

Joining forces to fight threat to chalk streams

A NEW project to protect Hampshire's internationally important chalk rivers and streams from phosphorus pollution is being launched.

The University of Southampton has joined Vitacress Conservation Trust, Wessex Chalk Stream and Rivers Trust, Test and Itchen Association, Environment Agency and OPRE Hampshire to collaborate to provide positive proof of how phosphorus pollution can be tracked.

Vitacress is providing £60,000 and the Test and Itchen Association £10,000 to commission a PhD study, led by Dr Pete Shaw, to identify the key factors in phosphorus pollution of Hampshire's chalk streams.

The new research aims to identify and measure sources of phosphorus entering

headwaters, including the three in the Upper Itchen (Oandover, Arle and Charlton/Tichborne), plus the Bopne Rivulet, Dever and Upper Test. The research will also examine the emerging threat from septic tanks.

The will assist the Environment Agency and Southern Water in identifying targets and mechanisms to reduce input of phosphorus into chalk streams. OPRE Hampshire's support will ensure a wider understanding among those involved in rural planning issues.

Dr Shaw says: "There are problems to be solved in these iconic streams and we hope to produce scientific evidence that will guide us towards solutions. Having a broad group of committed partners will help immeasur-

ably in achieving our aims."

To support the project, the Environment Agency will be providing auto-sampling equipment, while river keepers will be collecting multiple samples in the catchments of the Test and Itchen.

Symptoms of phosphorus-induced "chalk stream malaise" are evident in both river and include proliferation of algae, which smothers young shoots of aquatic plants, and blanket weed, which entangles and chokes water plants.

An earlier University of Southampton MSc research project has already measured phosphorus levels in the three headwaters of the River Itchen, as well as the Itchen itself. The study found high levels of phosphorus in the Arle.