

RIVER CHAR



Map of the River Char sub-catchment

Key

-  River
-  Environment Agency WFD Cycle 2 waterbody boundary
-  West Dorset Rivers & Coastal Streams Boundary

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Description

The source of the Char is said to be on the flanks of Lewesdon Hill but other tributaries run down from Bittiscombe and Marshwood village. Its valley quickly broadens to become the Marshwood Vale which, as its name suggests, is characterised by clay soils and lies wet for much of the year. It is a ‘flashy’ catchment with rapid run-off, and the river itself is widely acknowledged to be a natural, unadulterated water course. The Char is approximately 16 km long. The entire catchment is in the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the coastal strip, known as the Jurassic coast, has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Medium to large dairy units dominate much of the area with agricultural land use in the catchment being nearly all permanent and temporary grassland. The exception to this is maize cultivation, the extent of which varies from year to year. It is a renowned pastoral landscape with bountiful hedges and hedgerow trees, and the catchment is rimmed with characterful hill forts. The river is not formally fished and, it is believed, has never been stocked resulting in an unusually ‘natural’ brown trout population of high conservation value.

River length	16.77 km
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Catchment area	38.15 km ²
Geology	It rises on clay and flows through mudstone for the majority of its course.
Land use	Intensive dairy dominates land use
Principle towns and villages	Pilsden, Bettiscombe, Marshwood, Fishpond Bottom, Whitchurch Canonorum, Morecombelake, Charmouth

Environment Agency status assessment

Using the best available data, the Environment Agency have classified the river using their WFD hierarchy. It is a 'one out – all out' approach, so the classification is based on the lowest classification of the 10 individual elements.

<u>Key</u>	<u>Classifications</u>		
High status	Ecological	Chemical	Invertebrates
Good status	Fish	Phytobenthos	Macrophytes
Moderate status	Phosphates	Ammonia	Dissolved oxygen
Poor status	pH	Other	
Bad status			
Does not require assessment			
No data			

OVERALL STATUS:

MODERATE STATUS

Identified threats

Interviews with XX organisations over the winter of 2014 were held to gauge the perceived threats to the water environment within the West Dorset Rivers & Coastal Streams Catchment. The summarised anecdotal information is listed below:

Issue	Location
Flashy / rapid run-off due to clay soils	Throughout catchment
Point source pollution risk from septic tanks / lack of mains sewerage	Whitchurch Canonorum
Point source pollution risk from agricultural sources	Throughout catchment
Pollution incident in 2013 hit already oxygen-hungry fish (low flows)	Whitchurch Canonorum
Diffuse water pollution from agriculture linked to dairying, maize, fertilisers	Throughout catchment
Sediment linked to agricultural activities, e.g. maize, soil compaction	Throughout catchment
Sediment from road run-off, exacerbated by large machinery (inc contractors)	Throughout catchment
Ongoing rural run-off issues	Pilsdon & Bettiscombe
Sediment mobilisation – livestock poaching	Throughout catchment
Large Woody Debris exacerbating bank erosion at times of high flow	Lower catchment
Large Woody Debris blockages exacerbating flooding	Lower catchment
Stream eroding under sewage treatment works	Charmouth
Sewer flooding in / around Charmouth in floods	Charmouth
Bank erosion	Charmouth
Straightened section under A35 exacerbates erosion downstream	Charmouth
Roads prone to flooding at high flows	Whitchurch Canonorum
Himalayan balsam infestation along almost entire length of Char, source to sea	Throughout catchment
Giant hogweed on lower reaches of Char and up Wootton Fitzpaine tributary	Charmouth - Wootton
Canopy shading along almost entire length of river – macrophytes suppressed	Throughout catchment
Char not fished, therefore not valued – educate public, farmers, authorities	Lower catchment

Existing management action

Information on existing measures was also gathered during the interviewing of 34 organisations. A summary of the actions are listed below:

Environment Agency have remote monitoring boxes in Char detecting raised levels of nitrates & phosphates
Char Valley Parish Plan: 'keep streams free from domestic pollution' including local volunteer monitors
Westcountry Rivers Trust have done catchment walkovers to inform projects
Char Valley Parish Plan: press Dorset County Council and West Dorset District Council for improved highway maintenance
Pasture pumps installed (x 4) by Dorset Wildlife Trust to remove need for livestock to drink from river, near Whitchurch Canonorum
On-farm capital projects coordinated by Dorset Wildlife Trust, implemented & funded to reduce sediment, e.g. gateway renewal
Dorset Wildlife Trust partnership with Natural England / Catchment Sensitive Farming offering advice, events, small scale funding throughout catchment, 2011-15
Dorset Wildlife Trust have undertaken in-river large woody debris redistribution to relieve erosion and create habitat, 2012 - 2015
Bankside coppicing and in-river habitat restoration 2012-15 undertaken by Dorset Wildlife Trust (on-going)
Himalayan balsam pulling parties run by Dorset Wildlife Trust and local volunteers (on-going)
Dorset Wildlife Trust giant hogweed control project on Wootton Fitzpaine tributary (on-going)
Dorset Wildlife Trust ran a river wildlife 'celebration' / education event in 2014 aimed at landowners
Dorset Wildlife Trust river fly surveys 2012 - 2014 – kick sampling on gravel sections