



Environment Agency
Iceni House
Cobham Rd
Ipswich
IP3 9JD

4th December 2014

Dear Sir

Ref: AW Alston's irrigation licence renewals.

I note from the NFU weekly newsletter that [REDACTED] is renewing his abstraction licences and is finding it difficult to show no impact on Snipe marsh. Edward and Florence Boardman bought the 800 acre estate around 1900. He died in 1950 and she died in 1960 leaving the house and marshes also including first marsh and Snipe marsh (now alder trees) to Chris Boardman who sold the marshes to Norfolk County Council Education Department in 1966 with Norwich Union buying the house. The Centre was saved by a consortium led by the Norwich Union Insurance Group and the Broads Authority. The How Hill Trust, set up in 1984, is a unique organisation, which until recently held a lease on the house from the Norwich Union Insurance Group. In April 2002, the Company handed over the unfettered freehold of the house and gardens to the Trustees. The Broads Authority granted a lease on part of the estate, and an access agreement for the remainder. We continue to farm the arable land at How Hill farm whilst [REDACTED] farms Cobb's Farm and Summerhouse Farm.

I understand that Snipe marsh is now the centre of attention, mainly because of the lack of any data from the marsh. I have lived here all my life and feel I need to enter into this debate as there have been many changes to the site in my lifetime.

1. [REDACTED] was the tenant on Snipe marsh. Like many farmers in the area he had some arable land and a few cattle. The Summerhouse farm side of Snipe marsh was cut for hay in the summertime by tractors, so it must have been much drier in the 1950's that it is now.
2. The area to the West of Snipe marsh and to the East of the Northern end of Crome's broad was marsh during the war, as was Broad fen which was also cut for hay. West of Snipe marsh is now full of mature trees.
3. During the war there were fewer trees around Crome's broad than today and a few reedbeds that were cut for reed.

4. The main sluice at Pigeon Wood marsh used to be managed as a two way sluice by our family. Water was allowed on in the summer from the river in a controlled fashion and excess water was allowed back to the river during the winter or after heavy rainfall. The Broads Authority made a new entrance into Crome's Broad from Snipe marsh ditch just after they purchased the site. This water could run all the way to Snipe marsh via the ditch system and Crome's broad. Water levels in Snipe marsh are now controlled by 2 sluices in Snipe marsh and another sluice to the West of the bottom end of Crome's broad between Pigeon wood and Clayrack marshes. The water then flows to the soak dyke next to the river and then to the sluice at Toad Hole cottage. It then flows down to the IDB pump at Ludham Bridge. The water levels in Snipe marsh now remain at the same level all year round, there are no fluctuations in levels. The wooden sluice which was installed in 1988, leaked from the moment it was installed because the water went round the sides and under the boards especially at the bottom of the sluice. It was not a barrier like the current sluice which lets no water past. This change has had a major change to water levels internally as it is now a system that relies totally on rainfall rather than rainfall and river water. Fish cannot access the site since 1988. Surely the sluice management should reflect natural flow flows of water but I accept that at certain times of high water levels that the sluice needs to be closed to protect properties from flooding.

5. The water entering Snipe marsh comes from Sharman's wood (now called Summerhouse wood), the ponds at Grove farm and from [REDACTED] drains in his land at Sharp Street. This is all surface lateral water which has drained through the land in the area and slowly moves towards the lowest area. Catfield Lake is not filled from Sharman's wood but from water from below but a pipe takes the surplus to the ditch.

6. There is a wire mesh barrier 200 meters below Catfield Lake which acts as a barrier to prevent invasive species from escaping from Snipe marsh into the rest of the system.

7. From my house I can look across the river and across Reedham marsh. In the past the only time that reeds were cut on these marshes was 1963 when the water froze. Now the marshes are drier. I don't believe that the river levels have dropped, so the marshes must have risen.

8. In the past I have counted in excess of 2000 ducks on Crome's broad in the evening. Where have all the ducks gone? Snipe marsh used to be a place where ducks went in the morning, but there are no duck there anymore. Fish stocks have also been depleted by otters. Small birds are disappearing. Are predators getting out of control?

In conclusion, with all these changes in management over the years, it's difficult to see how water abstraction is having any effect on Snipe marsh. In fact the marsh's water levels are more variable now that it was 50 years ago.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]