

AINA CASE STUDY

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Grand Western Canal: siltation and nutrient management



New initiatives show how silting can be reduced to benefit the long term future of a waterway

Silt management is a significant issue for waterway managers. As canals silt up, navigation is restricted and costs are incurred for removing the silt through dredging. Dredging, if not carried out in a sustainable way, can also have adverse environmental effects. Siltation often arises through run-off from adjacent agricultural land and brings with it nutrients, which can stimulate plant and algae growth in water courses.

On the Grand Western Canal in Devon, a programme of work was implemented in 2003- 2006 to slowing down the process of siltation thus reducing the need for future dredging. The work was part funded through the EU Interreg IIIB North West Europe *Crosscut* project. Initiatives carried out included:-

- Fencing off an approximately 3m strip of agricultural land on the canal offside, to stop stock encroachment and installing surfaced stock drinking points.
- Excavating and restoring silt traps in watercourses and ditches that flow into the canal.
- Working in partnership with the UK Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) to explain to farmers the problems they may be causing in terms of soil erosion and excessive nutrient inputs, and to seek ways in which these problems may be solved, using agri-environment funding sources as appropriate.
- Increasing the amount of weed cutting undertaken, using a specialised boat.
- Undertaking cutting of overhanging branches to reduce leaf-fall into the canal. This also has the advantage of improving ecological conditions through reducing shading.

A summary of the work undertaken can be found at:-

www.crosscut-nwe.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/meetings/presentations/Crosscut_Lille_28Jun07_-_15-Baker.pdf