THE RIVER WITHIN

PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDY

The Water of Life: Protecting Rivers, Protecting our Future

Chivas Brothers
Pernod Ricard

FINDHORN, NAIRN AND LOSSIE RIVERS TRUST

DEVERON BOGIE ISLA

Spey Catchment Initiative



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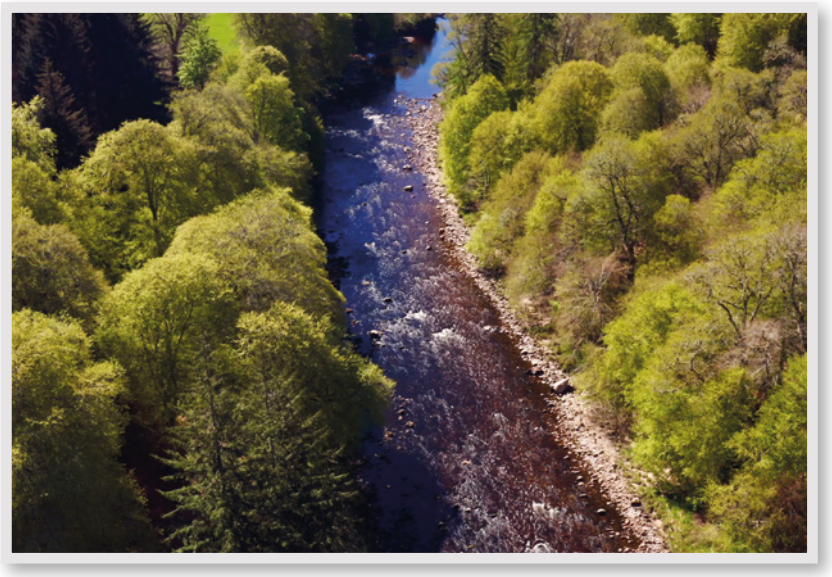
Much like The River Within, this case study was developed through a collaboration between Chivas Brothers, the Findhorn, Nairn & Lossie Rivers Trust, the Spey Catchment Initiative, and the Deveron, Bogie & Isla Rivers Charitable Trust. The lead authors are Leah Reinfranck and Julie Gallacher.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The River Within is a pioneering programme led by Chivas Brothers since March 2024, which aims to restore waterways and increase waterway resilience to climate change at a multi-catchment scale. The programme is being delivered in partnership with three local Rivers Trusts – the Findhorn, Nairn & Lossie Rivers Trust, the Spey Catchment Initiative, and the Deveron, Bogie & Isla Rivers Charitable Trust, which manage river catchments covering around 5,500 km² of Northeast Scotland where Chivas Brothers malt whiskies are produced.

Projects delivered so far range from riparian habitat enhancement and woodland creation to research to inform larger-scale interventions. Crucially, the programme remains flexible, recognising that each river catchment faces unique environmental pressures and requires tailored, locally relevant solutions.

The Chivas Brothers partnership with the Rivers Trusts is designed to strengthen long-term environmental and business resilience. A defining feature of the programme is its innovative funding model, which provides multi-year support for both project delivery and capacity of local river experts. This approach enables the Rivers Trusts to not only implement projects on the ground but also to identify restoration opportunities, build trusted relationships with landowners and communities, and develop ambitious pipelines of future projects attracting both public and private investment. Strong governance, including regular Steering Group meetings and ongoing collaboration, ensures accountability and shared progress. In just two years, this action-oriented partnership shows what can be achieved when charitable and private-sector organisations work together towards shared goals, setting a strong benchmark for others to follow. ■



INTRODUCTION

Healthy river systems have always underpinned both the ecological integrity and the sustainability of Scotland's iconic whisky sector. The shift to mandatory UK business sustainability reporting[1], production-interrupting droughts in 2018/19 and 2025[2], rising river temperatures, and biodiversity declines in species such as the wild Atlantic salmon have all highlighted the important role for water-dependent industries to play in investing in these river systems. Sustained support to conserve, improve and regenerate these systems will ensure that wildlife, business and communities alike can thrive for generations to come.

In April 2019, Pernod Ricard, the parent company of Chivas Brothers, published its 2030 Sustainability & Responsibility roadmap[3], *Good Times from a Good Place*. The roadmap sets out ambitious goals including a focus on water stewardship, protecting the landscapes, ecosystems and biodiversity on which Pernod Ricard depends for its products, and strengthening its long-term business resilience.

Chivas Brothers, the Pernod Ricard business dedicated to Scotch whisky, produces some of the world's most renowned blended and single malt Scotch whisky brands, including Chivas Regal, Ballantine's, Royal Salute, The Glenlivet and Aberlour. With distilleries located across Scotland – particularly in the Speyside region of the Northeast – the company has a long–established commitment to sustainability and a culture shaped by deep connections to local landscapes and communities rooted in place. ■

> ***"Water is more than a resource. It's a lifeline, a connector, and a shared responsibility. Here's to protecting it with care, with urgency, and with heart."***[4]

SANDRINE RICARD
Global Engagement and Sustainability Communications Director, Pernod Ricard



ABOVE: *Crombie Water Riparian Habitat Improvements*

[1] ***Mandatory climate-related financial disclosures by publicly quoted companies, large private companies, and LLPs*** *(Department of Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy) (https://bit.ly/4xQxgO6)*

[2] ***Droughts last year halted whisky production, Scotch producers admit*** *(The Drinks Business) (https://bit.ly/4A4nt8k) and* ***All of Scotland has water scarcity after driest period in 60 years*** *(BBC) (https://bit.ly/4cTPBkX)*

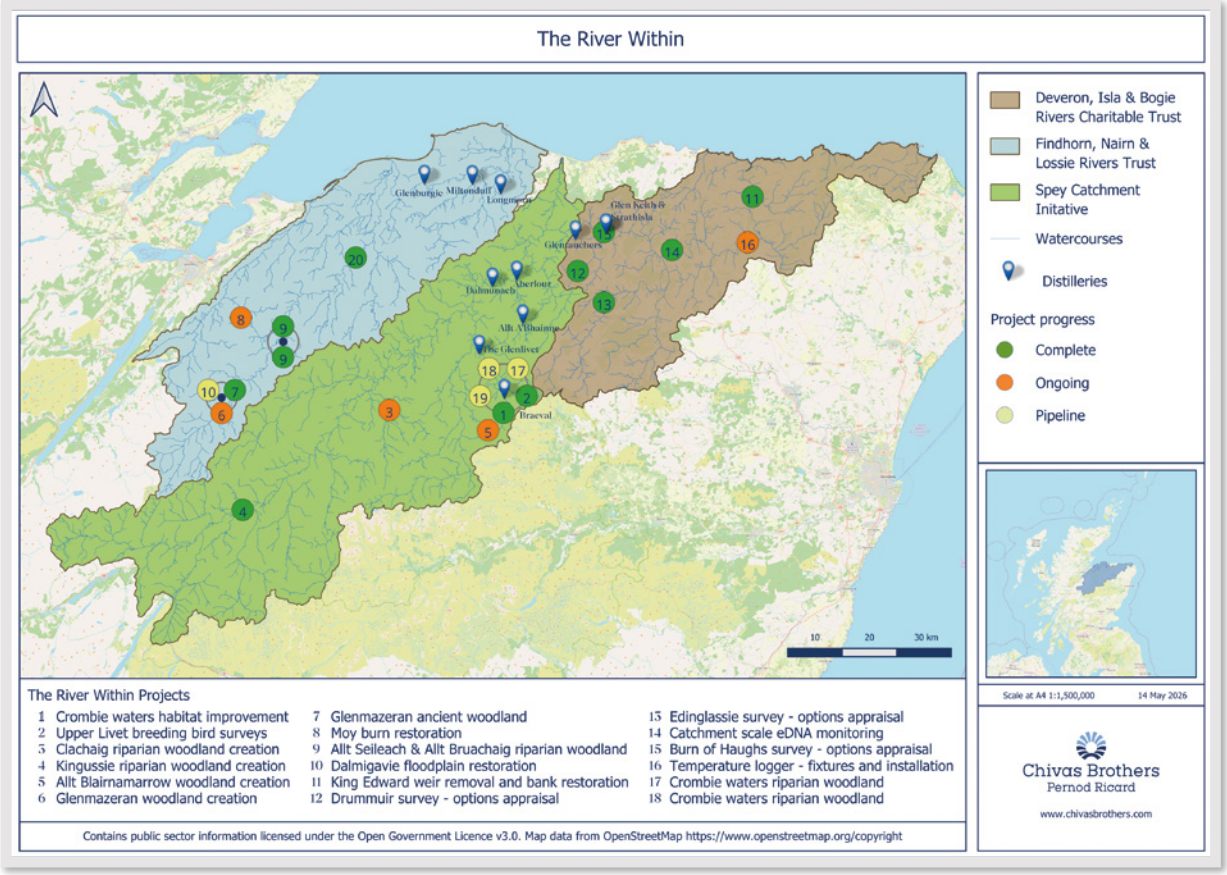
[3] ***Sustainability & Responsibility*** *(Pernod Ricard) (https://bit.ly/4duifZV)*

[4] *As seen in* ***Sandrine's LinkedIn post*** *(https://bit.ly/3UyPULF)*

THE RIVER WITHIN

The River Within[5] is Chivas Brothers' multi-year water stewardship programme contributing to Pernod Ricard's environmental ambitions[6]. Launched in March 2024, The River Within is a five-year partnership (2024–2029) focused on tackling climate and biodiversity challenges across the river catchments in Scotland where the Chivas Brothers whiskies are produced. It is a pioneering partnership between Chivas Brothers and three local Rivers Trusts covering around 5,500 km² in Northeast Scotland: the Findhorn, Nairn & Lossie Rivers Trust (FNLRT), the Spey Catchment Initiative (SCI), and the Deveron, Bogie and Isla Rivers Charitable Trust (DBIRT).

BELOW: *A map showing the Rivers Trust boundary areas, Chivas Brothers' distilleries, and The River Within project locations and status as of May 2026*





ABOVE: *Mazeran burn*

The goal of The River Within partnership is to preserve, protect and improve the health of rivers and waterways in Scotland for future generations to come. This partnership is not about direct carbon or biodiversity offsets, but rather it is about securing long-term business resilience. ▶▶

[5] ***The River Within webpage*** *(https://bit.ly/4gSt5eF)*

[6] ***Pernod Ricard Sustainability & Responsibility page*** *(https://bit.ly/4qZf5CW)*

THE RIVER WITHIN | IMPACT IN ITS FIRST 2 YEARS

13 **projects delivered** with 6 in progress and 6 more in the pipeline

7KMS of **improved watercourse habitats** with **4 more kms committed**

Nearly **40,000** **trees planted** with around **20,000 more committed to be planted** by the end of the year

More than £150,000 **in co-funding received** from the **Open Rivers Programme**, the **Forestry Grant Scheme** and the **Woodland Trust**, leveraged within The River Within delivered projects

The partnership has been delivering for rivers across catchment boundaries for over two years. Its innovative and progressive funding model has unlocked vital restoration action on a regional scale, including planting trees to provide shade, cool the water and protect fish and wildlife. It is also directly supporting vital scoping work, helping to build a strong project pipeline and deliver even more action in the coming years. By taking direct action along riverbanks and waterways, the company is helping to restore biodiversity, strengthen ecosystems, and ensure Scotland's rivers continue to support the Scottish landscapes, communities and the whisky industry. ■



ABOVE: *Trees planted along The King Edward Burn*

BELOW: *The King Edward Burn, a tributary of the River Deveron*





ABOVE: *Phil Whitfield (Spey Catchment Initiative) and Laura Taylor (Chivas Brothers) discuss the benefits of tree planting along the Crombie Water, a tributary of the River Spey*

Partnership Development:

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Developing a high-quality, action-oriented partnership, just like making whisky, takes time. The development phase of what would become The River Within programme took nearly two years. From setting a clear focus, to identifying delivery partners and working through the practical details, each step was essential to achieving a strong final outcome. ▶▶



"The Water of Life": The River Within Focus on Water

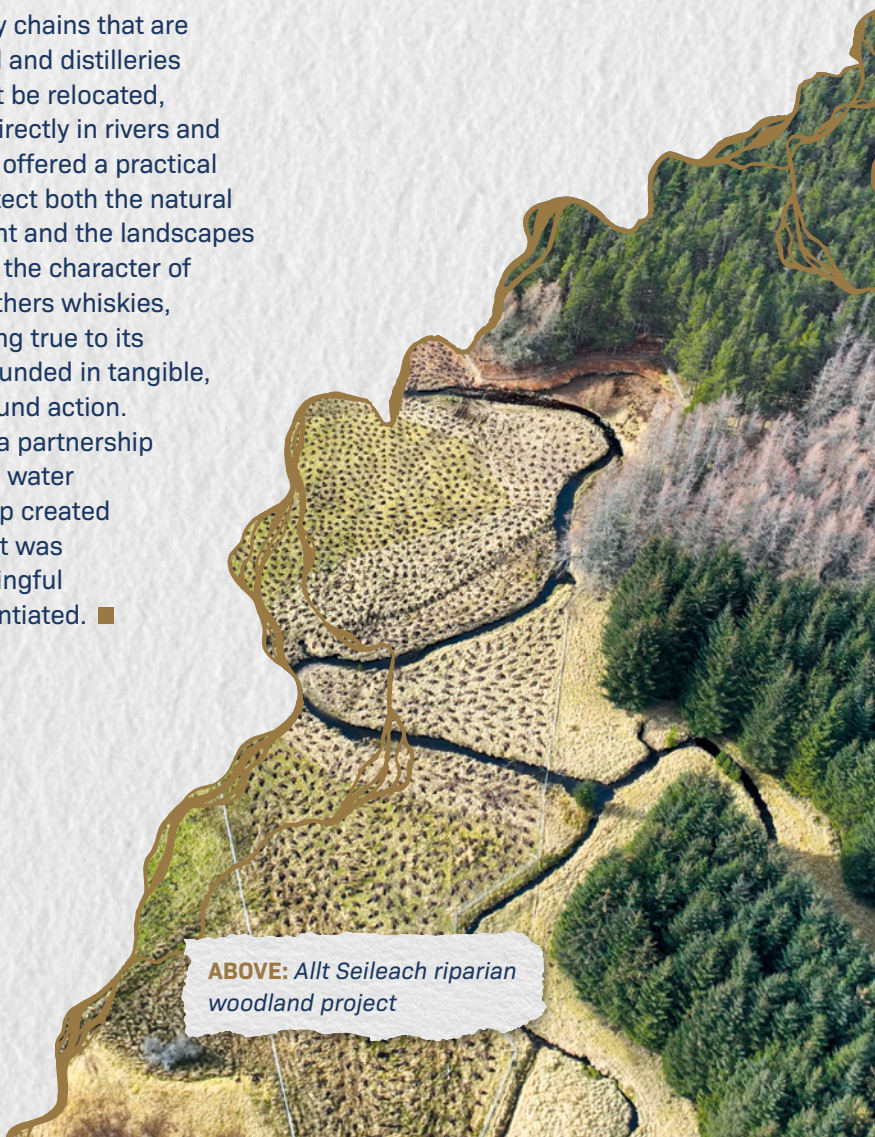
Chivas Brothers' decision to focus on water through this partnership was driven by both the fundamental role water plays in whisky production and its emergence as a significant business risk. Healthy rivers and reliable water supplies are essential to whisky production, supporting key processes such as distillation and cooling. Water security had become an increasing concern across the Scotch whisky industry following production disruptions caused by drought conditions in 2018, 2019 and 2025.

> ***'Water of life' felt like a good area to focus in on. Water is an environmental issue in Scotland that was impacting our business."***
>
> **JULIE GALLACHER**
> *Head of Sustainability Business Change & Engagement at Chivas Brothers*

Chivas Brothers also wanted to invest in an area of nature restoration that was not already supported by established funding mechanisms in Scotland. At the time, most private investment focused on woodland creation and peatland restoration, creating an opportunity for the company to take a leading role in river restoration and freshwater stewardship, an area that had not yet been widely championed within the Scotch whisky sector.

With supply chains that are highly local and distilleries that cannot be relocated, investing directly in rivers and waterways offered a practical way to protect both the natural environment and the landscapes that define the character of Chivas Brothers whiskies, while staying true to its culture grounded in tangible, on-the-ground action. Therefore, a partnership focused on water stewardship created a focus that was both meaningful and differentiated. ■

> ***"We can make a really big difference by doing things that help make that supply chain more resilient and help protect our locations which are vulnerable to climate change, and we can't relocate. We can't move."***
>
> **RONALD DAALMANS**
> *Head of Environmental Sustainability at Chivas Brothers*



ABOVE: *Allt Seileach riparian woodland project*

The Delivery Partners:
Why three Rivers Trusts?

Just as species such as the wild Atlantic salmon, sea trout, and freshwater pearl mussels depend on a steady supply of cold, clean water, whisky distilleries rely on the same natural resource to produce and maintain the quality of their products. As a product rooted in natural ingredients and shaped by its environment, Scotch whisky has a strong connection to place, with water, agriculture and local communities all playing an important role in its production.

After locking in on water stewardship as the focus, Chivas Brothers needed support to deliver. Discussing the partnership opportunity with the local Rivers Trusts in the catchments where Chivas Brothers operate, the Findhorn, Nairn & Lossie Rivers Trust, the Spey Catchment Initiative, and Deveron, Bogie & Isla Rivers Charitable Trust emerged as strong choices. These Rivers Trusts focus on sustainable river catchment management, restoring ecosystems and protecting native species, such as wild Atlantic salmon. Their work involves scientific research, controlling invasive species, habitat restoration, educating the public and engaging with local communities, farmers, landowners and businesses to promote environmental stewardship and build resilience to climate and ecological challenges. These organisations are heavily embedded in place and commit to hiring local contractors and staff whenever possible when delivering projects to support the local economy. As neighbours along the Moray Firth with similar charitable objectives, these Rivers Trusts also knew each other and were already regularly collaborating.

Further, Chivas Brothers held existing relationships with the Findhorn, Nairn & Lossie Rivers Trust, the Deveron, Bogie & Isla Rivers Charitable Trust, and the Spey Catchment Initiative from operating distilleries in these catchments which meant that Chivas Brothers was already familiar with these teams, the work they were capable of delivering, and the vast catchment knowledge and stakeholder relationships they held, making for an efficient use of funding. Good timing also came into play; at the time that The River Within development discussions were taking off, the Rivers Trusts had also recently launched landscape-scale, multi-year initiatives such as Project Deveron[7] and the Findhorn Watershed Initiative[8]. ■

> ***"We were really passionate that if we were going to invest that level of resource, it should be on doing real things on the ground."***
>
> **RONALD DAALMANS**
> *Head of Environmental Sustainability at Chivas Brothers*

[7] ***Project Deveron*** *(https://bit.ly/4xilbPw)*

[8] ***Findhorn Watershed Initiative*** *(https://bit.ly/4xildXE)*

True Collaboration & Trust Building

Initially approached separately, the three Rivers Trusts, who already knew each other from stewarding neighbouring river catchments, eventually advocated for joint talks with Chivas Brothers, enhancing efficiency and scale of impact. The River Within development phase was a learning journey across all four organisations to understand what all sides needed to make the long-term partnership viable, including an annual management fee to support the Rivers Trusts in building a robust project pipeline.

The diversity of backgrounds and experience present within the leadership across the three Rivers Trusts and the Chivas Brothers environmental team helped to secure an equitable collective deal underpinned by mutual respect and care. ■

> ***That was a real turning point. Things became much more efficient, easier, and far more transparent and open. Bringing all three Trusts together in the same room built a strong sense of trust, and that made a huge difference to how the partnership felt."***

JULIE GALLACHER
Head of Sustainability Business Change & Engagement at Chivas Brothers



BELOW: *Local school volunteers supporting the Spey Catchment Initiative with tree planting along the Crombie Water*

The River Within Partnership Model:

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The River Within partnership is a multi-year, collaborative commitment, which combines joint planning between Chivas Brothers and the Rivers Trusts, guided by shared priorities as well as corresponding funding for both project delivery and development. There is flexibility to phase or sequence delivery across financial years where this best supports impact and long-term outcomes. After all, high-quality restoration work takes ample time and effort. ▶▶





The River Within Partnership Model
Funding mechanism

The River Within partnership is comprised of several key elements which make it unique and innovative compared to other similar nature restoration partnerships in Scotland.

This includes provision of an annual management fee to support project pipeline development as well as project-specific funding for ecosystem restoration delivery work, which address local ecological pressures. The diagram below depicts the partnership funding model. ■



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The River Within Partnership Model

Governance

Strong governance is key to any strong partnership model. The governance developed for The River Within has helped ensure progress towards improving river ecosystems and waterways across the 5,000 km² region it covers. Quarterly Steering Group meetings are attended by the Rivers Trusts and Chivas Brothers to provide partnership oversight and ensure the partnership runs smoothly, and the Management Group meetings provide an internal Chivas Brothers forum to ensure projects and budgets are on track. The Chivas Brothers environmental team further support the Rivers Trusts through assigning each Trust a dedicated point of contact. However, project delivery is ultimately led by the three Rivers Trusts, as the local place-based experts, with deep knowledge about the ecological needs of their catchments and holding the vital relationships which make it possible to develop and deliver restoration projects on the ground.

"The Trusts lead delivery because they bring deep catchment knowledge, practical insight into what will work, and the trusted relationships with landowners needed to make projects happen."

RONALD DAALMANS
Head of Environmental Sustainability at Chivas Brothers

THE RIVER WITHIN PARTNERSHIP MODEL | GOVERNANCE

Programme Steering Group	Provides partnership oversight, insight and challenge
Programme Management Group	Monitors progress, oversees budgets and approvals, resolves issues
Programme Development & Delivery	Projects delivered by local place-based experts

FINDHORN, NAIRN AND LOSSIE RIVERS TRUST | Spey Catchment Initiative | DEVERON BOGIE ISLA

Programme Communications

What type of projects are supported through The River Within?

The River Within supports Rivers Trusts in the delivery of habitat restoration projects that help preserve, protect and improve the health of Scotland's rivers and waterways. Projects delivered through the partnership are designed to strengthen the resilience of rivers to climate change by improving water quality, regulating water temperature, and reducing the risk of water scarcity. They also aim to protect and restore habitats for wildlife that depend on healthy river ecosystems to thrive or create connected wildlife habitat corridors that support increased biodiversity. Alongside this practical restoration work, the Rivers Trusts actively engage local communities and stakeholders to build long-term stewardship and care for Scotland's rivers.



ABOVE: *Allt Bruachaig riparian tree planting (FNLRT)*



ABOVE: *Kingussie riparian woodland creation (SCI)*



ABOVE: *Catchment scale eDNA monitoring (DBIRT)*

Additional welcomed programme features include co-funding of restoration work alongside other private or public funding sources. The programme also provides Chivas Brothers' employees with volunteering opportunities, helping to build their understanding of the programme's benefits and its importance to long-term business resilience. In its first two years, the River Within has supported projects such as riparian habitat enhancements, woodland creation, and vital research and development work to support building the project pipeline and realise even more restoration action in the coming years. Chivas Brothers has always been open to supporting a range of different restoration project types as a way of **acknowledging that different interventions will be needed in different catchments to address location-specific water and biodiversity pressures**. This flexibility in project type is unique and hugely beneficial to supporting the right intervention in the right place. ■

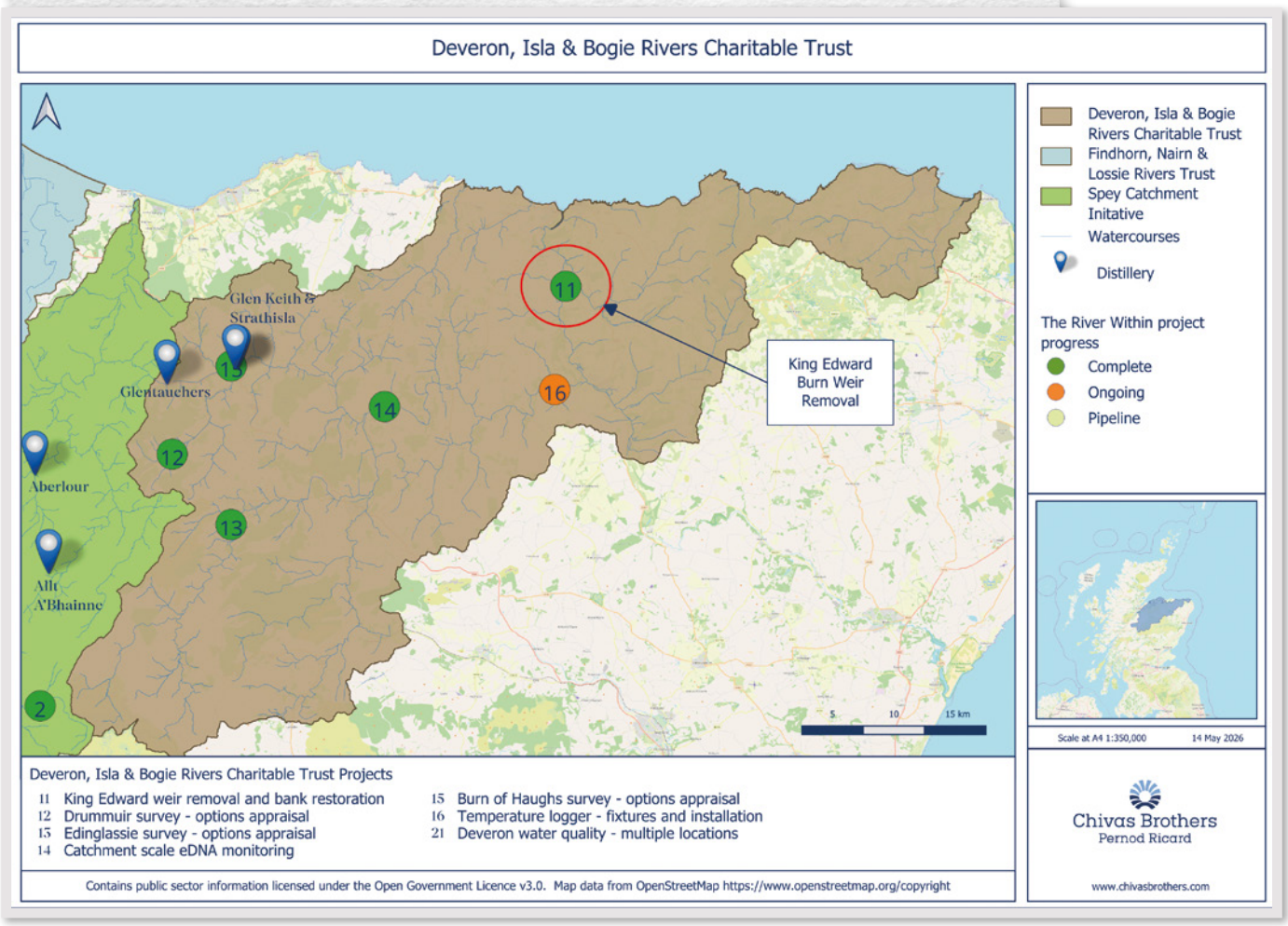
The River Within Partnership in Action:

PROJECT SHOWCASE

In its first two years, The River Within partnership has delivered a range of project types and sizes across Scottish catchments and landscapes, all addressing local pressures and improving freshwater and riparian ecosystems and biodiversity. This section showcases a few of the stand-out projects from each local Rivers Trust delivery partner. ▶▶



1 Burn of King Edward Weir Removal & Habitat Improvement



WHERE IS THIS PROJECT?

The Burn of King Edward is a lower tributary of the River Deveron around 10 km from the estuary at Banff. The nearest Chivas Brothers distillery is Glen Keith Distillery & Strathisla Distillery, approximately 27 km away.

DELIVERY PARTNER:

Deveron, Bogie and Isla Rivers Charitable Trust

Established in 2001, the **Deveron, Bogie & Isla Rivers Charitable Trust** (DBIRT) works to conserve, protect and rehabilitate salmon, sea trout, brown trout and other indigenous wildlife and to promote the ecological cycle within the Deveron catchment area. Additionally, DBIRT aims to raise people's awareness of conservation and protected areas by commissioning research and publishing the results for the public's benefit. They are the leaders of an ambitious, 10-year, catchment-scale wild salmon restoration project called **Project Deveron**, which launched in 2023 in partnership with the **Atlantic Salmon Trust**. Project Deveron aims to build resilience back into the landscape and actively restore biodiversity for the benefit of salmon and other native species.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING PARTNER:

The Open Rivers Programme

Key Facts & Figures

Project type: Barrier removal & river bank restoration – improvement in fish passage and habitat connectivity

9

woody structures built in burn to enhance diversity and habitat.

Additional river length opened up for salmon spawning:

11 KM

Trees planted:

720

WHY WAS THIS PROJECT NEEDED?

A historic weir (a low dam built across a river) on the Burn of King Edward, once used to feed a nearby corn mill, had been disrupting the natural flow of the burn and was negatively impacting the watercourse instream habitat both downstream and immediately upstream of the dam. The barrier was restricting water flow, preventing gravel from moving naturally through the river, and making it difficult for fish to move upstream. It was also making it difficult for young salmon moving downstream to start their migration increasing their risk of being caught by predators.



ABOVE: *Diggers removing the Burn of King Edward weir*

HOW HAS THIS PROJECT ADDRESSED THE PRESSURES?

For the first time in 150 years, 11 km of habitat for wild Atlantic salmon, trout, eels and other wildlife has been fully reopened on the Burn of King Edward. The Deveron, Bogie & Isla Rivers Charitable Trust, in partnership with the Atlantic Salmon Trust, removed the weir, stabilised the eroding riverbanks using trees felled by Storm Arwen as natural 'green bank' protection, planted 720 trees along the bank, installed fencing to protect the new planting from grazing livestock, and used 220 windblown trees to create nine large woody structures in the burn to enhance its physical instream diversity and habitat. Together, these actions are helping to improve fish passage, restore more natural river processes, and increase habitat connectivity. Over time, the bankside planting will support the regrowth of native plants, help stabilise the soil naturally, provide shade and cooling for the water, and increase biodiversity both in the watercourse and in the surrounding soil.



ABOVE: *The riverbanks were stabilised with boulders and locally-sourced wind-blown trees.*

WHAT WAS THE TIMEFRAME ASSOCIATED WITH THIS PROJECT?

The restoration works took place between April-December 2025, but this project has been on DBIRT's radar since 2021 and talks with landowners and other stakeholders were going on since 2022.

HOW DID THE CO-FUNDING FOR THIS PROJECT WORK?

This project had been on DBIRT's radar for a while and it wasn't until a combination of funding from The River Within and the Open Rivers Programme[9] (ORP), came together that it became possible. ORP funded the removal of the weir, while The River Within contributed to the riverbank restoration, tree planting and large woody structure installation.



ABOVE: *The newly restored Burn of King Edward channel with the weir removed and the bank stabilised.*

[9] *See **here** for main Open Rivers Programme website (https://bit.ly/4ypEyYT) and **here** for the Kind Edward weir removal page (https://bit.ly/4yja6zq)*

WHAT ADDITIONAL BENEFITS HAVE COME OR ARE EXPECTED TO COME FROM THIS PROJECT?

Project stakeholders have been happy with the outcome of the project. Hiring local contractors to support the delivery of this work was prioritised whenever possible.

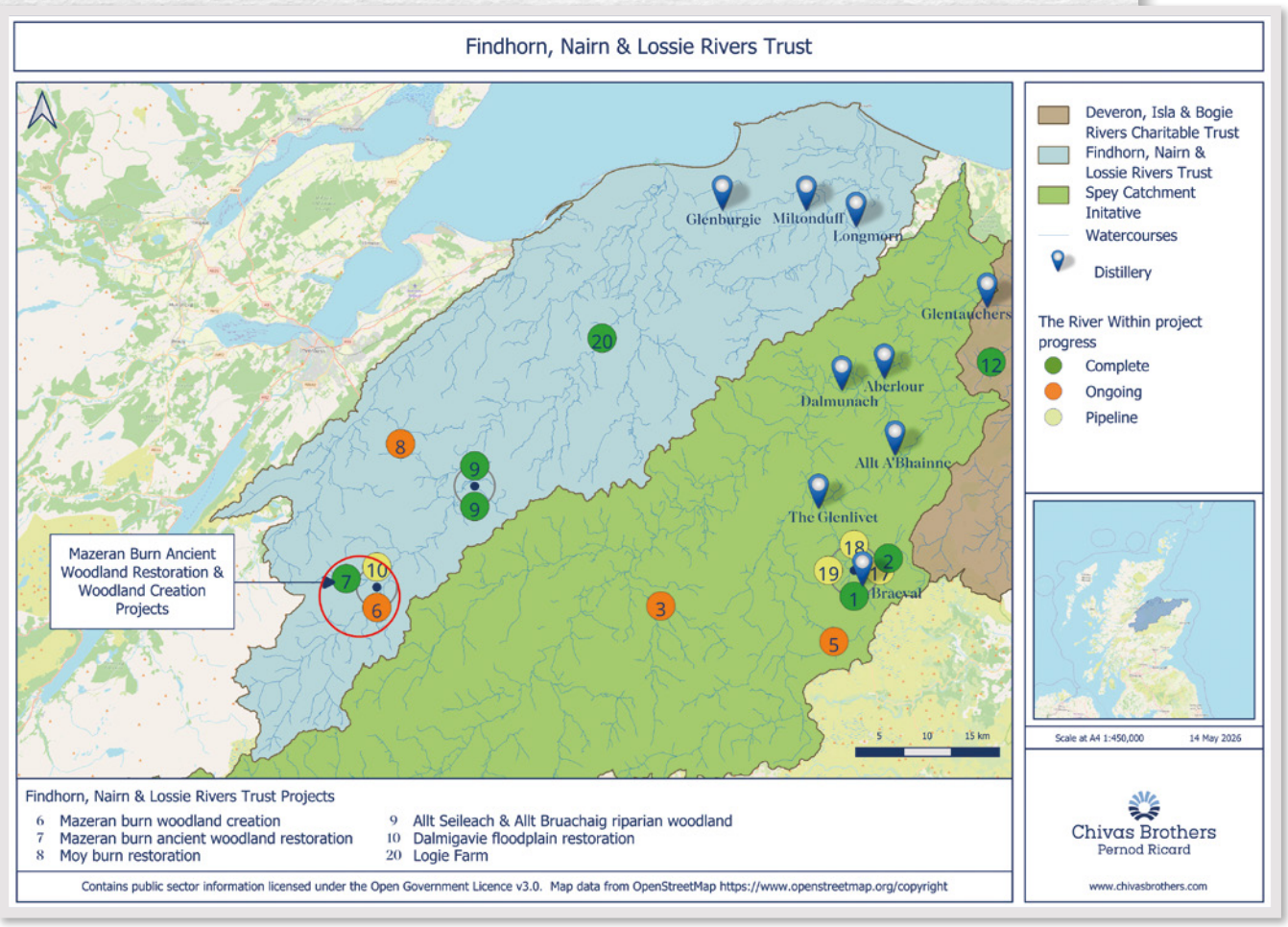
The project has received significant media attention, including being featured in a BBC Landward television programme, an interview with Irish national radio (RTÉ Radio 1), and a film made by the Atlantic Salmon Trust that reached over 40,500 views as of May 2026.

Looking ahead, the improved river health will support salmon and trout populations in the King Edward burn. The burn runs into the River Deveron, a lauded salmon and trout river which provides employment and acts as a major local, national, and international tourism destination at various points along the 96 km of the Deveron and its tributaries. Increasing river health and fish migration will support these activities in the long-term, ensuring the continuing livelihoods of many local people and helping to ensure the longevity of the local economy. ■

> ***Without Chivas Brothers, that project couldn't have gone ahead because we had to show the Open Rivers Programme that we had The River Within match funding and also display to Chivas Brothers that we had ORP funding in place. Joint working is absolutely key to getting bigger projects delivered."***

RICHIE MILLER
Managing Director for the Deveron, Bogie & Isla Rivers Charitable Trust

2 Mazeran Burn Woodland Creation & Ancient Woodland Restoration



WHERE IS THIS PROJECT?

The Mazeran Burn is a tributary in the headwaters of the River Findhorn, near the town of Tomatin and upstream from Glenburgie Distillery.

DELIVERY PARTNER:

Findhorn, Nairn & Lossie Rivers Trust

Established in 2008, the **Findhorn, Nairn & Lossie Rivers Trust** (FNLRT) is a place-based environmental conservation intermediary, uniquely positioned to play a coordinating and enabling role in improving local resilience in the face of the nature and climate crises. They work at a landscape-scale, and in partnership with landowners and land managers, our local communities and businesses, blending sources of funding and delivering practical actions to protect and restore our rivers, their watersheds, and the wildlife which inhabits them. In 2022, FNLRT established the **Findhorn Watershed Initiative**, a multi-generational partnership and vision to restore a mosaic of nature-rich habitats, inspire a local culture of nature connection, and enable a thriving nature-positive local economy across the 1300 km² area of the River Findhorn watershed.

Key Facts & Figures

Project type: Riparian woodland creation and Ancient woodland restoration

Km of river within site boundaries:	Project site in hectares:	Trees planted:
2.6KM	43	9,750

WHY WAS THIS PROJECT NEEDED?

The Mazeran Burn, a tributary of the River Findhorn and a critical wild Atlantic salmon spawning burn, flows through a remnant ancient birch woodland, which is both rare and important ecologically, originally identified in a survey undertaken by the District Salmon Fishery Board in 1997 as a key area for protection and restoration. The pressures in the area include herbivore grazing preventing natural regeneration and expansion of this ancient woodland, riverbank erosion, and rising water temperatures due to climate change and lack of suitable tree cover.

Preserving the key genetics of the remnant ancient woodland, such as the existing climate-adapted seed source, flora and insect life, and improving habitat for wild Atlantic salmon were key motivations for this project. Nearly 30 years on, this important site is now protected and will be enabled to recover, thanks to The River Within and the support of the estate.

HOW HAS THIS PROJECT ADDRESSED THE PRESSURES?

This project is made up of two complementary schemes – fencing an ancient woodland exclosure to kickstart natural regeneration and establishing new native riparian woodland downstream. In March 2026, the woodland creation phase was completed with 9,750 trees being planted over a 17-hectare area (over 20 football pitches) along the banks of the Mazeran Burn.

Tree planting along the burn will create native riparian woodland habitat, which, when mature, will cool the river, increase water infiltration and groundwater regeneration, stabilise the banks and support wild salmon populations who feed on invertebrates who rely on the fallen leaf litter from trees. In a changing climate, every degree is important – and riparian woodland creation has the potential to significantly cool the water when implemented at scale. This woodland creation will also enhance habitat connectivity with the 26-hectares of ancient birch woodland site upstream, where the installation of exclosure areas will allow recovery and natural regeneration by keeping livestock and deer away from nibbling on young trees. Taken together, these neighbouring schemes will significantly positively impact this important spawning tributary, retaining and expanding a unique and diverse habitat of local importance, and contribute towards the landscape-scale vision of a functioning ecological system.

WHAT WAS THE TIMEFRAME ASSOCIATED WITH THIS PROJECT?

The process to get a habitat restoration project delivered takes time – requiring extensive stakeholder engagement coordination, suitable weather, seasonality considerations and attentive due diligence and approvals to ensure that the right intervention happens in the right place. While these sites have been on FNLRT's radar since before the inception of the Findhorn Watershed Initiative, more serious talks began in November 2022, and delivery of the schemes was only completed in 2026. Timeframes have been influenced by weather, eagle nest considerations and even a fencer's broken leg!





ABOVE: *Mazeran Burn Woodland Creation site and trees that were planted at the site.*

BELOW: *Mazeran Burn Ancient Woodland site – to be completed by Autumn 2026.*



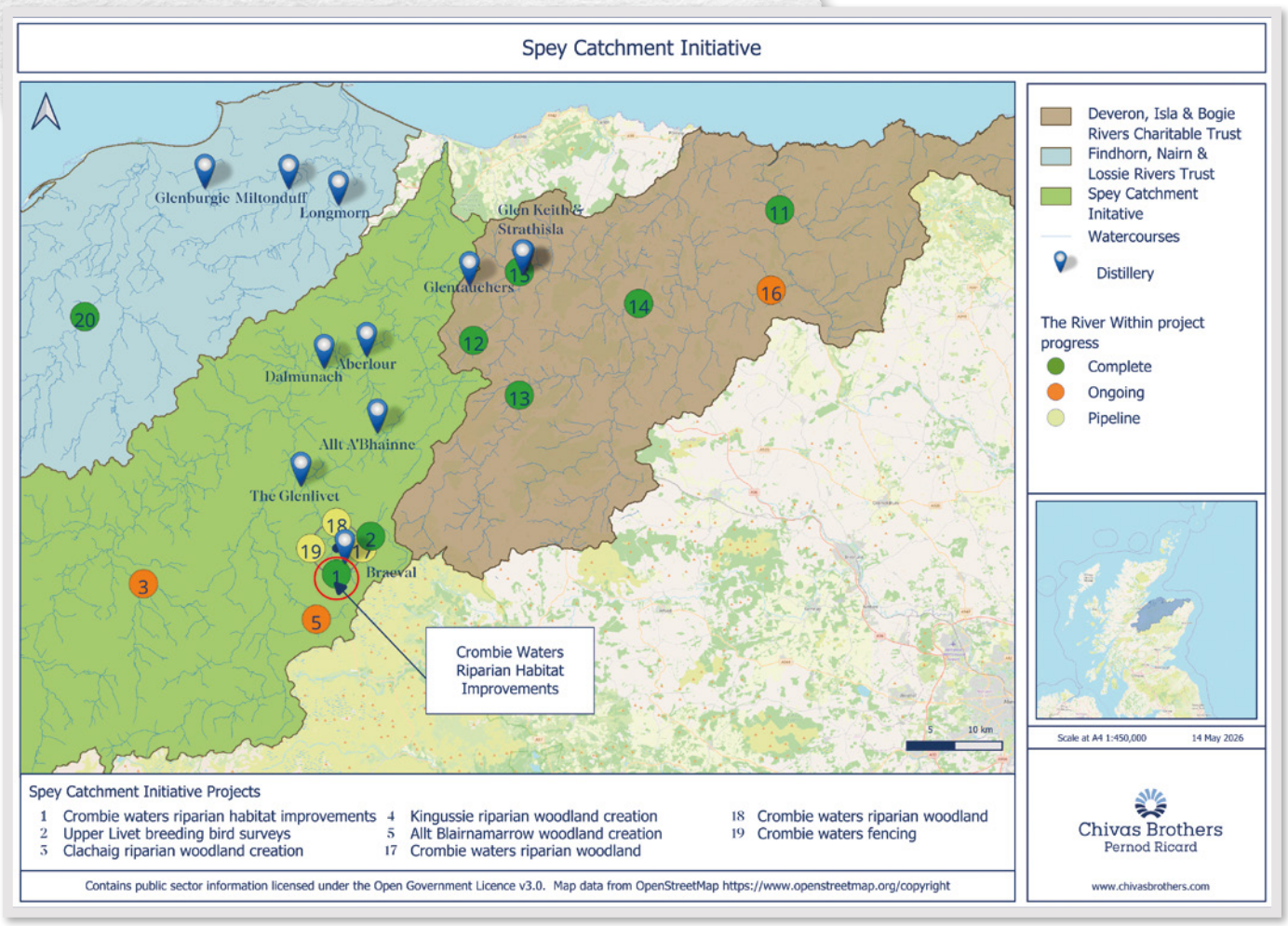
WHAT ADDITIONAL BENEFITS HAVE COME OR ARE EXPECTED TO COME FROM THIS PROJECT?

With this two-site project situated between estate-funded river restoration downstream and recently restored peatlands upstream, the Mazeran Burn is becoming a compelling example of the variety of ways to aid the recovery of river systems and landscapes.

This work benefits all Findhorn watershed inhabitants, from the wild salmon to the forest birds like woodcock, to the anglers, to the local contractors commissioned to support delivery on the ground. FNLRT prioritises contracting and working with local people whenever possible. For this project, FNLRT used only local labour and suppliers, supporting community wealth building.

Looking ahead, we are excited to see the impact of the project 5, 10, let alone 30 years down the line. ■

3 Crombie Water Riparian Habitat Improvements



WHERE IS THIS PROJECT?

This project takes place on the Crombie Water, which flows from the hills above Scalan, through the Braes of Glenlivet, past the Braeval Distillery and joins the River Livet, a tributary of the River Spey, around Tomnavoulin. The nearest Chivas Brothers distilleries to the project site are Braeval, less than 1 km away and The Glenlivet, 7.5 km away.

DELIVERY PARTNER:

Spey Catchment Initiative

Founded as a partnership in 2010 and established as a formal legal entity since 2022, the **Spey Catchment Initiative** cares for the rivers, landscapes, wildlife and communities of the Spey catchment. They are an award-winning environmental charity dedicated to improving the habitats and landscape of the Spey Catchment. Their team, partner organisations, funders,and volunteers are committed to restoring rivers and landscapes, protecting endangered species, and raising awareness about key environmental issues affecting the Spey Catchment.

Key Facts & Figures

Project type: Riparian woodland creation, bird surveys and farmer outreach

Km of river within site boundaries:

1KM with over **15km** more identified

Trees planted:

1,000 on demonstrator site

Project site in hectares:

1 hectare demonstrator site and **1** bird survey covering **370**-hectares across the **7** farms involved

5 primary school volunteers helped with tree planting

WHY WAS THIS PROJECT NEEDED?

These upper reaches and tributaries of the River Livet are degraded watercourses, often lacking tree cover, overgrazed and subject to diffuse pollution risks. They are a key area of the catchment for salmon and trout spawning and are at risk through heating and habitat decline.

The adjacent land use to these tributaries is primarily livestock farming. Tenant farmers need long-term support to work towards practical and sustainable restoration. Building relationships, credibility, and a reputation for delivery, are key to delivering landscape scale change.

HOW HAS THIS PROJECT ADDRESSED THE PRESSURES?

This project involved several activities – including tree planting and fencing along a small section of the Crombie Water, undertaking bird surveys to ensure existing wading bird habitat was preserved, and engaging tenant farmers. The Crombie Water riparian woodland creation site was small scale at just 1-hectare, and it not only serves as a strong demonstration site to show farmers what's possible but will also improve riverside habitat connectivity and reduce water temperatures, through the reduction in grazing pressure and improved tree canopy shading.

Further, this project revealed the importance of engaging a variety of stakeholders to open up opportunities across a landscape.

SCI have spent a lot of time scoping ideas, working with other stakeholders, particularly over wading bird and farming interests, and proposing solutions. Working in partnership with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has also demonstrated how seemingly competing conservation objectives of wading birds and riverside tree cover might be balanced. A wading bird survey in the upper Livet has helped guide woodland creation planning there, to boost biodiversity and ecosystem resilience, as well as maximising opportunities to improve wading bird habitat.

SCI has also worked hard to better understand the farming community, their pressures and how nature restoration might work within their enterprises. Through building trust with farmers, further projects within the same sub-catchment to enhance the benefits of the demonstrator project, are gradually emerging.



ABOVE: *Scoping restoration work at Glenlivet Estate*

WHAT WAS THE TIMEFRAME ASSOCIATED WITH THIS PROJECT?

After about one year of planning and development, the initial demonstration site was planted along the Crombie Water in Spring 2025. A bird survey was funded in the same year in the upper River Livet, covering 370-hectares. Conversations and scoping are ongoing with farmers and RSPB to increase restoration sites in the Livet. SCI envisage a 5–10-year commitment to working on restoration areas with farmers in the Livet to develop and deliver landscape-scale projects.



ABOVE: *A treeless upper River Livet and the bird survey area funded by The River Within*



ABOVE: *The area which forms part of the Crombie Water demonstration project*



ABOVE: *Location for the project on the Crombie Water, which flows through the Braes of Glenlivet, past the Braeval Distillery seen in the background*

WHAT ADDITIONAL BENEFITS HAVE COME OR ARE EXPECTED TO COME FROM THIS PROJECT?

Five volunteers from the local primary school came out to plant trees at the Crombie Water site, supporting wider community engagement efforts.

The project has generated local interest and encouraged more farmers to engage with SCI and explore riparian woodland creation opportunities on their farm. New areas that were previously "off the table" are now being discussed.

SCI partnership working with RSPB demonstrates that creation of riparian restoration schemes can also balance the needs of wading birds through habitat enhancement on the same landholding.

Larger project scoping has shown the power of SCI acting as an "honest broker" in negotiations with relevant parties, requiring time and patience. The management fee from The River Within has been critical to SCI fulfilling this role. ■

For more information scan this QR code

BELOW: *The Crombie Water Riparian Habitat Improvements project involved some help from local volunteers*



The River Within

PARTNERSHIP REFLECTIONS

The River Within is an example of true partnership working, with collaboration, mutual ambition, and trust at its heart. The partnership has been receiving increased recognition, having been included as an example of a strong natural capital approach in a River Basin Management Planning report[10] and been referenced during a presentation[11] at a "Nature Finance in Action" conference in March 2026 in Scotland. With two years now underway, this section highlights some of the key reflections offered by both Chivas Brothers and the Rivers Trusts about the partnership itself and the restoration work delivered to date. ▶▶

[10] *See p.40 of **this report** on Natural Capital and River Basin Management Planning from the Centre of Expertise for Waters (CREW) (https://bit.ly/4czOo1S)*

[11] *The River Within was referenced as an exemplary programme at the "Nature Finance in Action" event organised by the Scottish Forum on Natural Capital in a presentation by Fisheries Management Scotland. See post **here**. (https://bit.ly/4cypQ9v)*

Key Benefits

Diversity of on-the-ground restoration work delivered

With 13 projects delivered and 6 more delivering within the next two years, an obvious benefit is the tangible **implementation of restoration projects on the ground** across all three Rivers Trusts. These have taken a variety of shapes and sizes, with some being smaller demonstrator sites and others being larger-scale "lighthouse" projects. However, each project represents a step towards wider catchment recovery and a strong example of water stewardship in action.

The River Within funding model

The most important benefit of The River Within partnership from the Rivers Trusts' perspective is the **transformative impact of flexible, multi-year funding in the form of a management fee to support project development**. The importance of this should not be understated. While "shovel-ready" projects are sought out by many corporates as part of sustainability agendas, the reality is that the financial resource to dedicate the time it takes to scope and develop these projects is rare. Without this development resource, it is difficult for the project pipeline to become robust.

Not only has The River Within enabled the Rivers Trusts to plan ahead more confidently, they can also afford to be more ambitious and strategic with restoration projects and build a more resilient project pipeline.

> ***"The management fee is the game-changer. The way the partnership supports project development enables everything else to flow from that."***
>
> **ELLE ADAMS**
> *Executive Director, Findhorn, Nairn & Lossie Rivers Trust*

This was described in contrast to other corporate partnerships or public grants which do not provide this same level of support or duration.

Supporting the Rivers Trusts to build their project pipelines wasn't an accident. Chivas Brothers has a strong track record of investing in research and development which has helped build a deep understanding of innovation and reinforced the importance of accepting short term financial risk as part of the learning and development process.

For projects that were approved, the three Rivers Trusts highlighted that the **timely, lump-sum upfront payments for the delivery of the work** allowed them to more confidently cash flow project costs and move quicker than they otherwise would have been able to.



ABOVE: *Clachaig Water Margins (Spey Catchment Initiative)*

The River Within multiplier effect

Further, The River Within has enabled the Rivers Trusts to **more easily attract private and public match funding for projects** or other restoration developmental work, increasing the overall impact that the partnership has had. Within project delivery alone, The River Within support has unlocked **£150,000+ in co-funding support.**

Demonstrating high-integrity, professional, and successful project delivery as well as prioritising local procurement to support jobs in the surrounding community[12] as much as possible has helped the Rivers Trusts build additional credibility with landowners and other catchment stakeholders. This, in turn, has created a positive feedback loop where successful delivery leads to momentum to enable additional work and a more robust project pipeline to support river ecosystem recovery.



ABOVE: *Allt Seileach Riparian Habitat Improvement (Findhorn, Nairn & Lossie Rivers Trust)*

The River Within governance enabling collaborative working

A commitment to mutual understanding and thoughtful relationship building has resulted in a strong governance structure, with both Chivas Brothers and the Rivers Trusts noting the benefits of genuine collaboration and engagement. The dedicated support within the Chivas Brothers environment team is useful because these **employees live locally and know the surrounding landscapes,** which supports the Rivers Trusts both in positioning project pitches and acting as a trusted sounding board. The regular meetings and internal communication ensure that expectations are managed and updated as projects progress.

> ***I would be surprised if there's another area in Scotland that has a sort of partnership like this."***

RICHIE MILLER
Managing Director, Deveron, Bogie & Isla Rivers Charitable Trust

> ***The River Within partnership has created further opportunities for us in various ways. Practically, we've leveraged the management fee as match funding towards other funding applications which has been enormously helpful. Then, a more intangible benefit has been the way that being able to reference a multi-year, multi-million pound partnership with a distillery has helped build our credibility."***

ELLE ADAMS
Executive Director, Findhorn, Nairn & Lossie Rivers Trust

Organisational benefits for Chivas Brothers

The River Within provides the Chivas Brothers environmental team with the opportunity to work on a **strategic, purpose-led initiative** alongside essential day-to-day compliance activities, while also creating a meaningful platform to **engage and involve employees** across the organisation. In doing so, it contributes to the mitigation of a long-term business risk by proactively addressing environmental resilience. ■

[12] *Supporting local economies and job creation is directly linked to the Scottish Government's* ***Community Wealth Building*** *policies. (https://bit.ly/3VjgloG)*

Key Lessons Learned

Overcoming challenges and learning lessons along the way are part of any partnership, especially one that is innovative in design. The following are reflections about experience gained through the evolution of The River Within partnership.

Restoration takes time and continuous effort to pay off

From the Chivas Brothers business perspective, there was excitement about seeing action on the ground and achieving quick results. The challenge is that the process of planning and implementing high-quality evidence-led restoration projects takes time and coordination, which is often an iterative process with scoping, re-scoping, approvals, and aligning seasonality and contractor availability. Communicating this and setting expectations for the Chivas Brothers business was a learning process on all sides and the great thing is that it has paid off – projects are starting to come in at a greater pace than before!

Long-term maintenance, monitoring and assurance

While The River Within is a multi-year investment, many nature-based restoration projects require care, monitoring and adaptive management well beyond the initial delivery phase. This is not a reflection on the robustness of the projects or the commitment of the Rivers Trusts. Rather, it reflects a wider challenge in nature restoration funding, where delivery funding is often easier to secure than long-term support for monitoring, maintenance and evaluation.

The projects supported through The River Within are developed with strong local expertise, due diligence and governance between the Rivers Trusts, landowners and Chivas Brothers. This helps ensure that the right interventions are delivered in the right places, and that environmental benefits are supported through careful project design, local relationships and ongoing learning.

Other nature finance mechanisms, such as carbon credits and emerging biodiversity markets, often include more formal long-term management and monitoring obligations for landowners. These structures can provide additional assurance that environmental benefits will be sustained over time, although they also tend to require more complex agreements, governance and accountability.

Looking ahead, larger-scale catchment projects may benefit from more formal and enduring funding frameworks to support long-term monitoring, adaptive management and maintenance where needed. A range of environmental codes and nature finance models are currently being developed and may provide useful mechanisms for future investment, helping to build on the strong foundations already established through The River Within. ■



ABOVE: *Glenmazeran Ancient Woodland*

> ***We've grown into the partnership. We now have a much better understanding of each other."***

ROGER KNIGHT
Chief Executive Officer of the Spey Catchment Initiative

The Bigger Picture:

SO WHAT?

As the impacts of climate change and water security risks increase, investing in business resilience and water stewardship are becoming ever more important. The River Within programme continues to be a lighthouse example of how multi-year place-based partnership working with robust governance and strong relationships can deliver real value on the ground, as well as for each partner organisation through the focus on shared ambitions and connection to place. The emphasis on water and surrounding ecosystems, local procurement to support the local community, volunteer opportunities, and the corresponding momentum which comes with people seeing the impact of this work, all contribute to a more resilient landscape. Chivas Brothers has set a high benchmark for other water users and corporates to follow or join. ▶▶

How can the ambition for this partnership grow?

Looking ahead, Chivas Brothers remains committed to investing in the long-term resilience of the river catchments that support whisky production through The River Within while continuing to build the evidence base for the effectiveness of nature-based solutions. Although The River Within programme has demonstrated the potential of collaborative action, further evaluation will be needed before these approaches can be confidently scaled across entire catchments. Expanding this work is also likely to require broader participation from catchment ecosystem service beneficiaries and water users, alongside more formal funding and governance structures that support long-term delivery and maintenance.

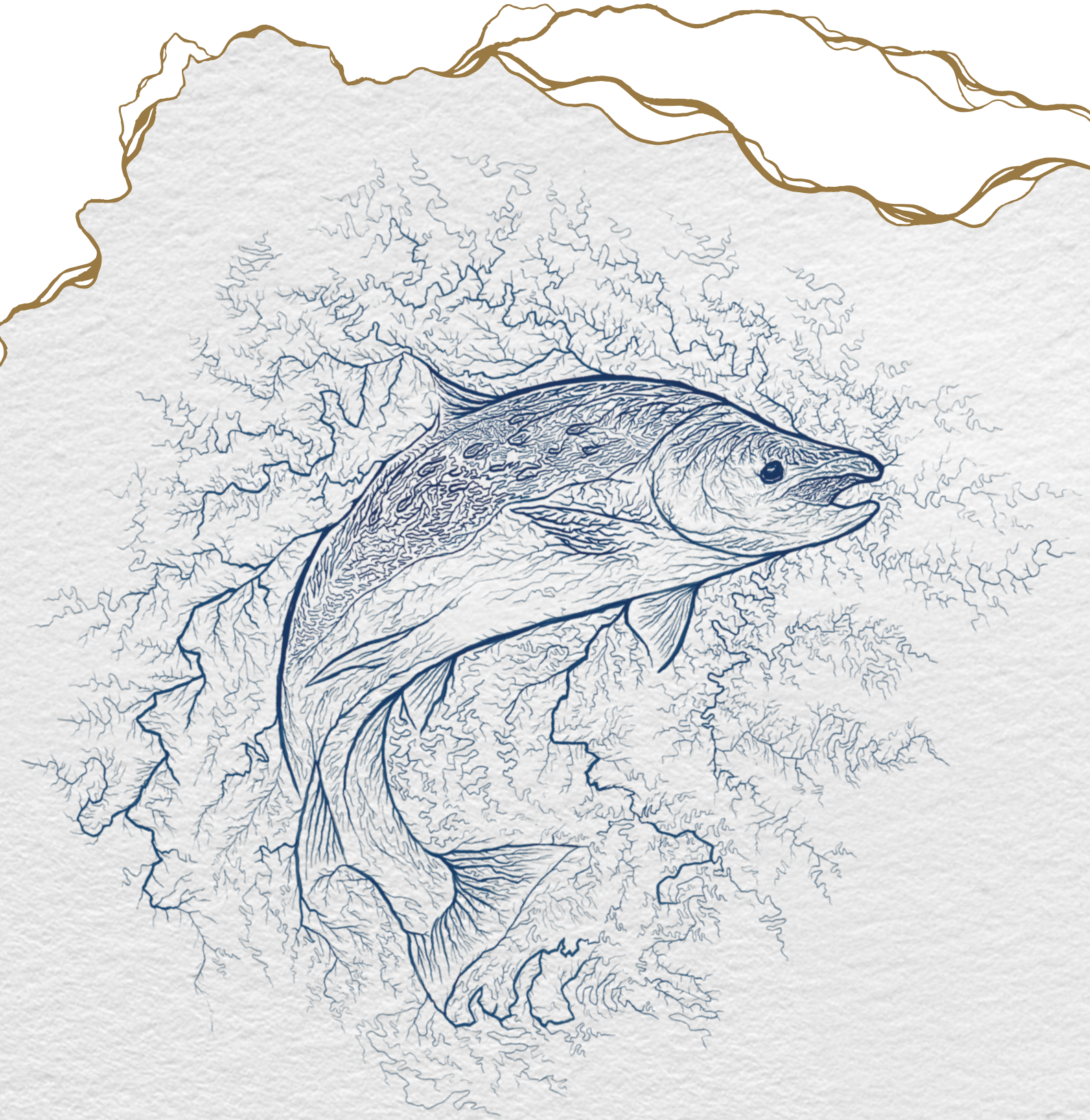
Encouraging progress is being made through initiatives such as the Scottish Forum on Natural Capital, the Scottish Rivers Fund, and Riverwoods Investment Ready Pioneers, as well as the development of emerging natural capital and environmental codes. Establishing mechanisms that effectively connect the benefits experienced by catchment users with the costs of delivering and maintaining environmental improvements remains on ongoing challenge. As these approaches continue to evolve, The River Within partners are keen to share the lessons and insights generated through the programme to help inform future partnerships, investment models, and catchment-scale action across Scotland. ■

"It's not a silver bullet solution, but it [The River Within] has made a meaningful contribution."

RONALD DAALMANS
Head of Environmental Sustainability at Chivas Brothers

"It's been transformative and a unique undertaking on the part of Chivas Brothers. I think it has set a benchmark for others to follow."

ROGER KNIGHT
Chief Executive Officer of the Spey Catchment Initiative



Chivas Brothers
Pernod Ricard

FINDHORN, NAIRN AND LOSSIE RIVERS TRUST

DEVERON BOGIE ISLA

Spey Catchment Initiative



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