

WENP Ambitions for Nature’s Recovery: Explanatory Document

Context

As part of producing a WENP Strategy for 2021-2030, it was agreed by the WENP Board that a set of ambitions for nature recovery would be helpful in providing additional context to our work as a Partnership. These ambitions are focused specifically on nature’s recovery, and the actions that will be necessary to achieve this. They have been chosen to reflect our impact priority: ‘Facilitate investment in and delivery of projects that deliver the West of England Nature Recovery Network, with a focus on large and impactful projects’.

The ambitions are also intended to be consistent with national targets as set out in the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan (although some of our ambitions are more ambitious than targets set nationally) and also cover the need to create ‘bigger, better, more and joined-up’ habitats, as per the 2010 Lawton Report.

These ambitions also build on those set out in our Nature Recovery Network Methodology Document, which are reflected in the West of England Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy. However, there is a lack of consistency between the dates that these previous ambitions refer to, and some of the targets are not as easily understood as national targets. The updated ambitions have consistent timelines, and also includes targets for 2030 to provide us with a greater sense of urgency and clarity on what we are working towards.

Ambitions for Nature’s Recovery

2030 ambition	2050 ambition
Increase the abundance of wildlife from 2020 levels by 30%	Double the abundance of wildlife from 2020 levels ¹
Increase our semi-natural broadleaved woodland cover by 2500ha (from 8,000 to 10,500 ha)	Double our semi-natural broadleaved woodland cover by 2050 (from 6% to 12%) ²
In addition to woodland, create 2000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside the protected site network	In addition to woodland, create 6000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside the protected site network

¹ As measured by an agreed West of England Wildlife Index

² Equivalent to creating 80km², or 8000ha, of new semi-natural broadleaved woodland.

2030 ambition	2050 ambition
At least 40% of the NRN Connectivity Gaps have been closed through the creation of new habitat referenced above	Through the creation of new habitat listed above, close all NRN Connectivity Gaps by 2050
All water catchments are in at least moderate ecological status, with at least half in good ecological status	All water catchments are in good ecological status
70% of designated sites are in favourable condition	All designated sites are in favourable condition

Further Information and Rationale

Ambition: Double the abundance of wildlife from 2020 levels

Further information: This is our overarching ambition. It will be measured by an agreed West of England Wildlife Index, which will focus on priority species that have suffered the greatest declines or are especially ecologically or culturally important. This will also be informed by the species included in the national target for species abundance.

Rationale: Ultimately, the abundance of wildlife is the best indicator of the health of the natural environment, being reliant on the extent, state, and connectivity of habitats, as well as factors such as environmental pollution. We need to restore biodiversity both for its inherent value and for the benefits it provides to society. All the below ambitions will contribute to this as well, making it an overarching ambition and our ultimate measure of our success.

Link with national targets: The Environment Act includes a new legally binding target on species abundance for 2030. This is a key purpose of the national NRN as per the England Nature Strategy, as well as part of the 25 Year Environment Plan.

Ambition: Double our semi-natural broadleaved woodland cover (from 6% to 12%)

Further information: More precisely, the ambition is to double the West of England's semi-natural tree and woodland cover, including open wooded landscape and mosaic habitats, by 2050 – equivalent to an additional 8,000 ha of tree and woodland cover. This is consistent with the overall ambition of the [Forest of Avon Plan](#). The inclusion of open wooded landscape and mosaic habitats reflects the importance of these habitats for wildlife.

Rationale: Increasing tree and woodland cover will be one of the most important measures we take to restore nature, with many specialist woodland species in decline. It is also an important part of our efforts to sequester carbon and mitigate the effects of the climate emergency.

Link with national targets: Consistent with the national ambition to double woodland cover by 2060. Our target is more ambitious but wider-reaching (including more open wooded habitats) and focuses on semi-natural woodland cover, which is most beneficial for nature.

Ambition: Create an additional 6000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside the protected site network

Further information: As we have a specific target for trees and woodland, this target is intended to cover habitats not included in that definition (such as wetlands, grasslands, scrub and saltmarsh).

Rationale: While important, trees and woodland are far from the only habitat we need to restore. Increasing the extent of grasslands, wetlands, scrub and saltmarsh will also be critical to restoring nature. 'Wildlife-rich' habitat is here taken to be represented by [UK BAP Priority Habitats](#), identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP).

Link with national targets: This is reflective of the 25YEP goal to 'Create or restore 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside the protected site network, focusing on priority habitats as part of a wider set of land management changes providing extensive benefits'.

Close the NRN Connectivity Gaps through creation of new habitat

Further information: The NRN Connectivity Gaps are as defined in the [West of England Nature Recovery Network](#) mapping. 'Closing' a Gap would mean the gap in mapped ecological networks has been filled through the creation of new habitat.

Rationale: One of the four Lawton Principles for nature's recovery is 'joined-up', reflecting the fact that habitat needs to be functionally connected to enable wildlife to move through the landscape. Our West of England NRN mapping identified 'connectivity gaps' in our ecological networks, which, if filled, would better connect our habitat across the West of England.

Link with national targets: No explicit national target related to connectivity, but there is a recognition of the need to create a national Nature Recovery Network.

Ambition: All water catchments are in Good Ecological Status

Further information: 'Good Ecological Status' is as defined in the [Water Framework Directive](#), which is regularly monitored.

Rationale: Much of our wildlife is reliant on a healthy water environment, including rivers, lakes and wetlands, and so are we. Currently, all the sub-catchments in the West of England are in either 'moderate' or 'poor' ecological condition, and suffer from problems including pollution, watercourse modification and over-abstraction. Restoring water catchments to good ecological status will be crucial to recovering nature in our water environment.

Link with national targets: The Water Framework Directive requires that all EU Member States 'aim to achieve' Good Ecological Status in all waters by 2027, and at the time of writing remains UK Law. The 25 YEP has a target to restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition by 2043.

Ambition: All designated sites are in favourable condition

Further information: Designated sites will include at least SSSIs, SACs, SPAs and Ramsar Sites in the West of England, and ideally will also include Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs), if the condition of these sites can be monitored. It will also be crucial that the favourable condition is maintained beyond 2050.

Rationale: While creating new habitat will be necessary to nature's recovery, it is most important ([Biodiversity in the UK: Bloom or Bust](#)) to ensure that our existing habitats are in good ecological condition. Although designated sites will not include all existing habitat of ecological value, monitoring their condition will provide an indication of the condition of existing habitat more widely.

Link with national targets: The 25YEP identifies a target to restore 75% of SSSIs to 'favourable condition' by 2043, but we want to go further and quicker by aiming for 70% of designated sites to be in favourable condition by 2030 and all designated sites to be in favourable condition by 2050.

What we haven't included

As explained at the start of the document, our ambitions are focused specifically on nature's recovery, and the outcomes that will be necessary to achieve this. They have been chosen to reflect our impact priority: 'Facilitate investment in and delivery of projects that deliver the West of England Nature Recovery Network, with a focus on large and impactful projects'.

We have not included ambitions related to natural capital, climate mitigation, or health and wellbeing. However, delivering our ambitions will significantly increase natural capital, sequester carbon, mitigate the impacts of climate change, and increase people's access to nature. For example:

- More wildlife and nature-rich spaces will improve people's connection to nature, which is shown to positively contribute to people's health and wellbeing.
- Doubling our woodland cover will sequester significant amounts of carbon, create new spaces for people to enjoy, provide natural flood management, reduce air pollution etc. New grasslands and wetlands will also sequester carbon, help to improve water quality, and provide natural flood management.
- Improving water quality will enable people to enjoy access to bathing in rivers and improve angling opportunities.

Our [NRN Prospectus](#) provides more detail on how individual programmes and projects contribute to our natural capital and provide services of benefit to society.

We have also not included 'enabling' ambitions, such as for investment in nature's recovery and 'green' jobs. This is because of the focus on outcomes that will deliver nature's recovery; enabling work being covered by the 'enabling priorities' within our Strategy; and the difficulty of quantifying the level of investment or number of jobs we would need to deliver our ambitions. We do, however, recognise that our ambitions will not be achievable without significant investment and the jobs needed to deliver nature's recovery.

Finally, we have not included ambitions related to the use of pesticides and pollution, which are dealt with primarily through legislation and the ELM Scheme. However, we recognise the importance of reducing the use of pesticides and pollution for nature's recovery.