

West Wilts Fly Fishers Guild

RISK ASSESSMENT

Activity: Bank Management – WWFFG stretch of the River Frome at Tellisford

Participants: Guild members age 18+ .

NB - Any younger members helping to be under the close personal supervision of a named member who will ensure that all the following safety measures are adhered to.

The following Risk Assessment to be reviewed by the organiser / lead person prior to the activity taking place

UPDATED JANUARY 2022

Identification of HAZARDS and their management to eliminate or minimise RISK to participants

1. The River Frome

The River Frome is a spate river so the height and flow can change quickly if there is heavy rain for even a short period of time. It is therefore essential to visit and assess the condition of the river close to the date of any working party visit. The depth of water and speed of the current can vary considerably across the width of the River Frome and between different stretches or beats. Even at its lowest, during a dry summer, when some shallow sections are barely knee deep some pools can be over 2.5 Metres deep with sloping gravel beds. The Flume Pool downstream of The Gauging Station on beat 12 is 5 Metres (16 feet) deep in the middle (Environment Agency)The composition of the river bed also varies greatly along its length and whilst for the most part it is gravel and small stones, there are areas where there are large slabs of stone and sudden drop-offs of 300mm to 500mm so great caution is vital and a wading staff is recommended at all times to test water depth and maintain balance.

The river is only entered to carry out river management work when the water is at its lowest during summer. An automatic lifejacket is advisable and a safety rope. The river is not entered during winter or early spring bank management sessions.

2. The river bank

a) Uneven footpath

The footpath along the river from Tellisford Packhorse bridge to Pomeroy Wood (beats 1 to 9) requires care and a watchful eye because it is uneven in places and anglers carrying tackle could be thrown off balance. It is easier to use the public footpath across the field to get to beats 4 and beyond.

b) Undercuts, Soft banks, Sudden drops, Overgrown bank edges

Anglers must always be vigilant when approaching the river as bankside vegetation can camouflage the edge of the bank and/or undercuts & soft soil which can give-way. At some points there is a vertical drop of 5'. The Guild makes every effort to remove bankside vegetation at key access points and has put in place handrails on the popular beats in the summer to indicate the safest and easiest entry points. The Guild recommends using a wading stick to probe bankside vegetation.

c) Slip hazards

Anglers wearing felt-soled wading boots must take particular care on wet grass or mud because they will have very little traction compared with cleated soles or studs

d) Trip hazards

Guild working parties in the spring target trip hazards left by any winter flooding and brambles which have grown across footpaths but anglers must be vigilant and are asked to remove trip hazards such as tree branches when found to help other members.

e) Barbed wire fence

The Guild has placed hard plastic tubing over barbed wire fence at key points to protect members. Any injuries caused by barbed wire should be treated seriously because there may be infections left by animals.

f) Weills disease

A bacterial infection carried by rats in their urine (and probably cows too) which contaminates bankside vegetation and water. Early 'flu-like symptoms are noticed after 3 to 19 days. A doctor must be consulted immediately. Precautions:

- i) Do not let river water or hands come into contact with nose, eyes or mouth.
- ii) Cover any cuts or scratches with water-proof plasters before starting fishing.
- iii) Disinfect any cuts, scratches or abrasions that appear at the bankside.
- iv) Wash hands / use hand-gel or hold food in a wrapper before eating.
- v) Do not touch dead animals.
- vi) To discourage rats do not leave food waste at the bankside
- vii) At the end of the fishing session cleanse hands before heading for home

g) Lymes disease

A bacterial infection transmitted to humans via the bite of a tick, usually associated with deer (deer are present in Pomeroy wood). Ticks vary in size from 1mm to 10mm. Flu-like symptoms usually 7 to 15 days after infection e.g. fever, chill, swollen lymph nodes, headache, fatigue, muscle ache, joint pain. Visually – a 'bull's-eye' rash fading to the centre not always at the bite site. If left untreated the full effects can be devastating – arthritis, nerve damage and damage to the rhythm of the heart. Lymes disease can be misdiagnosed so vigilance is essential. Early diagnosis and antibiotics will prevent serious complications.

Action to be taken to avoid being infected:

- i) Cover the skin – wear long trousers (Not shorts), socks, long-sleeved shirts with collars and long sleeves. Tuck trousers into boots. Light coloured clothes will help you see ticks.
- ii) Use insect repellent containing DEET.

To remove ticks use fine tweezers as close to the skin as possible and pull steadily without twisting. Do not use heat or chemicals to remove them.

h) Grass snakes

These are seen frequently enough around the river at Tellisford for anglers/ working party to be cautious when amongst bankside vegetation.

i) Brambles / branches at face height

At points along the footpath along beats 4 to 5 the gap between the barbed wire fence and bankside shrubbery is very narrow and members must be vigilant about over-arching brambles and branches which can cause eye injury. The Guild removes them but they grow back quickly. This section of the footpath should be avoided by using the public footpath in the field

3. Use of equipment

General guidance - no lone working, and a safety rope to-hand when working near the river edge. Gloves recommended when using any tools.

a) **Handtools –**

Loppers and long-reach pruners:

Used to remove relatively light section branches but long handled tools can become unwieldy especially if the operator becomes tired so it is a good idea to swop tools rather than become over tired or strained. Eye protection is recommended as a lot of garden accidents are caused by light twigs, brambles etc scratching eyes.

Saws including bow saws:

As above plus awareness of where the branch will fall and the effect removing it will have on the rest of the tree.

Hooks and hand scythes:

Members using these are responsible for checking that any spectator is well clear of the sweep of the tool. Three (3) Metres is recommended. Cutting undergrowth using a hook is tiring work so operators should be aware of how tired they are getting and take rests or swap tasks. Tiredness can lead to a weaker grip on the hook and misjudgement. During physical work in hot weather dehydration can lead to accidents so it is important to drink and take breaks.

b) Power tools – Strimmers, Brush cutters, Hedge trimmers

It is essential that operators wear BSI approved face guards or goggles, ear defenders and robust footwear – steel toe-capped boots and gloves are recommended. Operators are responsible for making sure that no other person is nearby - spectators must stand well clear – at least ten metres as these tools can pick up stones etc. and propel them. Anyone closer should be wearing BSI approved eye-protection. These tools must only be used by those judged competent. If on-going maintenance is required e.g. jammed strimmer the power tool must be switched off / isolated in such a way that it cannot restart accidentally.

c) Chainsaws

Only to be used by personnel who have the recognised HSE training certification & are approved by The Guild and use full Personal Protective Equipment as required by HSE for chainsaw users. Also only to be used in situations which do not compromise safety and when the ground is dry and there is no possibility of slipping. Bow saws should be used wherever adequate for the job.

Spectators must not stand any closer than 5metres of a chainsaw in use. A clear signal must be given before any power sawing is commenced.

4) Types of work undertaken

a) Removal of rubbish – plastic containers, bags, drinks cans etc

Gloves must be worn. All rubbish into refuse sacks for disposal according to Local Authority regulations.

b) Coppicing

Take care not to over-reach at the river's edge taking into account hazards listed above 2 to 5 and work methods for minimising risk.

Branches removed by coppicing are left at the spot but aligned tidily along the river bank so they do not obstruct the footpath. They then form a natural habitat for small mammals and invertebrates.

c) Removal of larger section boughs

This is only done if vital to remove an obstruction and it is safely within the capacity of Guild members. The Laws of Physics apply. Tree sections are much heavier than they look and boughs are also much larger than they look. Removing a heavy over-arching bough from a tree can have dramatic consequences as the load is released. Crack Willow is particularly dangerous in this regards and should not be tackled.

d) Felling trees (subsiding or dead)

The Guild does not remove trees that are dead or subsiding and likely to cause damage to the river-bank unless they are safely within the capacity of members to do so. They must be small enough for their fall to be controlled and they will not end-up in the river and causing a hazard downstream. No felling of trees without the approval of the person i/c the day, who will carry-out a specific 'need & risk' assessment.

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