Paul:
The Ribble is a beguiling river, powerful in parts and tranquil in others. And it's one I've always wanted to fish. I'm visiting the small rural village of Wigglesworth for a very different reason. 20 of the area's finest, young and old, have been brought together by the Ribble Rivers Trust, led by Jack Spees.
Hello Wigglesworth.
Crowd:
Hello.
Paul:
Very nice to meet you all. Thank you very much. Good welcome. Jack.
Jack:
That's right.
Paul:
Hello, Paul. Jack, you're the CEO of the Ribble Rivers Trust.
Jack:
That's correct.
Paul:
You try saying that.
Jack:
No, I have.
Paul:
Tell me what you're doing today.
Jack:
So we're doing the River Blitz on Wigglesworth Beck. We are going to go out and take some invertebrate samples, some water quality samples, have a bit of a look at the habitat.
Paul:
Do I need my waders?
Jack:
Definitely.
Paul:
OK, all right. Come on then, guys. Come on.
The Ribble Rivers Trust was formed in 1998 by just six volunteers. Now, there's a core team of eighteen employees and an army of volunteers. Today, the team are spread out along Wigglesworth Beck, a small tributary of the Ribble, to assess the water quality by taking a sample of the life in the riverbed.
So you don't care, do you? You just throw your children in the river there and let me get on with it, don't you?
Woman:
Yeah. I think it's really important for them to learn what's going on with the rivers and the water at the minute because, ultimately, they're the ones that are going to be inheriting it.
Paul:

Wow. It's absolutely teeming with life.
Woman:
Yeah.
Paul:
What's that?
Jack:
Uh, a shrimp.
Paul:
OK. Look at your Mayfly. And what is this rather sinister thing here going? Look.
Jack:
Those are our-
Man:
Crane flies.
Boy:
They're all wrestling each other.
Paul:
Yeah.
Jack:
The only challenge is, we got to identify and then count them all.
Boy:
Ramshorn snail.
Woman:
Well done boys.
Paul:
Yeah, you know more than I do boys.
Boy:
Crane fly there, Crane fly.
Paul:
Wow.
Jack:
Green Drake
Paul:
Is that a Mayfly then?
Jack:
Yeah.
Paul:
Yeah, look at this, these Mayflies.
Boy:
Oh, caddisfly.
Paul:
Yeah, a little tiny caddisfly.
Jack:
Little tiddlers.

Paul:
Well you must be, um.
Boy:
Oh, flat body.
Paul:
Yeah, there's a flat body, I saw that. I know that.
Man:
How did you know?
Paul:
Well, Jack, you must be very pleased with what you're seeing here.
Jack:
Yeah, yeah.
Paul:
It's incredible, isn't it? This amount of life.
Jack:
And the fact that we're seeing the Green Drake, the Mayfly, they are so intolerant pollution, to have got as many of them as we have is, is such a good sign.
Paul:
Yeah.
Jack:
Couldn't be much happier.
Paul:
Yeah. Fantastic. Whilst the Trust is having a positive impact on improving water quality and habitat for aquatic life, there is a large cloud looming, that is now one of the biggest concerns for Jack.
Climate change. In the past, many waterways were straightened to maximise land use, increase the flow of water for mills and carry unwanted human sewage away from housing quickly.
Drastic flood events brought on by climate change are actually enhanced by the straightened waterways.
Jack has brought me to one of the Trust's largest scale projects looking to mitigate the impacts of climate change.
Jack:
Yeah, so you can see here exactly what we're doing. Opening up that channel, trying to get those bends back in the stream or the technical term, to re-wiggle. Genuinely, genuinely.
Paul:
Is it actually called re-wiggling?
Jack:
Yeah, yeah, it is absolutely the technical term.
Paul:
You've made that up.
Jack:

So, we had a survey done on the ground here and we were able to identify where the old channel used to be so we've put these little blue flags out to mark where the channel should be. And so the digger can follow along and make sure that we are getting it right.

Paul:

Climate change is the, sort of, dark horse that's stalking all of us, and it, and all the work and effort that's being done to improve things, it's got that big underlying threat. How are these measures helping in the, sort of, the small scale fight against global warming?

Jack:

Yeah, so where Ged Beck was straightened, it essentially from the start of the straightening to the end, it's about 93 to 100 metres. What we've now done here is extended that to 230-odd metres.

So it takes longer for the water to get from, you know, the upstream bit to the downstream, and that's slowing the flow and it's reducing the flood risk downstream and we know that climate change is going to see our flood risk increasing.

Paul:

Right.

Jack:

What the digger driver is trying to do, as best he can, is save some of the turf that he's stripping and put that back. We'll probably come and put some grass seed on a few rushes, you know, some sort of marginal habitat.

But, overall, you know, the big thing is that we're extending the river by 133 metres. So we're getting 133 metres of river habitat back.

Paul:

Yeah. So what do you expect to see here, say in about a year?

Jack:

So, based on what we've found downstream, I think we can expect eels, but there's an outside hope that we might see some salmon and some tripe starting to sneak in.

Paul:

I mean, at the moment you can't imagine. Any, any self-respecting salmon would turn its nose up and head right back to Lancashire.

Jack:

Absolutely. Absolutely.