



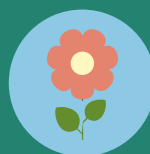
Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Biodiversity Deep Dive

Biannual Recommendations Update 1

October 2022 – April 2023

**Report on actions to support meaningful delivery
of the target to protect 30% of the land, freshwater
and ocean in Wales by 2030**



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1. Transform the protected sites series so that it is better, bigger, and more effectively connected

Expanding and scaling up the Nature Networks Programme

Key highlights / milestones

- Circa £15m has been allocated in 2022/2023 to support the delivery of the nature networks programme (NNP). This includes direct support of delivery via Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and indirectly through providing match funding of 2 NRW led LIFE projects: LIFEquake and the Four Rivers for LIFE project.
- NRW were allocated £4.5m under the NNP and have delivered a range of terrestrial, freshwater and marine projects via their land management agreement mechanism
- NLHF have been allocated circa £11m to support seventeen medium and nine large scale projects through the nature networks fund that NHLF administer in partnership with NRW and Welsh Government.

Next steps towards completion

It is anticipated that funding to support the NNP will be increased 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 in line with the published budget.

Evaluation of the NNP will be incorporated into the new contract for the environment and rural affairs monitoring & modelling programme (ERAMMP).

Nature Networks Map

Key highlights / milestones

- Completing the initial scoping on the content and timescales for developing the nature networks map and completing the updates and revisions to the set of terrestrial priority ecological networks (PENs)* in preparation for release. The map will be an essential tool to ensure that investment in our nature networks programme will deliver the maximum benefit for our protected sites and the connections between them. Importantly the map will also provide land managers and their advisors with the evidence needed to help ensure that interventions through the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) can make a significant contribution to the coherence of this network.
- Priority Ecological Networks (PENs) identify areas that have relatively high ecological connectivity between protected sites for a range of broad habitats, and so provide a framework for targeting activities such as habitat improvement, restoration and creation to build a functionally connected and resilient series of the best biodiversity sites.

Next steps towards completion

NRW will progress with the nature networks map with the release of mapped evidence layers, Phase 1, to aid spatial prioritisation of applications for future nature networks funding (Summer 2023); engagement and discussion to look at additional information relating to potential opportunities within the Map as a second phase; and the commissioning of specialist work to support the future development of the map, for example in relation to future climate change scenarios.

Protected Sites Portal

Key highlights / milestones

- NRW are developing narrative for initiating internal and external engagement on the scope of the protected sites portal to allow partners access to NRW protected sites data This will facilitate better participation and a more collaborative approach to the management of these sites.

Next steps towards completion

Establish a protected sites portal project team, undertake stakeholder engagement phase, including a focus group followed by business analysis, requirements and development once project funding is confirmed.

National Peatland Action Programme

Key highlights / milestones

- A further £1.1m capital funding was provided for the 2022/2023 financial year taking total spend to £2.4m. The annual delivery report is expected to be published in June.
- The national peatland action programme has been provided with an additional £5.88m over the next two years: 2023/2024 & 2024/2025.

Next steps towards completion

All peatland restoration activity data funded through the national peatland action programme will be published on the [peatland data portal](#) in June. This will cover the last 3 years of activity.

Local Nature Partnerships Funding

Next steps towards completion

Local nature partnerships (LNPs) have been provided with an additional £3.3m over the next three years to support local collaborative partnership approaches. We recognise LNPs are key in bringing together organisations, businesses and communities to take collective action to address local priorities.

Completing the Marine Protected Area network

Key highlights / milestones

- The Minister for Climate Change launched the Welsh marine conservation zone (MCZ) pre-consultation engagement process in November of 2022 ([Statement here](#)).
- The process has hosted several engagement days and opportunities to interact with the areas of search within which site designations are sought.
- A programme website has been set up to share updates and relevant information on the process to date (businesswales.gov.uk).

Next steps towards completion

Further work is ongoing to engage with critical sectors, such as fishers and marine developers, who may provide critical socio-economic data to the process.

The MCZ task and finish group is to convene mid-April and again in late summer to progress and discuss potential site boundaries pending the completion of the pre-consultation engagement.

Formal consultation on proposed sites to complete the marine protected areas network is expected in Spring 2024.

Preventing damage to MPA features – evaluation of potential fishing gear interactions with features of Marine Protected Areas

Key highlights / milestones

- NRW continue to complete the assessments of feature sensitivity to given fishing gear types.

Next steps towards completion

Budget has been allocated to progress delivery of these fisheries assessments for the coming year.

Ensure protected sites (management, monitoring, designation), land and sea, are a priority for NRW

Key highlights / milestones

- Publishing of NRW's corporate plan to 2030: 'Nature and people thriving together'. The plan sets out how NRW will use their tools and powers to ensure Wales steps up to meet the 2030 targets for climate and nature.

— [Natural Resources Wales / Our corporate plan to 2030 - Nature and People Thriving Together](#)

Review the SSSI series to inform an accelerated notification programme aligning it with the Nature Network Programme

Next steps towards completion

NRW are scoping the review of the sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) series to inform an accelerated notification programme

2. Create a framework to recognise nature recovery exemplar areas (NREAs) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) that deliver biodiversity outcomes

Establish an expert working group

Key highlights / milestones

- Work has commenced establishing a nature recovery exemplar area (NREA) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECM) task group. The key purpose of the group will be to recommend processes and criteria for recognising, monitoring and reporting on existing and candidate other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) and nature recovery exemplar areas (NREAs) in Wales:
 - Members have been identified, terms of reference drafted and Chair's agreed.
 - Work is also underway to establish a NREA & OECM task group.

WaterSource conference 2022

Key highlights / milestones

- The annual catchment management conference was held on 9th November 2022 with more than 70 stakeholders, including policy makers, regulators, landowners and managers in attendance. The Keynote was provided by the Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS.
- The Conference which was themed “Enabling Collaboration” explored opportunities and enablers through 3 interactive participation sessions as follows:
 - i) Themes around problems or issues which stand in the way of delivery.
 - ii) Identification of actions against the themes.
 - iii) Plan a roadmap for execution of the actions.
- Six themes were identified as blockers to delivering sustainable water quality for future generations together – these were Regulation; Data; Skills & Capacity; Governance & leadership; Culture & Collaboration; and Communications & Narrative.

- There was a high energy and enthusiasm from delegates, with a recognition of the breadth of activities being undertaken in Wales delivering for multiple benefits. However, there was concern that a lack of coordination prevents the full potential of activity from being realised. Delegates suggested coordination was urgently needed to bring stakeholders together to work on one plan with a single set of deliverables and outcomes
- A Report was produced summarising the event, which is being made available to delegates: [WaterSource 22 - Summary Conference Report Nov 22.pdf](#)

Next steps towards completion

WaterSource23 will be held in central Cardiff on 4th October 2023; Welsh Water is happy to offer this event to support the continuation of the Deep Dive activities and engagement.

3. Unlock the potential of designated landscapes: national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs), to deliver more for nature and 30 by 30

Support the national parks and AONBs to develop a prioritised action plans for nature restoration embedding these in strategic planning

Key highlights / milestones

- Welsh Government is funding two specialist nature recovery posts based in Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) National Park Authority and Eryri National Park Authority. Postholders commenced in October 2022 and one of their key tasks will be to develop a strategic framework for all Welsh designated landscapes to add impact at pace to their focus on nature recovery by 2030. Plans will identify land with potential to contribute towards 30% including:
 - Existing protected sites.
 - Areas of existing priority habitats outside those sites.
 - Other areas where habitat creation or restoration will be delivered.
 - Connectivity between sites to increase ecosystem resilience.
 - Other sites/land that with management changes can do more for nature.

Next steps towards completion

Plans will assist designated landscape bodies to secure funding & buy-in and will be used to engage farmers, grant funders, partner bodies and private finance initiatives:

By end Year 1 (December 2023): agree consistent methodology, draft framework emerging.

By end Year 2 (November 2024): framework fully developed and adopted by designated landscape bodies.

Year 3 onwards (November 2024 onwards): embedded into strategic planning timescales and implementation.

Realign designated landscapes priorities to enhance and accelerate nature recovery delivery, supported by updated policy, resources and guidance to build capacity and expertise and to target activity

Next steps towards completion

The work will have three aims:

- i) Increase awareness across Government of how designated landscapes can deliver policy at local level.
 - ii) Increase confidence for national park authority's (NPAs), AONBs and their partners; to take forward nature recovery work.
 - iii) Contribute to robust evidence that designated landscape bodies are making a positive contribution to nature recovery.
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Guidance from NRW for national park and AONB management plans has been identified as the key mechanism, supported by clear policy direction from Ministers. Guidance should allow better integration with other targets and priorities, e.g., carbon equivalents, woodland planting and the sustainable farming scheme in designated landscape management plans.

Updated national park and AONB Management Plan guidance will give a clear biodiversity remit and require SMART targets and objectives, with robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

Year 1, 2023-24, will see Initial engagement and commissioning of a review of NRW management plan guidance. In 2024-25 the guidance will be completed, endorsed by Welsh Government, and shared widely.

Develop the evidence and mapping tools to enable designated landscapes to baseline, target and monitor areas of high nature value that could be secured as their contribution to 30 by 30

Next steps towards completion

Designated landscapes will work to influence and inform national monitoring frameworks, agreed at Section 7, to be taken forward by the monitoring and evidence expert group. A consistent approach will be required across all designated landscapes for better planning, monitoring and production of useful data.

Ensure Designated Landscapes bodies are funded adequately

Next steps towards completion

Welsh Government will seek to protect and over the period leading up to 2030 scale up national park authority (NPA) core funding; although the current funding climate is very challenging. NPAs should exploit all funding opportunities for nature restoration including Welsh Government and NRW administered grant schemes, appropriate private funding and through commercial income generation. A secure, sustainable, and flexible funding model for AONBs should be established.

Potential designation of a new National Park in northeast Wales – priority delivery for climate change mitigation and nature recovery

Next steps towards completion

NRW is taking forward a programme to assess eligibility for designation of a new national park, as the statutory designating authority. Climate mitigation and nature recovery will be key priorities for any new national park in northeast Wales, and the principles of sustainable management of natural resources (SMNR) will be built into the assessment process.

4. Continue to reform land and marine management and planning (including spatial) to deliver more for both protected sites and wider land / seascapes

Strengthened guidance for Policy 9 of Future Wales

Key highlights / milestones

- The purpose of this project is to use a proactive, spatial and landscape scale approach through the planning system to ensure planning and land management visions, aims and objectives are complementary and outcomes for biodiversity and green infrastructure improved. Milestones to date include:
 - The setting up of a specific task and finish stakeholder group to shape the pilot project, which will include the identification of a national natural resource area in the Gwent Levels and supporting planning guidance.
 - The undertaking of initial scoping work with the task and finish group and the development of a critical path to guide project management, which is to be kept under review.
 - Identification of the pressures and opportunities which need to be considered and which link with on-going work in the Gwent Levels.
 - Identification of evidence and information requirements to support the work, including evidence gaps.

Next steps

Continue to work with the stakeholder group and communicate progress more widely.

Procure a study on a post construction monitoring to fill an identified evidence gap.

Crystallise how the evidence can be used to support and develop a spatial policy for Gwent Levels to enable the implementation of Policy 9.

Develop an on-going method of evaluating the pilot project which will consider what can be applied elsewhere in Wales.

Strengthen the policy protection afforded to SSSIs as outlined in Planning Policy Wales (PPW), Edition 11

Key Milestones

- Planning authorities and all those participating in the planning process were reminded of the need to embed biodiversity and ecosystem resilience into all their actions through a chief planning officers letter published on 20 December 2022.
- A consultation paper on targeted policy changes to PPW 11 was published on 9 March 2023.
- The consultation paper details proposed changes to the SSSI protection policy (PPW 11, paragraph 6.4.17), to state that proposing development within a designated site should be avoided, unless it is necessary for the management of that site, or where development is considered to be necessary then this must be taken forward in an overall planned approach through the development plan.
- The consultation will close on 31st May 2023.

Next steps

Consider all comments received and undertake any further stakeholder engagement, as necessary.

Publish the finalised policy, part of an update to PPW, later in 2023.

Marine Spatial Planning

Key highlights

- Welsh national marine plan monitoring report 2019 – 2022, laid before the Senedd and published in November 2022.
- Written ministerial statement on “Taking forward marine planning following the three year review of the Welsh national marine plan”, published in March 2023.
- Draft outputs of an NRW environmental constraints mapping exercise received.
- Marine planning technical statement for recreational boating, published in April 2023. Two further technical statements, for subsea cabling and ports & shipping developed.

- Mapping marine strategic resource areas (SRAs):
 - Three stakeholder engagement events held.
 - Baseline resource maps circulated and validated with stakeholders, with mapping displayed interactively on the Wales marine planning portal.
 - Work commenced with regulators to discuss guidance requirements to support implementation of SRAs.

Next steps

Following the March 2023 written ministerial statement, work with policy leads and expert marine planning stakeholder reference group to scope and plan a marine planning mapping for sustainable development programme.

Outputs of NRW environmental constraints mapping exercise to be received.

Work with NRW regarding developing understanding of opportunities for environmental restoration.

Publish marine planning technical statements for subsea cabling and ports & shipping.

Mapping marine strategic resource areas (SRAs):

Develop guidance and supporting material to sit alongside SRAs;

Develop SRA mapping for consultation;

Prepare for consulting on draft SRAs later in 2023, including drafting potential marine planning notice(s) for consultation.

Sustainable farming scheme (SFS)

- We are refining sustainable farming scheme (SFS) proposals, including habitat management and designated site management actions, to reflect ongoing modelling work and feedback received from an extensive co-design exercise. The next iteration of scheme proposals will be consulted on towards the end of this year.
- The results of our co-design exercise will help inform what advisory and support processes are needed to enable farmers to adopt sustainable land management practices.
- Maintenance payments for the positive active management of habitats and designated sites will be included in the scheme. We have communicated with the farming industry that actions such as peat restoration, tree planting and signing SSSI management plans undertaken in advance of entering the SFS will count towards scheme actions. We are encouraging farmers to adopt these practices earlier to ease their transition into the scheme and help to ensure the ecological benefits are realised earlier.

5. Build a strong foundation for future delivery through capacity building, behaviour change, awareness raising and skills development

Integrating the skills and expertise needed for nature recovery (including ecologists, marine planners and biologists) into the net zero skills strategy

- In order to deliver on our vision for a fairer, stronger, greener Wales the [net zero skills action plan](#) has prioritised key areas of action. This means an economy that works for everyone and skills will be a key enabler as we transition to a net zero and nature-based economy.
- With the launch of the net zero skills action plan, on 28 February, the Minister made it clear his intention to undertake a public consultation to capture the more granular detail required to inform sector roadmaps that will ultimately shape our skills offer. That work is already underway and we aim to publish in the coming months.
- The plan is an important first step in understanding the role of skills in making a just transition to net zero. The challenge to meet our net zero commitment is huge and our future skills needs will require a collaborative approach across the whole economy.
- Sector roadmaps will be created for each of the eight emission sectors in Wales. The roadmaps will outline milestones in terms of investment opportunities, changes in industry practices aligned to carbon reduction, new technologies, developments, policies, transitioning activities etc; all factors that will have an impact on the skills needed to support these key shifts. This detail will allow planning and policy on skills to shift to the forefront in order to stimulate and create the workforce of the future.

Include actions to tackle the nature emergency into the overall climate change behaviour change programme

- The new climate public engagement strategy, to be published this summer, will emphasise that the climate and nature emergencies are inextricably linked and that the loss of wildlife and wild places leaves us ill-equipped to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to the irreversible impacts of change. It will also commit to a delivery route map which will include actions we can all take to help tackle the nature emergency and will highlight the co-benefits that these actions will bring to our health, wellbeing and local environment.
- Expanding and enhancing capacity and capability building schemes to support the public, third and private sectors to accelerate delivery for nature recovery. This will include a focus on financial resilience and investment readiness.
- Wales coasts and seas partnership (CASP) has worked together to develop and agree a shared narrative, published in December 2022, which sets out common ground for partners to support a resilient marine environment in Wales. A key element is supporting sustainable long-term investment and developing longer term sources of public and private finance crucial to support delivery of key objectives.
- A coastal capacity building challenge fund was launched in December 2022, to build capacity within the public and third sectors to improve environmental outcomes and potentially increase demand for local seafood with strong sustainability credentials. 14 projects spread across Wales were approved and the Capacity Building funding is now being extended to run for a further two years.
- Wales coasts and seas partnership will continue to progress further actions to build capacity to support resilient marine ecosystems, developed from the [coastal community capacity building evidence-synthesis report | GOV.WALES](#).

Natur a Ni – Nature and Us programme

Key highlights / milestones

- The nature and us programme is approaching the end of its second phase where, through an ongoing process of involvement, NRW have focussed on shaping and agreeing a shared vision for nature. That work has culminated in a citizens assembly, which met three times throughout February and March, to reflect on what a future Wales might look like where society and nature thrive together. It builds on the successful first phase, in spring 2022, that gathered intelligence from people in Wales by exploring alternative futures.

Next steps towards completion

The final phase of Nature and Us, phase 3, will see the launch of the nature and us vision in Summer 2023. This will create a foundation on which to build new relationships to drive forward action, and to contribute to work through our networks to build collective approaches to implementation.

6. Unlock public and private finance to deliver for nature at far greater scale and pace

Develop a clear policy position on private investment in nature recovery

- The sustainable finance task and finish group have completed a draft of a set of responsible investment principles. Next steps will be to consult more widely on these.
- The work Welsh Government commissioned looking at the development of a sustainable delivery model for biodiversity has been completed. This focuses on building capacity and capability within the delivery sector and increasing the levels of investment available for nature recovery. Next steps will be to consider which of the interventions and potential pilot models will be prioritised to be taken forward.

Explore sustainable funding mechanisms and opportunities to support work delivering the marine component of 30 by 30

- Through the coasts and seas partnership, scoping work has been undertaken with partners regarding a potential marine enhancement fund for Wales. This work will continue to be developed at pace with the blue investment working group.

7. Develop and adapt monitoring and evidence frameworks to measure progress towards the 30x30 target and guide prioritisation of action

Monitoring and evidence task group

Key highlights

- Work has commenced establishing a monitoring and evidence task group which will drive our commitment to develop effective and affordable monitoring and evidence frameworks to prioritise actions. The Minister has invited Ceri Davies, Biodiversity Core Deep Dive group member, to lead the group in establishing robust and appropriate monitoring and evidence frameworks building upon what is already in place for both the 30 by 30 and wider nature recovery targets.

Next steps

The first meeting of the monitoring and evidence task group is anticipated to commence early summer.

8. Embed nature recovery in policy and strategy in public bodies in Wales

Revise the natural resources policy and our national biodiversity strategy (currently the Nature Recovery Action Plan) to reflect deep dive recommendations and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework

- A new Kunming-Montreal global biodiversity framework (GBF) was agreed at COP15, the convention on biological diversity (CBD), in December 2022. This sets out four long-term goals and 23 targets which seek to halt and reverse biodiversity loss to achieve a nature positive world by 2030. Consequently, our key strategy documents will be refreshed to outline Wales approach to the delivery of the new targets. Work is underway to scope the work required with a view to completing the refresh within the next 12 months.

Strengthening delivery of the NRP and section 6 of the environment Wales act to support the mainstreaming of delivery for nature across all Welsh Government portfolios and public bodies

Key highlights / milestones

- Presentation and discussion with council leaders and the leads of the climate change and environmental committees of Welsh local authorities to raise awareness of biodiversity legislation and policy, with a specific focus on the section 6 biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty. Carolyn Thomas, MS for North Wales, also spoke to highlight what changes can be made to the management of verges and green spaces to benefit biodiversity, and to also promote the “[It's for them](#)” campaign.

- Presentations and a bespoke session on the section 6 duty featured at the 2022 [Wales biodiversity partnership conference](#) and at the society of local council clerks 50 Years Anniversary Conference, for town and community councils.
- Publication of the summary and detailed [section 6 biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty reports](#).
- Four sessions of the [nature wise biodiversity training course](#) for Welsh Government staff were held.
- Welsh Government and NRW to lead by example through demonstration and exploring further opportunity to ensure that delivering for nature is one of the priority objectives for the Welsh Government woodland estate, changing practices where needed that are detrimental to nature.
- Leading by example on our forest estate, for example through continuing to manage national nature reserves to achieve improvements to their condition; working to ensure the forest estate is resilient to climate change by ensuring it has a variety of species, age classes, structure and management regimes; running a pilot project through the nature networks programme funding in the Dyfi, Gwydir / Coed Y Brenin and Wye Valley to inform practical delivery in the future.

Next steps towards completion

NRW is continuing to lead by example and exploring further opportunities to ensure the delivery for nature is a priority objective for forest estate, for example scaling up the delivery of nature-based solutions; extending thinning programs to provide resilience to pests and diseases and climate change as well as supporting biodiversity; creating new woodlands through the woodland creation programme; continuing to explore river and wetland restoration; developing an integrated program to benefit rare and threatened species on the estate, and identifying locations that provide the best opportunities for action focused initially on bringing SSSI features into favourable condition.

Environmental governance body and statutory nature recovery targets

- Welsh Government officials have developed a workplan for delivering a bill during this Senedd term to establish a permanent environmental governance body for Wales and statutory nature recovery targets with a view to publishing a white paper during 2023.
- Since March 2021, an interim assessor has been in place to consider concerns raised about the functioning of environmental law in Wales. The interim assessor has received 26 submissions to date and has issued one report to the Welsh Ministers. This report related to the proposed UK retained EU law bill (REUL).