



BIODIVERSITY

Protecting and enhancing the biodiversity and ecological value of our woodlands.

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Enhancing Biodiversity (EB)

Woodlands with their diverse habitats support a wide range of species, some of which are national priorities for protection.

Stakeholders strongly agree on the desire to increase biodiversity, protect and enhance ancient semi-natural woodland, manage current woods and restore the ecological value of planted ancient woodland sites. These issues are also key to the Regional Spatial Strategy, Regional Biodiversity Strategy and local Biodiversity Action Plans, are widely supported, but require resources for effective and co-ordinated delivery. Multiple use of woodlands means that biodiversity needs and interests must be identified and shared with owners, managers and the public.

Aims:

- To deliver relevant nature-conservation objectives set out in legislation, international commitments, national and regional policies and local strategies and plans.
- To achieve targets in policies and strategies, with particular regard to Biodiversity Action Plans.

ACTION

Delivering the vision

Objectives	Actions
<p>EB 1 To meet national targets for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the priority habitats and species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Ensure that relevant strategies and plans support, protect and assist recovery of nature-conservation assets.● Promote SSSI conservation objectives and BAP targets to woodland owners/occupiers, integrating these with other management objectives.● Develop initiatives and programmes aimed at bringing SSSI woodlands into favourable condition.● Develop specific initiatives focused on delivery of relevant HAP and SAP targets.● Maintain and, where appropriate, increase the extent and improve the condition of woodland and open-ground habitats.● Develop a programme to monitor progress towards targets, and revise targets as required.
<p>EB 2 To protect and enhance ancient or semi-natural woodland, including through the creation of new native woodland in targeted locations, which will create habitat networks and increase semi-natural woodland cover</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Target grants and initiatives to ancient and semi-natural woodlands.● Ensure that owners/occupiers are aware of the value of the ancient or semi-natural woodlands in their care.● Use woodland management-related initiatives (for example, increasing wood fuel production) to enhance ancient and semi-natural woodland habitats.● Increase protection and enhancement of veteran trees through planning policies, tree preservation orders, forestry grant schemes and targeting via environmental stewardship.● Integrate resources for landscape conservation with those for biodiversity to benefit non-woodland trees (parkland, orchard, hedgerow, etc).● Address the most widespread and serious threats to woodland, including deer and livestock overgrazing, non-native species, diffuse pollution and adverse impacts of adjoining land uses.

Objectives	Actions
EB 3 To develop a programme for improvement and restoration of plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Agree and promote a prioritised action plan for restoration and improvement of private sector and public woodland and woodland habitats. ● Integrate the PAWS action plan with other regional strategies.
EB 4 To achieve exemplary management of assets through UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Actively promote good practice for biodiversity conservation.
EB 5 To target action through landscape-scale improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Integrate Framework actions with action plans for landscape-scale conservation at regional and sub-regional levels, including the 14 Biodiversity Enhancement Areas identified in the Regional Spatial Strategy and the region's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. ● Develop a comprehensive database of the region's veteran trees as a basis for prioritised action.
EB 6 To secure the integration of agri-environment, woodland and forestry and rural development delivery mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote the Framework to assist England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) resource targeting and to inform ERDP review. ● Seek to create habitat networks and enhance landscape-scale interaction of different habitats through integration of woodland, environmental stewardship and other grant schemes.
EB 7 To develop sustainable woodland and forestry markets, products and enterprises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pilot and expand market share for biodiversity-friendly forest brands and products.
EB 8 To increase contributions and commitment to wildlife gain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Monitor the biodiversity component of woodland and forestry activity. ● Target organisations or groups to improve performance.
EB 9 To assist delivery of Forestry Commission England woodland bird corporate targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure woodland management planning addresses the needs of priority woodland and associated farmland bird species.
EB 10 To increase public awareness and participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Co-ordinate promotional activity and measure effectiveness. ● Use measures such as the woodland bird index to raise public and land managers' awareness.
EB 11 To raise levels of skills and knowledge to enable exemplary biodiversity management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encourage and enable woodland and forestry bodies to improve members' knowledge of biodiversity. ● Organise appropriate training events and seminars with accreditation outcomes. ● Include conservation management evaluations in site visit programmes by woodland and forestry practitioners.
EB 12 To improve information to support ecological sustainability and biodiversity enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Agree information/knowledge needs for woodland and forestry with data-gathering, managing and funding bodies. ● Co-ordinate and improve technical information and its accessibility through the regional biodiversity partnership and network of local biological record centres.

CASE STUDIES

The Heartwoods and Deer Initiative Project

As deer populations increase so does the risk of damage to woodland special sites, habitats and young trees from deer grazing and the urgency for sustainable solutions.



Image: Forestry Commission

This project is enabling appropriate deer population control, so that numbers are in balance with a high-quality natural environment, and is encouraging local wild venison as a renewable natural resource.

The project co-ordinates and gives practical assistance to the voluntary Deer Management Groups (DMGs) in three pilot areas in Herefordshire and Shropshire, where key woodland biodiversity assets are under pressure. Accessing better information on deer numbers and ranges for planning culls, helping deer stalkers and landowners together agree and action effective local management, enabling stalker culling proficiency and cultivating a well-informed, co-operative public are ongoing elements. Complementary activity is researching the links and participants in the Marches venison-marketing chain and promoting the health and culinary merits of venison to consumers.

Future work seeks to put these gains on a sure footing through development of local deer management plans, which have policy support and are embedded in the 'environmental economy.' The higher culls necessary to protect woodland ecology require a reliable and equitable system of deer control and of venison in supply with demand and a growing market.

Forest Enterprise Ancient Woodland Project

The restoration of ancient woodlands damaged by plantations is a national and regional environmental priority.

Forest Enterprise (FE) manages nearly 5,400 hectares of this category in its West Midlands Forest District, hence its restoration efforts can make a major contribution to regional woodland Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) targets and wider wildlife gains. In 2000-2001, FE carried out a complete and systematic field and desk survey of the state of its ancient woodland estate across England, updating knowledge of extent, content and ecological condition. This major achievement has enabled the relative importance of 80 ancient woodland sites in

the District to be assessed and evaluated. The outcomes are a prioritised programme for planned restoration, improved target-setting for recovery of UKBAP woodland habitat types and detailed information to shape the design and implementation of management plans for individual woods. Regional partnerships and resources will be crucial in accelerating the scale of the programme and its scope to further the Framework's vision.



Image: Forest Enterprise West Midlands Forest District



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