

NERR092 Appendix 3 Evaluation of the Upland Ecosystem Service Pilots

Natural England's Natural Capital Evidence Handbook helps you come to a strategic understanding about the natural environment in your place using natural capital evidence. This Evidence Information Note helps you access resources related to the [Evaluation of the Upland Ecosystem Service Pilots](#).

Background

Natural England's Upland Ecosystem Service Pilots (2009-2011) were designed as demonstration projects to apply the Ecosystem Approach on the ground. The pilots were located in Bassenthwaite Catchment in the Lake District, the South Pennines and South West Uplands. The projects were evaluated in 2018. Individual evaluations of each of the three pilots were undertaken, as well as an overall synthesis evaluation.

Box 1 Research questions for the synthesis evaluation of the Upland Ecosystem Service Pilot projects

- 1) What are the key outcomes from each pilot?
- 2) What are the key differences across the areas in terms of approaches and impact and why?
- 3) How important were participatory ways of working in achieving stated aims in each area?
- 4) How important were existing partnerships in each area in driving forward actions and additional stakeholder involvement? (Comparisons around governance in each area and what difference that made to outcomes.)
- 5) What lessons can we learn in terms of evaluating the pilots?
- 6) How were environmental outcomes captured in each area? What mechanisms were in place/put in place to achieve these?
- 7) What was the role of economic valuation in the three areas? To what extent did it help to inform decision-making?

What did we do?

- Identified **research questions** (Box 1) based on the Ecosystem Approach Principles (Convention on Biological Diversity 200).
- Developed a **theory of change** for each pilot, linking inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts, and exploring assumptions about these links.
- Conducted **semi-structured interviews** with key partners and stakeholders for each pilot, as well as national staff involved in the pilot programme.
- Undertook an in-depth **review of project documentation**.
- **Analysed data** from the interviews and review of project documentation, coded it to the research questions and identified key themes.
- Ensured research was conducted in accordance with the principles of Government Social Research (GSRU undated).

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Outputs: What is available to use?

[Evaluation of the Upland Ecosystem Service Pilots - NECR254](#) publication including:

- synthesis evaluation of all three pilots;
- evaluation of South Pennines pilot; and
- evaluation of South West pilot.

[Evaluation of the Upland Ecosystem Service Pilots: Bassenthwaite - NERR077](#) - post-project evaluation based on stakeholder interviews and GIS analysis of agri-environment scheme uptake.

Lessons Learned

The evaluations concluded that this project is a useful practical example of how to apply the Ecosystem Approach 'on the ground', with the following lessons learnt:

- Successful **practical demonstration** of a participatory approach to identifying and prioritising ecosystem services – subsequently leading to land management change.
- The importance of **existing place-based partnerships** for delivering the ecosystem approach.
- Existing partnership **boundaries** enable partner buy-in.
- Aligning boundaries to one or more discrete **functional land management units** is likely to be of interest/relevance to partners.
- The importance of ensuring that the project area is **not too large** (e.g. <50k ha).
- The importance of ensuring **participatory engagement of stakeholders/beneficiaries** across a full range of ecosystem services.
- **Economic valuation** of ecosystem services is challenging, resource and data intensive, and needs to be carefully planned to coincide with the timing of the participatory process.
- **Building in evaluation of pilots from the outset** and agreeing required ongoing data collection.
- **Process evaluations** need to be done soon after the initial phase of activity.
- **Impact evaluations** can be undertaken after a few years, although data still needs to be collected throughout the project to inform this.

References

Convention on Biological Diversity. 2007. Ecosystem Approach Principles. [online] Available at: <https://www.cbd.int/ecosystem/principles.shtml> [accessed 29/01/2021].

GRSU (undated) GSR professional Guidance: Ethical Assurance for Social Research in Government. London. Government Social Research Unit.