PARRETT DRAINAGE BOARD

***Part of the* SOMERSET DRAINAGE BOARDS CONSORTIUM**
Protecting property, land and the environment

Southlake Moor Favourable Condition Project

Autumn 2010 Issue 2

INTRODUCTION

The Parrett IDB has been working with local farmers, Natural England and the Environment Agency to improve water management and to restore the Southlake Moor SSSI to favourable condition. This newsletter provides an update on the project and gives information about plans for this winter and next year.

LAST WINTER (2009/10)

The new IDB inlet for Southlake was operated for the first time last winter, allowing high flows from the River Sowy to flood Southlake for eight weeks between December and February. High rainfall and river flows in early December provided ideal conditions for testing the system. This included a long period of cold weather in late December and early January when the moor was frozen for several weeks. Water levels on Southlake reached a maximum level of 4.4m (ODN), equating to a volume of approximately 600,000m^3. The total capacity of the moor is 1,200,000m^3. The maximum water depth in the centre of the moor was about 30 – 50cm. The new inlet was also used to evacuate flood water back to the River Sowy and by early February all fields were drained and ditches were back to their normal winter level.

Operation of new IDB inlet – winter 2009

Southlake Moor has always attracted large numbers of water birds when flooded in winter, and the restoration of this ancient management practice produced record bird counts for the site. Bird numbers were at their peak in mid-January, when over 4,000 wigeon, teal and lapwing were present, along with good numbers of Bewick's swan, pintail, shoveler, golden plover and gadwall.

Natural England is very pleased with the results of the partnership project at Southlake and would like to thank everyone involved for their hard work and for the much improved conditions for wintering birds. "*Wetlands are vital for wildlife and you only have to see the large flocks ducks and other wetland birds that used the moor to see that the project has been very successful*" Stephen Parker (NE).

Southlake Moor Winter 2009/10

LAND MANAGEMENT

The new water control structures have been used this summer to maintain the desired conditions for farming and conservation. The relatively dry weather this year has also helped it to be a busy year for farming on Southlake.

A number of farmers have reinstated field gutters and ditches on Southlake, with the help of HLS funding from Natural England. These new features will assist in-field water management, as well as providing valuable wetland habitat for plants, invertebrates and waders.

New field gutter – funded by HLS

Contact Details: 1 Church Street, Highbridge, Somerset, TA9 3AE. Tel: 01278 789906 Fax: 01278 793443
Email: drainage.boards@btconnect.com Website: www.somersetdrainageboards.gov.uk

The impact of winter flooding on grassland communities has been monitored over the summer and there does not appear to have been any significant detrimental impacts on sward quality. It is also possible that the insulating effects of the flood water may have helped protect fields from frost damage during the very cold weather in December and January.

Summer grazing on Southlake – essential management

IDB WORKS DURING 2010

The IDB has undertaken a series of minor works and investigations on Southlake this summer. This includes the removal of structures and bunds from the old Raised Water Level Area (RWLA) and the replacement of several pipes under the droves that had been previously blocked to form the RWLA. These restoration works have, in effect, re-established a single system for Southlake, where the main control structures and raised banks are used to manage water levels and flows across the whole moor.

Decommissioning the old RWLA scheme

PLANS FOR WINTER 2010/11

The IDB plans to operate the new inlet again this winter and water levels on Southlake should start to increase from early December. Farmers are asked to be ready to move their stock from the moor before this time, and their co-operation in this matter is appreciated by the IDB and Natural England. The operation of the inlet, and the depth and duration of flooding on the moor, will depend on weather conditions and adequate flows in the River Sowy. The IDB plans to ensure the inlet is closed by the end of February and that no flood water is held on Southlake in March.

Southlake Moor – Burrow Wall and Burrow Mump 2009

INVESTIGATION AND WORKS FOR 2011

Dry weather this summer clearly shows the importance of ditch maintenance and adequate connectivity in the system for effective water level management and wet fencing for grazing. The unblocking of pipes and the removal of old structures has helped solve some of these problems on Southlake.

Further works are planned for next year, including the maintenance or replacement of blocked access culverts either side of Cut Drove Rhyne through the centre of Southlake. Other water management improvements planned for the area include the replacement of Hembrow's Penning Bay on Earlake and channel maintenance works to remove blockages through Langmead, Weston Level and Earlake.

IDB Rhyne – Southlake Moor

ENQUIRIES

For enquiries about the Southlake Moor Favourable Condition Project please call 01278 789906 and ask for:-

Philip Brewin	Project Ecologist
Iain Sturdy	Principal Engineer
Nick Lockyer	Expenditor

The new WLMP for the area is available for download from the IDB web site:

http://www.somersetdrainageboards.gov.uk/html/approved_plans.html

Contact Details: **1 Church Street, Highbridge, Somerset, TA9 3AE. Tel: 01278 789906 Fax: 01278 793443**
Email: drainage.boards@btconnect.com Website: www.somersetdrainageboards.gov.uk