



If you could make small changes to your lifestyle to protect and 'Love Your River', would you do it?

That is the question that is being asked of everyone following the launch of a groundbreaking campaign to raise public awareness about the link between the health of our rivers and water use.

The 'Love Your River' campaign is being launched and backed by Defra, the National Trust, the Environment Agency, the Wildlife Trusts, Keep Britain Tidy, water companies and Waterwise, to promote the value and benefits of our rivers to our everyday life. The need to protect our rivers has become more urgent in light of droughts being declared in various parts of the country, with some of southern Yorkshire joining the list of drought affected areas today.

The campaign will concentrate on the issues that affect rivers and encourage people to think about:

- how the water we use in our homes or businesses affects the water in our local river;
- how the pollutants we dump down our drains harms our local water;
- the fact that there is likely to be less water available for people and businesses in the future and the knock-on effect this will have on the natural world around the river; and
- how we could get by with less in the event of drought measures in our areas.

On average we use nearly 150 litres of water per person per day and it is easy to forget that our actions have a direct consequence on the health and wellbeing of our local rivers. That is why people are being asked to look at their own lifestyle to see if there are any changes they could make to help our rivers flourish.

The 'Love Your River' campaign is not just about educating people about the difficulties that many rivers face. It is also about celebrating the importance of rivers to local people – for their health, well-being, leisure and sport. It's about recognising the great work that local groups already do to look after their rivers. It's about honouring the community spirit and the inspirational individuals who give up their time and energy to improve their local environment.

Speaking from the River Itchen at the launch of the 'Love Your River' campaign, Rivers Minister Richard Benyon said:

"We all love our rivers. They are the lifeblood of our country. They've shaped our landscape, and our towns and cities have been designed around them. They are vitally important for our everyday lives and our environment, and we've all got a role to play in making sure our rivers are as healthy as they can be.

"I hope the 'Love Your River' campaign will inspire people to value their local rivers and take action to look after them. It's especially important that we care for our rivers when they're facing the added pressure of drought, as well as the constant threats they face from over-use and pollution. The fact that so many organisations have come together to back this campaign shows the depth of feeling about this issue, and the importance we all place on making sure our actions don't damage our rivers."

Paul Wilkinson, Head of Living Landscape for The Wildlife Trusts, said:

"The amazing wildlife of our rivers and wetlands is under immense pressure from drought and other factors. Many of us would like to help but don't know what action to take. There are simple steps around water use that can make a real difference including turning off taps when cleaning our teeth. As well as saving water, you might also want to find out more and get involved with what your local Wildlife Trust is doing for rivers and wetlands near you."

Lord Smith, Chairman of the Environment Agency said:

"The amount of water that we use at home and in our businesses has a direct effect on the amount of water available in our rivers and for wildlife. We would urge all water users – including consumers, businesses and farmers – to use water wisely to help protect our valuable rivers."

Simon Pryor, Natural Environment Director at the National Trust, said:

"We're delighted to be involved in the Love Your River campaign as an amazing 43 per cent of the land in England and Wales drains to the boundary of National Trust owned land. Whether you earn your living from, travel on or play in the rivers of the UK, rivers can join us together, connect us back to the natural world and provide natural corridors for our wildlife. This campaign will help raise awareness of how actions we all take can affect the health of our rivers and wildlife they support. We all have a role to play in using water wisely."

Richard Aylard, director of sustainability for Thames Water, said:

"Following one of the driest two-year periods in our region since records began, many of the tributaries which feed the River Thames are running low. In some cases whole stretches of these rivers - for example the Pang in Berkshire and the Kennet in Wiltshire - have dried up completely, and we are only in March.

"We all need to recognise that the water coming out of our taps comes from our local river or from the aquifer feeding that river. The less water we all use the less we need to take from the local river, and from the habitats and wildlife it supports.

"The current drought is not just our problem, it's everyone's problem and we can all do our bit to help by doing simple things like turning off taps while we brush our teeth and taking shorter showers."

Paul Butler, Managing Director, South East Water, said:

"Rivers are such an important part of our daily lives and yet it is a connection that is easily forgotten. Whenever we turn on the tap we should remember that the water we use may be from a river, and when we let the plug out of the bath much of this water will return back to the environment.

"Water companies work hard to protect this natural environment, carefully managing the amount of water we take from rivers, and then ensuring water is treated to high standards before it is returned to the environment. By reducing leaks and making our treatment works more efficient we are investing in our rivers for the future.

"We hope everyone is encouraged to 'Love Your River' and that together we can all take steps to use water wisely and know that in doing so we are helping protect this vital water habitat."

If people are going to make changes to the way they live to protect their local river, they are being encouraged to let everyone know on twitter at #loveyourriver