

Comments on “New Forest Wetland Restoration Review” (Cox, Janes & Aaberg 2015)

- 1) The review is based mainly on short site visits (one or two day walk-overs during November 2014, just after a period of substantial rain) to 8 selected sites where restoration work had been conducted, in some cases only one or two years before.
- 2) Since there are no records from comparable observations prior to restoration, the review represents a rather heroic effort to assess the success of the schemes in the absence of much relevant information.
- 3) The report suffers greatly from lack of hard evidence (such as before/after photographs or quantitative data on vegetation cover). A brave effort has been made to find and use earlier photographic evidence, and the (usually cursory) NE condition assessment reports. However, most photos are undated and in most cases do not clearly correspond to the same locations, scale or orientations.
- 4) The report is therefore bedevilled by statements that are essentially purely supposition, particularly regarding stated changes of vegetation that are not based on any quantitative observations of vegetation cover (either before or after).
- 5) The overall conclusion is that restoration work has generally contributed positively to the declared objectives, but these are mostly either vague or activity (rather than outcome) based. The basis for this conclusion is therefore weak. It is based primarily on changes to the hydro-geomorphology that are relatively easy to assess visually during a short visit.
- 6) The projects that appear to have been most successful are those involving small low-gradient low-flow rivulets, or where the pre-existing conditions were the worst (e.g. Fletchers Thorns where there was indubitably a long straight artificial channel). Those involving larger flows and steeper gradients (e.g. Holly Hatch) have apparently been less successful.
- 7) The report contains a number of pertinent observations on the basic conflict between promoting wetland vegetation and improving grazing for stock, and on the difficulties involved in re-establishing anything close to the natural dynamic equilibrium between erosion and deposition of a natural stream.
- 8) The report implicitly tends to assume that the ideal state of a stream (for adjacent wetland vegetation) would be close to bank-full throughout its length at all times, which is simplistic because it would be (a) quite unnatural (in both space and time), and (b) deleterious for grazing and for less preferred types of vegetation.
- 9) The conclusions include (p 118) some pertinent recommendations regarding the necessity for extended and quantitative monitoring both before and after works are undertaken, and some useful suggestions of the appropriate methodology.

John Shepherd, 16 November 2015