

Volunteer Handbook

Welcome

Rivers and lakes are amazing, and we must keep them that way!

Not only do they make the British landscape so picturesque and vibrant, they have been crucial for the growth of our towns and cities, providing fresh water for drinking, farming, industry and transport over centuries. But there is so much more to rivers, particularly healthy rivers. They support an abundant array of wildlife and diverse habitats. They capture pollutants and can provide flood protection. They give us places we turn to for recreation and reflection. Our health, and that of the communities we are part of, is intrinsically connected to these rivers. In short, healthy rivers sustain and connect us.

West Cumbria Rivers Trust is an environmental charity working to restore and enhance the rivers, lakes, estuaries and surrounding countryside of West Cumbria. Our work includes improving water quality, enhancing habitats to improve wildlife diversity and reducing flood risk. Education sessions are run for schools, teaching the next generation about the importance of our environment.

First founded as Derwent Rivers Trust in September 2009 to protect and improve the River Derwent catchment area, we broadened our work across the West Cumbria region and became West Cumbria Rivers Trust in 2011. Today we employ almost 20 staff and carry out improvement projects on rivers and lakes across an area from Mungrisdale to Silloth to Bootle.

We couldn't achieve as much as we do without the help of all our amazing volunteers and for this, we thank you!



Jodie Mills
Operations Director

Our area



We're working on exciting projects across four water catchments: The Derwent, The Ellen, Wild Rivers (which includes the Ehen, Calder, Irt, Mite, Esk and Annas) and the Waver and Wampool.





Volunteering

Thank you for your interest in becoming a West Cumbria Rivers Trust volunteer and helping us improve our river environments. We're a small team with a big job on our hands, so it's only with the help of volunteers like you that our rivers will be protected, now and into the future.

Upcoming volunteer events are listed at:



westcumbriariverstrust.org/events



Whichever activities you choose to get involved in, you really are making a difference to the health of the river and the wildlife that inhabits them. We aim to make your experience volunteering with us as enjoyable, rewarding and educational as possible. Sadly, we can't do much about the weather, but we carry on, rain or shine!

Essential Information



Clothing

Please bring outdoor clothing suitable for the time of year. We suggest: waterproof coat, waterproof trousers, walking boots or wellies, sun-cream, hat and insect repellent. We do sometimes get muddy so wear clothes you don't mind getting dirty.

We supply durable gloves for most activities and waders if the activity requires them. All other tools and equipment are also supplied.



Food and drink

Please bring a packed lunch and drinks. Light refreshments (tea, coffee and biscuits) are sometimes provided.



Travel expenses

Generally we can't cover volunteers' travel expenses to and from the site. Expenses are only covered in exceptional circumstances but if travel costs are prohibitive to your volunteering experience then please talk to a member of the team.



Smile - you're on camera!

Photos and video clips of our volunteers in action keep our publicity alive. We love to show off the exceptional contribution our volunteers make to improving our rivers. Please be aware that by attending our volunteer events, you may appear on our website, social media, press releases, newsletters and other publications. If you do not wish to appear, please let a member of the team know. For our volunteers under 18 we will ask for a parent or guardian to complete a photo consent form.



How can we improve?

We want your experience of volunteering with us to be as valuable and rewarding as possible. If there's anything you think we could change or improve, we're keen to hear about it. Please email comments or suggestions to info@westcumbriariverstrust.org

Our mutual obligations

We'll make sure you:

- understand how your work is benefitting the river and its wildlife
- have a good understanding of West Cumbria Rivers Trust and its objectives
- feel welcome, respected and a valued participant of the team
- know who your leader is and who you are answerable to
- have safe working conditions
- are carrying out tasks suitable to your ability
- know how to do your tasks safely and effectively
- have access to relevant training
- are insured to take part in our volunteering activities
- know who to approach if you have a problem

In return we ask you to:

- be reliable and punctual - our work sites are often difficult to find so if you're not at the meeting point on time, you may struggle to find the group
- pay attention to and adhere to the leader's health and safety advice
- carry out your tasks as your leader has instructed
- ask for support if you need it
- be respectful and courteous to your fellow volunteers
- adhere to West Cumbria Rivers Trust's equality and safeguarding policies
- respect the land on which you are working, follow the countryside code and take any litter home with you - even if it's not yours!

If the leader of the task has concerns about your behaviour or contribution as a volunteer, they will discuss the issue with you and take appropriate steps to address it. However, if the issue cannot be resolved, your volunteering with West Cumbria Rivers Trust may have to cease.



Activities

That's the serious bit over... Let's take a look at the activities you can get involved in!



Litter picks

Every year, hundreds of volunteers help clean up rivers in our catchments. It's one of our most popular volunteer activities.

Removing litter can change your attitude to a river as you can immediately see the beautiful asset underneath. You'll also help discourage people from littering - we've found that if there's already rubbish somewhere, it attracts more rubbish! Litter isn't just unsightly; it's harmful to wildlife and small amounts of pollution can leak from discarded bottles and cans, affecting water quality.

Removing rubbish is incredibly satisfying. In just a couple of hours you can make a huge and immediate impact. Many hands make light work – clean-ups help to make a BIG difference in a short time, and together this can be fun as well as rewarding.

We provide the gloves, litter pickers and bin bags.

All you need to provide is a few hours of your time.





Tree planting

Planting trees is a vital part of improving our rivers and streams. Trees help stabilise riverbanks, filter diffuse pollution, reduce flood risk, and maintain cool water temperatures (by shading the river). Trailing roots and branches also provide important habitat for fish, invertebrates and otters.

We plant trees from November to March, when weather conditions ensure that as many trees as possible survive and grow. It doesn't matter if you've never planted a tree before; we provide you with all the training and tools. Tree planting is a really rewarding experience and it's wonderful to see your efforts transform into established woodland over the years.

We only plant native tree species

For example: oak, birch, alder, rowan, hazel, willow, hawthorn, blackthorn and holly.



Invasive species control

Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) are plants or animals that displace our native species and cause damage to the environment, infrastructure or public health. Three of the worst offenders are:

- Himalayan balsam colonises riverbanks quickly, outcompeting native flora and leaving banks exposed to erosion when it dies back in winter.
- American Skunk cabbage grows on wet ground. Mature colonies form large dense patches, shading native ground flora.
- Japanese knotweed spreads prolifically, impacting on biodiversity, flood management and even damaging properties.

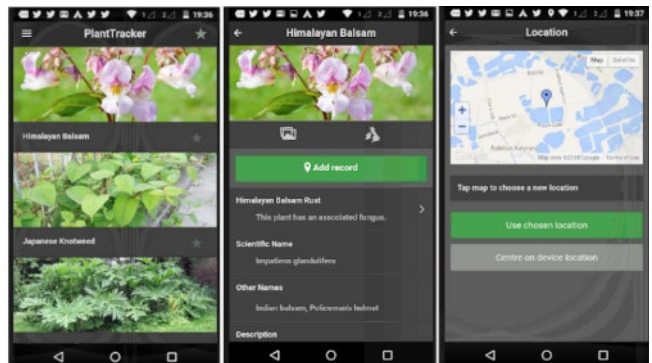
Help us control invasive species

Balsam Pulls; Throughout the summer we hold regular balsam pulling events to help control Himalayan balsam. You'll spend a couple of hours of pulling or strimming the plants to eradicate them from our rivers.

Chemical control; American Skunk cabbage and Japanese Knotweed require special chemical treatment. Certified training is available to volunteers willing to commit time to chemical control. Please contact us if you're interested in taking on this specialist training.

Report your sightings

Report sightings of invasive species through PlantTracker, a free app. Snap a picture and let us know where it is!



westcumbriariverstrust.org/projects/invasive-species

Bank stabilisation

Brash bundling

Posts are driven into the riverbed and the top of the bank, providing anchor points from which wire is tightly criss-crossed over bundles of brash. The brash bundles are made using willow secured with coir rope and then piled into the eroded area of the bank. Large willow stakes are driven through the bundles to provide extra stability.

Willow spiling

Willow is fantastic for preventing riverbank erosion and reducing the amount of silt entering a river. As well as reducing silt run-off, willow work has wider benefits for biodiversity as it provides habitat and shade.

Willow spiling is a traditional technique of weaving a willow hurdle into a riverbank. It's based on an ancient technique but has been modified and improved over the years. It's still all done by hand though!





Wildlife surveys

Surveys and monitoring activities help us identify where work is needed and how previous work is performing. We provide training and supply all the necessary equipment.

Electrofishing

Fish are a fantastic indicator of the quality of a river, from how clean the water is to the quality of the habitat. Electrofishing surveys take place daily from July to September. This activity is a real eye-opener, with many volunteers stunned to see the numbers and variety of fish that live in our rivers.

westcumbriariverstrust.org/projects/fish-surveys

River walkovers

Walkover surveys are one of the best ways to gather information about a river and identify areas where there are particular issues. With over 3,400 miles of river and beck in our area, we can't walk every mile! With your help, we can gather a lot more information data about the condition of our rivers and streams.

Riverfly monitoring

Falling invertebrate numbers may be a sign of water pollution. Our Riverfly monitors survey invertebrates from Spring to Autumn. You'll visit the same site monthly and do a 'kick sample', disturbing the riverbed so invertebrates are washed into a net, and counting them before returning them to the river. Any sudden fall in numbers will be reported to the Environment Agency for investigation. Contact us you're interested in becoming a Riverfly monitor. You'll need to attend a one-day training workshop and then we'll supply you with the necessary equipment.



Toad Patrols

Every Spring, volunteers nationwide go out at night to help migrating frogs, toads and newts cross busy roads. We need volunteers for our Toad Patrols on the A591 near Keswick.

westcumbriariverstrust.org/projects/toad-patrol

Specialist skills

We're always on the lookout for volunteers with specialist skills. Volunteers have helped with tasks ranging from monthly monitoring of lake samples for algal species to IT and GIS support. We're really interested in volunteers with specialist hydrologist experience. You might also like to take your volunteering one step further and consider becoming a trustee! Contact us if you can help.



Education & engagement

If you want to help inspire the next generation of conservationists we'd love to hear from you! There's a range of education sessions you could volunteer with, including formal primary school sessions, Forest Schools and informal community events. Contact us to register your interest.



Regular volunteering days

We set up regular monthly volunteering groups in areas where we're working on longer-term projects. To see what's happening near you, visit westcumbriariverstrust.org/support-us/volunteer

Corporate days

Looking for a team-building day with a difference?

Getting outside with West Cumbria Rivers Trust helps improve staff morale, grow professional relationships and boost team productivity, all while making a valuable contribution to your local environment.

Contact us for more information.



Keeping you safe

Equality policy

West Cumbria Rivers Trust endeavours to ensure that no volunteer receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, gender, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, responsibility for dependants, age, belief or disability and that volunteers are selected and treated on the basis of their relevant skills and experience. Volunteers also have an individual responsibility for complying with and promoting this policy.

GDPR

Our privacy policy complies with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the General Data Protection Regulations 2018. Any data that we obtain is stored safely, never shared with third parties, and only ever used with consent for the purpose that it was originally provided.

Safeguarding

West Cumbria Rivers Trust works to safeguard the welfare of the young people we work with by protecting them from physical, sexual, emotional harm, and neglect. A copy of our safeguarding policy is available on request. All West Cumbria Rivers Trust staff working regularly with volunteers have been checked by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to ensure they are suitable to work with children and vulnerable adults.

Risk assessment

We undertake risk assessments for all volunteering activities and identify the safest

ways of working. To ensure your safety, we ask that you comply with the methods of working as set out in the risk assessment and demonstrated by your Volunteer Supervisor. If you are unsure how to do something safely, ask your Supervisor.

Accidents

Our actions should not put volunteers, staff or the public at risk. The best practice is to prevent accidents from happening in the first place so we must look out for each other and if you see a potential hazard, warn your colleagues and report it to a leader straight away. If an accident does occur, ensure that it is noted in the Accident Book.

First aid

All of our staff are trained to administer emergency first aid and a first aid kit and welfare kit is present at every volunteer event.

Insurance

Volunteers are covered under West Cumbria Rivers Trust's Public Liability insurance policy, providing the volunteer is undertaking an activity suitable for their ability. Regrettably West Cumbria Rivers Trust cannot cover loss or damage to your personal possessions. Any equipment or materials necessary for your activity will be provided by West Cumbria Rivers Trust.

Please contact us if you require further clarification of the above.



Another way to help

Become a West Cumbria Rivers Trust River Giver to help us maintain, protect and improve West Cumbria's lakes and rivers.

Adult: £15 per year	Family: £25 per year
Lifetime membership: £300 one-off payment	

Join online at westcumbriariverstrust.org/support-us/rivergiver or contact us for a membership form.



Contact

Phone: 017687 75429 Email: info@westcumbriariverstrust.org

Website: westcumbriariverstrust.org

Upcoming volunteering events are listed on our website at
westcumbriariverstrust.org/events

We also send out monthly emails with event lists.
To join the mailing list, email info@westcumbriariverstrust.org

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