

50 Year Wetland Vision for England

# Update

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ENGLISH HERITAGE



Environment Agency





David Morris (RSPB)

## Securing the future for England's wetlands

Launched in July 2008, the 50 year Wetland Vision for England sets out a shared view of where current wetlands can be restored and where new wetlands could be created, through targeted projects and collaborative partnerships. Led by a partnership between the RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts, English Heritage, the Environment Agency and Natural England, with the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust now joining the steering group, the Wetland Vision is intended to make sure future generations are able to enjoy the many benefits wetlands provide.

This Update explains some of the work that is happening on the ground to make

the Wetland Vision a reality. It is timed to coincide with the announcement of wetland schemes which are receiving additional Natural England funding over the period 2009-11, in collaboration with a range of partners. We are now also issuing a printed copy of the Wetland Vision Technical Document to those who attended the launch.

Wetland Vision documents and information can be downloaded from the website ([www.wetlandvision.org.uk](http://www.wetlandvision.org.uk)). We would welcome thoughts on any issues raised by the Wetland Vision – please contact us through [info@wetlandvision.org.uk](mailto:info@wetlandvision.org.uk)



**The Wetland Vision partnership is continuing to work together for the future of our wetlands, their habitats and species and the services they provide**

## £6 million to help realise the Wetland Vision

Natural England made a commitment to provide £2 million annually to the Wetland Vision for England for three years, following the launch in July 2008.

More than £2 million was spent by Natural England (together with £3.9 million by partners) on 15 projects in 2008-9, including support for schemes within the four priority new "landscape scale" wetlands (The Fens, Humberhead Levels, Midlands Meres and Mosses, and Morecambe Bay Wetlands) selected by the Wetland Vision steering group / the Wetland Biodiversity Integration Group (BIG) partnership. In addition to the projects carried forward from last year, Natural England's £4 million funding for 2009-11 will support projects in the four priority areas and schemes in three other areas.

For more information contact:

[alastair.burn@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:alastair.burn@naturalengland.org.uk)

## A Living Landscape

*A Living Landscape* is The Wildlife Trusts' strategic vision to create a resilient and healthy environment.

It aims to help species adapt to climate change, people to engage with nature, and restore the living systems which provide vital services like clean water, air and carbon storage.

Wetland restoration is an important part of creating *A Living Landscape*. Across the UK, The Wildlife Trusts and our partners are working to restore wetland habitats for people and wildlife. For example, along the Ray Valley the Wildlife Trust for Bucks, Berks and Oxon is working with the RSPB to create and manage new wetland habitat to link fragmented sites.

There is still much to be achieved but the overall Living Landscape vision and the specific Wetland Vision are helping to inspire action for the future.

Find out more at: [www.wildlifetrusts.org](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org)



## Achieving the Vision

Natural England funding in 2008-9 supported creation or restoration of 690 ha wetlands. During 2009-11, a further £4 million funding will support new schemes within the four priority landscape areas, three new projects outside these areas and a range of projects carried forward. This map describes the projects which are receiving new Natural England funding during 2009-11. Regional biodiversity partnerships were vital in identifying new projects for funding.

## Reaching new wetlands

### River Till Floodplain, NE England

Building on the Floodplain Restoration Project, this work will contribute 30 ha of restored floodplain grazing marsh and develop a new phase for wholesale management of areas within the wider catchment. This work supports ecosystem services including flood risk and diffuse pollution management.

### Somerset Levels and Moors

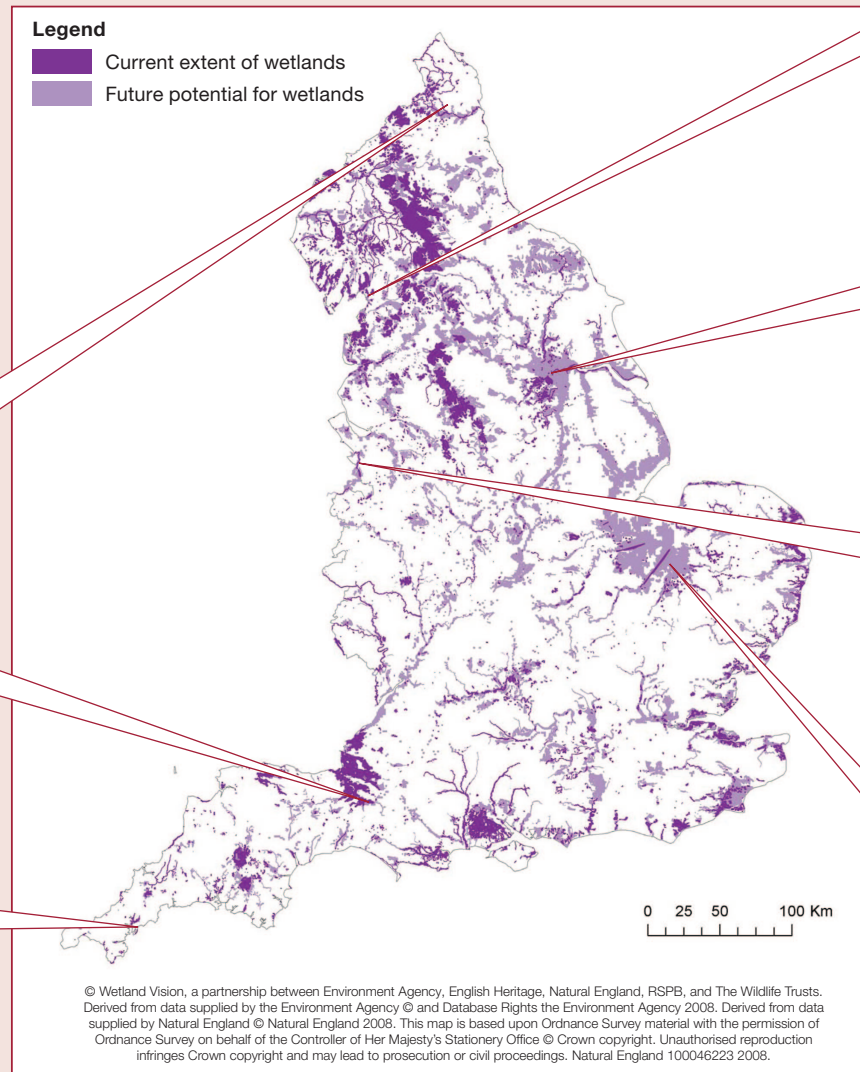
Natural England will be contributing to the Somerset Wildlife Trust Brue Valley Living Landscapes Project (part funded by the EU INTERREG programme) and the RSPB Middle Parrett floodplain project. These projects will collaborate to produce a new vision and action plan across the Somerset Levels and Moors.

### SW England: Payments for Ecosystem Services

Support will be provided for a research project for trialling novel approaches to funding wetland ecosystem services (West Country Rivers Trust) linked to river restoration in the upper Fal. The outcomes of this project should contribute greatly to future implementation of the Wetland Vision.

## Investing in Wetland Projects (Wetland Vision 50 year indicative map)

### 'Future wetlands and new wetlands projects'



## Extending priority schemes

### Morecambe Bay wetlands

Led by the Morecambe Bay Wetlands Partnership (including the Wildlife Trusts, Natural England, RSPB, EA, EH, FC, National Trust and Tourist Boards), the focus is on restoration of wetland habitats within the Lyth valley, Leighton Moss and Witherslack Mosses.

### Humberhead levels

A series of linked projects around Hatfield Moors NNR and on Went Ings (Burnet Trust), Epworth Turbary (Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust) and Fishlake (Environment Agency). This will contribute to 167 ha wetland habitat created or restored within the target area of 2,320 ha identified by the partnership for wetland restoration.

### Midlands Meres & Mosses Revival

Projects to restore and link wetlands include the Meres and Mosses revival project in the Ellesmere/South Cheshire corridor (Natural England); Shropshire Moors (RSPB); Gowry and Mersey Washlands (Cheshire Wildlife Trust) and Staffordshire Meres and Mosses (Staffs Wildlife Trust). About 635 ha wetland habitat will be delivered by the Meres and Mosses Core Areas Partnership in 2009-11.

### East Anglian fens

Project to help Norfolk Wildlife Trust create a 97 ha mosaic of reedbed, fen and floodplain grazing marsh on arable land within their Wissey Living Landscape area. This will expand on EA wetland creation nearby and provide a 175 ha 'stepping stone' for wildlife and link with other major Fens-region wetlands.



## Next steps for the Wetland Vision workshops

Four productive workshops covering topics on 'Sustainable land-use', 'Protected areas', 'Ecosystem services' and 'Funding future wetlands' were held at the launch of the Wetland Vision in July 2008.

The partnership is continuing its work to define the necessary actions for the next year, but several points have already been taken forward, including:

- Funding a planned Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) workshop on managing wetland at a landscape scale
- Environment Agency proposed work on climate change
- Funding a project in the South West to look at ecosystem services associated with river restoration in the Upper Fal area.

Transcripts of the workshop discussions can be found in the download section of the Wetland Vision website [www.wetlandvision.org.uk](http://www.wetlandvision.org.uk)



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

**Community wetland creation at Pershore, a Severn and Avon wetlands partnership project**

## Managing wetlands on a landscape scale



**Lyth Valley, Morecambe Bay**

We will be funding a 'Managing wetlands at a landscape level' workshop in the autumn.

Led by CEH, the workshop will help identify current information and major research gaps to optimise wetland habitat development to meet Biodiversity Action Plan species and long-term habitat requirements.

For more information contact Iain Diack on 0300 060 3974 or [Iain.diack@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:Iain.diack@naturalengland.org.uk)

## Climate change adaptation Project

The Environment Agency is proposing a project to better understand the impact of climate change on existing and future wetlands. It will help wetland managers improve management practices to make wetlands more robust in the face of climate change.

The impact will depend on the type of wetland and its location, but most wetlands will be affected by changes in rainfall and groundwater levels, different river flow regimes, increased temperatures and summer evaporation.

Functioning wetlands are expected to continue to provide wider catchment benefits:

- Helping to recharge aquifers
- Improving water quality
- Tempering high and low flows
- Providing important areas for wildlife, recreation and the historic environment.

The project will develop a practical set of tools that wetland managers can use to assess the impact of climate change. It will consider the type of wetland, its geographical and landscape setting, possible management options and adaptation strategies. The guidance will help managers to identify the role that wetlands play in maintaining catchment ecological status, and where ecosystem services assist with adaptation to the effects of climate change.

For more information contact: [ann.skinner@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:ann.skinner@environment-agency.gov.uk)



**The response of wetlands to increasing drought frequency will be examined in the climate change project**



## Water Resources Strategy for England and Wales

The Environment Agency has developed a new Water Resources Strategy for England and Wales which sets out a long-term direction for the sustainable management of water resources in the context of the economy, growth and increasing uncertainty due to climate change.

The Wetland Vision features in this strategy as its implementation will help to achieve a number of its aims.

By 2050, the UK could be facing more extreme droughts and floods. The amount of water available in England and Wales could be reduced by 10-15%, yet the population could have risen by 20 million, putting further stress on existing resources. Summers are likely to be hotter and drier, increasing seasonal demand for people and for crops. Average summer river flows could reduce by as much as 50-80%; a significant proportion of the flow could be made up of treated effluent, and there will be less water for dilution. More rainfall will come in big downpours, leading to more flooding, possibly at the same time as droughts.

To reduce existing pressures and improve resilience, a more strategic approach to managing water resources is needed. The strategy includes a series of actions needed to deliver a secure water supply and safeguard the environment into the future. These include:

- Metering, supported by tariffs to incentivise efficient use and provide protection for vulnerable users;



River Nene (East Anglia)

- Resource development where demand management is not enough;
- Investment in water efficient technology and labelling;
- Better land management to safeguard water resources and quality;
- Increased use of sustainable drainage systems to improve groundwater recharge and reduce surface water flooding;
- Actions to adapt to climate change, including developing a better understanding of the vulnerability of water dependent habitats and species, and supporting efforts to restore wetlands at a landscape scale to buffer existing sites and help wildlife adapt; and
- Getting people and businesses to understand and value water better, and use it more wisely and efficiently.

Regional action plans will enable the different priorities and pressures to be reflected locally.

Implementation of the strategy in partnership with others will enable the Environment Agency to reconcile the sometimes conflicting needs for water, and manage water resources so that there is enough clean water for people and the environment in the decades to come.

## Million Ponds Project

The Million Ponds Project was launched in September 2008.

This 50-year project aims to reverse a century of loss and decline in Britain's ponds, so that once again we have a million ponds in the British countryside.

A critical element of the project is that these new ponds will have clean water. This is important because 80% of the countryside ponds are now badly damaged by pollution so this project, led by Pond Conservation in association with the other 12 partners, will bring clean water back to many landscapes and create vital new wildlife habitats.

In the first four years, the project partners and others will make a network of 5,000 clean-water ponds across England and Wales. These ponds will provide a home for at least half of all Britain's freshwater species and over 80 priority plants and animals under the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

Pond creation is an important way to protect Britain's freshwater wildlife. Ponds are cheap, quick and easy to create!

If you are interested in creating clean water ponds or ponds for BAP species, please visit: [www.pondconservation.org.uk/millionponds](http://www.pondconservation.org.uk/millionponds)



Wetland creation under the Million Ponds Project

## Fen handbook

*The Fen Management Handbook: a technical guide to the management, creation and restoration of fens* is currently in production.

A steering group of representatives from Natural England, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Environment Agency is now working on the content.

The handbook will cover understanding and managing hydrology and nutrients; assessing the requirements for management and the options for restoration/creation; creating new fen habitats; management for species; and use by people.

It will be available electronically later this year.

For further information please contact Margaret Street ([margaret.street@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:margaret.street@naturalengland.org.uk))



Mike Dodd (Open University)

## Thinking BIG

The new Wetland Biodiversity Integration Group (BIG) has now been set up. As well as overseeing the achievement of the wetland Biodiversity Action Plans for England, this group will monitor the progress of the Wetland Vision Projects. The group will assess the contribution each of the Wetland Vision projects is making to wetland habitat and species action plans, and the targets for landscape scale wetland mosaics.

## Open University Floodplain Meadows Partnership

The Open University is running a floodplain meadows project with the Environment Agency, Natural England, The Grasslands Trust, the Field Studies Council, The Wildlife Trusts and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.

This partnership project will focus on species-rich floodplain meadows to ensure that this rare and valuable habitat can be protected and restored.

Once common across the floodplains of England and Wales, the decline of these meadows means there are now fewer than 1,000 hectares of the classic species-rich meadow habitat remaining in the UK (less than the area of one of London's smallest boroughs, Kensington and Chelsea).

Floodplain meadows are particularly sensitive to changes in rainfall pattern, and being species-rich, they are sensitive to the

increasing burden of nutrients and pollution from the wider river catchment and atmosphere.

Floodplain meadows have evolved over many hundreds and, in some cases, thousands of years through traditional agricultural practice. They were highly prized farming systems, their natural fertility maintained through regular winter flooding with little need for extra nutrients.

In today's world, these systems continue to provide important functions. They can help alleviate flooding through storage of winter floodwaters, and continue to provide a very valuable agricultural crop and rich source of biodiversity.

The Partnership is keen to hear from anyone managing, restoring or promoting flower rich floodplain meadows.

For more information go to: [www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk](http://www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk)



Mike Dodd (Open University)

Explaining the value of meadows to local people

## Uncovering archaeological potential of the Little Ouse

The Little Ouse Headwaters Project (LOHP), a charity run by volunteers from the local community, is currently restoring an area of former wetland adjoining the internationally important Theltham Fen SAC in Suffolk. The land had been drained, farmed and later become neglected and overgrown. Removal of the degraded peat surface has exposed underlying, less enriched soils, encouraging fen vegetation to develop. The area lies in an important historic landscape and the valley is known for its extensive prehistoric and Roman archaeology. Numerous remains have been found locally, including Iron Age and Saxon

archaeology on adjacent land.

The LOHP, in consultation with Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service carried out archaeological mitigation early in 2009 before the fen restoration.

The work was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeology Unit and included evaluation and monitoring of the site's archaeological potential together with an assessment of the peat characteristics.

The assessment looked at the depth, stratigraphy and extent of the peat, and a core sample was taken for further palaeoenvironmental assessment and radiocarbon dating.

No archaeological artefacts were recovered but the core sample has yielded new data, showing that peat started to develop at the site in the Mesolithic (c.8000 BC) and continued to grow steadily until the Iron Age.

The project shows archaeological best practice in advance of a wetland restoration scheme and demonstrates the value of recording peat sequences and their archives of past environmental evidence.

Such information is essential for understanding the development of river valleys in the region, and wider issues of landscape and climate change.