Bavaria. The health screening of the beavers has been carried out by, or with expert input from, the Royal Zoological Society for Scotland (RZSS).

The River Otter Beaver Trial is supported by The Peter De Haan Charitable Trust, The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, Garfield Weston Foundation, Tale Valley Trust and donations from DWT members, local residents and the general public.

The ROBT is given strategic input, advice and guidance by the ROBT Steering Group. The Steering Group is comprised of a wide range of national and local, public, statutory, charitable sector and special interest organisations who are impacted or hold a stake in the future of beavers in the River Otter.

**Figure 1.1 -The governance of the ROBT is illustrated by the following chart**

