THE FLOOD HUB

A basic guide to owning and managing a watercourse



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This resource has been produced by Newground who work in partnership with the Environment Agency

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For more information visit:
www.thefloodhub.co.uk
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Introduction

A riparian owner is somebody who has either a main river or an ordinary watercourse, such as a stream or culvert, running on, through, beneath or alongside the boundary of their land. If the watercourse forms the boundary of the land, you will usually own it up to its centre. If you are unsure about your ownership, you can check your title deeds on the land registry.

Main rivers are usually larger rivers and streams that are designated as a 'main river' on the Environment Agency's Main River Map. The Environment Agency carry out maintenance, improvement and construction work on these main rivers to manage flood risk.



Ordinary watercourses include rivers, brooks, becks, ditches, streams, culverts and sewer pipes (other than public sewers). The Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) or the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) are responsible for flood risk and flood defence works on these watercourses.



Responsibilities

If you own a watercourse you are responsible for ensuring that water flows through it naturally, and for maintaining it by removing blockages that may impede the flow of water or cause flooding. However, you are not responsible for proactively reducing the risk of flooding from the watercourse.

In order to allow the water to flow freely, riparian owners have the following responsibilities:

- Clearing any in-channel natural or man-made blockages in watercourses and keep any trash screens, culverts, weirs and mill gates clear of debris.
- Clearing any trees and shrubs growing on the banks or in the channel which may contribute to a blockage.

If there is a lack of maintenance, or changes are made to the watercourse that cause or contribute to flooding, you may have to pay for the damages and could face legal action.

You have a responsibility to report flooding from your watercourse. If the flooding is from an ordinary watercourse, contact your Lead Local Flood Authority. If the flooding is from a main river, contact the Environment Agency Incident hotline on **0800 80 70 60**.

Carrying out work on a watercourse

If you wish to undertake any work in or around a watercourse, it is your responsibility to contact the relevant authority to check if the activity requires any consents or permissions.

If you wish to undertake any work in or around a main river, it is your responsibility to contact the Environment Agency to find out if the activity is regulated and which environmental permits may be required.

You can find out whether your watercourse is a main river here:
https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/main-river-map-for-england-proposed-changes-and-decisions


Image: Masonbros.co.uk

For information on flood risk activities and environmental permits, click here:

- **www.gov.uk/guidance/flood-risk-activities-environmental-permits**
- **www.gov.uk/topic/environmental-management/environmental-permits**
- Email: **enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk**
- Environment Agency general enquiries contact number: **03708 506 506**

If you wish to undertake any work in or around an ordinary watercourse, it is your responsibility to contact the Lead Local Flood Authority or the Internal Drainage Board to find out if the activity is regulated and which permissions or licences may be required. Flood risk permits are not required for activities in or around ordinary watercourses, although land drainage consent may be required from the local council or Internal Drainage Board.

An environmental permit or ordinary watercourse consent needs to be obtained before carrying out works and making changes to structures, such as dams. For any works that could cause an obstruction to flow, restrict storage or involve building a culvert, consent as well as planning permission or other consents, will be required.

Flood risk assets are structures which are used to manage flood risk such as walls and embankments, pumping stations, culverts, trash screens, flood gates, and channels, some of which may be on your land. It is important to check with the appropriate authority as to whether you're responsible for managing any flood risk assets on your property.

For more information on owning a watercourse, take a look at the following websites:
https://thefloodhub.co.uk/landowner/#section-1
https://www.gov.uk/guidance/owning-a-watercourse

This booklet is based on information within the Calderdale Council 'Managing a watercourse or flood risk asset on your land' guide.

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