

A 500m side channel has been re-connected to the River Spey at Aviemore, enhancing ecology and restoring instream habitats for a multitude of species.



The channel was blocked off with rock armour around 50 years ago to reduce flood and erosion risk to nearby properties. Until the restoration works took place in Feb 17, flow only entered the channel during spate conditions when the main stem of the Spey overtopped the bank and the whole area flooded. Out with these events, the watercourse was stagnant or had minimal flow, leading to poor habitat which was a dank, often smelly ditch rather than a gently flowing burn.

Following research in 2015 by an Edinburgh University Master's student as part of his dissertation project, a proposal to reintroduce a sustainable flow to the channel was developed. It was accepted for further development and delivery by the EU Life+ funded Pearls in Peril Project later that year with ground works taking place in February 2017.

A culvert was incorporated into the rock armour such that there will now be a constant inflow to the backwater. During larger flow events the River Spey already overtops the existing banks and the opening of the backwater channel will have no significant impact on flood levels or extents. The 500m channel was also cleared of extraneous accumulated debris, but was not dredged or remodelled in any way.



Reconnecting the backwater channel with the River Spey main stem will improve habitats for fresh water pearl mussels and salmonids. The constant inflow will provide sustainable habitat for individual mussels washed into the backwater during flood events, as well as high water refuge habitat for juvenile fish. It will improve the condition of the channel and local environment generally.

The work was carried out as part of the Pearls in Peril LIFE project working in partnership with the Spey Catchment Initiative, Seafeld Estate and the Spey Fishery Board.

Before ground works



Channel during dry periods (no flow)



Channel looking back to inflow point



Downstream view from inflow point



Channel outflow (just before it re-joins the Spey)

After culvert installation



Continuous flow in channel



Culvert now installed



Post culvert installation

