



Natural England News



Winter Issue 3 - January 2020

At Natural England we have been working to define how we can set about achieving our long term vision of '**Thriving Nature for People and Planet**'. Part of that has been by embodying our mission of '**Building partnerships for nature's recovery**' by having some really good conversations with many of you. (I've shared more on what our vision, mission and the four Programmes we are developing mean to me in my [blog](#).)



A big focus of those conversations has been how we can add most value and use our unique statutory conservation agency role to support and enable action by others, such as Non Governmental Organisations, farmers and other businesses, local authorities and National Park Authorities. Three strong themes are emerging as to what we should focus on beyond our role to regulate, designate and licence:

- **Leading through our evidence** and expertise, be that scientific knowledge, best practice or practitioner evidence
- **Bringing people together** from within and beyond the conservation world to come together and work in a way that adds up to more than the sum of our individual parts
- **Ensuring high standards** are followed by others, so enabling public private and voluntary sector bodies to all play their part in nature's recovery.

We have also recently agreed five year aims for Natural England to provide the threads that bind our everyday work through the Programmes to our long term vision:

1. **Well managed nature recovery networks** across land, water and sea delivering resilient ecosystems rich in wildlife and character, enjoyed by people and widely benefitting society.
2. **People connected to the natural environment** for their own and society's wellbeing, enjoyment and prosperity.
3. **Nature based solutions** contributing fully to tackling the climate change challenge and wider environmental hazards and threats.
4. **Improvements in natural capital** underpinning sustainable economic growth, healthy food systems and prospering communities.
5. **Evidence and expertise** is used by a broad range of partnerships, organisations and communities to achieve nature recovery and enable effective regulation and accreditation.
6. **A value-led organisation** which delivers excellent service standards to all partners, organisations and communities engaged in achieving nature's recovery.

Our five year aims are ambitious and we won't be able to deliver them on our own. We know that nature needs us to act at a scale and pace that will bring about real change across the nation - and the world. We can only achieve this by working together. Natural England will be working harder than ever in the next year to reclaim a '**Thriving Nature for People and Planet**' for future generations. I hope the stories in the newsletter show how we are already doing that and inspire you to work with us.

Marian Spain - Chief Executive Officer

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EU EXIT

While we will be leaving the EU on the 31st January, during the Implementation Period, EU rules and regulations will remain in effect. At the end of this implementation period these regulations and protections will be saved into domestic law. So as we move through this period of change as a country, the processes and services we currently operate at Natural England continue to apply and our statutory remit is unchanged. We look forward to continuing to work with you for nature's recovery.

Greener farming and fisheries: *Supporting farming and fisheries to operate in harmony with the environment*

How the Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) partnership are working to improve water and soil health.

It seemed to rain incessantly during autumn and many farmers couldn't drill their winter crops because the fields were so wet. You can really see the difference between fields with good soil structure that rain can infiltrate, compared with fields with damaged soil where the rain sits on the surface or runs off as muddy water onto roads and into watercourses.

In just one intense rain event, 1mm of soil can be lost from a field surface and it takes 100 years to replace!

Conserving soil is essential if we are going to keep producing food. The soil run off takes nutrients and pesticides with it and impacts the water quality in our rivers. Many farmers find poor soil health prevents crops from reaching their full potential due to restricted root growth in compacted soils and limited nutrient uptake because soil biology is not functioning well.

So what is going on here and what can we do about it?

There are a growing number of farmers who are changing their farming systems to regenerative or conservation agriculture. Using techniques such as reduced tillage, cover crops, crop diversity, spring cropping and rotation, reducing pesticide use, introducing livestock, composts and manures to build soil organic matter. Their aim is to restore soil health in terms of soil structure and biology. These fields are now in an improved condition with crops growing better and taking up nutrients, while machinery can travel without getting bogged down.

Soil and Water Management Centre conferences

CSF recently collaborated with universities, agricultural machinery and advisory companies to run four [Soil & Water Management Centre](#) winter conferences; attended by over 320 farmers, advisers and agricultural students. Alongside soil researchers and the industry experts, CSF spoke about reducing ammonia emissions and soil loss from agriculture.

What CSF can offer – farm advice

The [CSF Evaluation Report](#) shows that farmer actions taken as a result of CSF advice have reduced sediment loss by 12.3% (average agricultural load reduction in CSF priority catchments). Greater reductions have been achieved where CSF has been providing advice to farmers for longer and where there is a greater uptake of soil management recommendations by farmers.

For more information look up your local [Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer](#) or contact [Philippa Mansfield](#)

Sustainable development: *Creating great places for people to live and work*

Natural England's Geoportal: England-wide data for great crested newts now available

Natural England has now [uploaded baseline survey data](#) on great crested newts (GCNs) to create a map of where GCNs are across the whole of England. The project – taking three years to complete – is the largest ever survey of its type for GCNs across England, and was funded by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

Why is the project important?

This England-wide survey data has enabled Natural England develop the district level licensing programme. This significant new licensing option better supports GCN populations whilst reducing delays for developers. We hope the data will bring other benefits: it is a fantastic resource coming out of the district level licensing programme, available to all. The data will mean that Local Environmental Record Centres and other groups such as the Wildlife Trusts can help better protect the GCN as we build up a better picture of where they are. This means that their habitats can be better managed as well as linked-up on a landscape scale, helping the species to thrive.

What did we do?

GCNs are a visually striking but elusive species, breeding in ponds and hibernating on typically in rough grassland, scrub and woodland. We worked with contractors, with permission from landowners, to survey more than 7,518 ponds using the relatively new environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling technique to establish the presence or absence of GCNs.

Why should we protect great crested newts?

GCNs are a European protected species. The animals and their eggs, breeding sites and resting places are protected by law. Although they are widely distributed throughout lowland England the species has suffered enormous declines, with approximately 50% of ponds in the UK lost in the 20th Century and 80% of current ponds in a poor state. A [traditional](#) or a [district level licence](#) is required from Natural England if you're planning an activity and can't avoid disturbing them or damaging their habitats (ponds and the land around ponds).

Who can use the data?

The data is available under an Open Government Licence so absolutely anyone can use it. It is already being put to good use – the data will form part of the evidence used to update the 'Favourable Conservation Status' statement for GCNs. The Conservation Status is considered 'favourable' when the population and range of the species is healthy and will be maintained into the long term. Monitoring this helps environmental managers, policymakers and scientists effectively protect habitats and species such as GCN.

What is the Natural England Open Data Geoportal?

The [Natural England Open Data Geoportal](#) was launched 2017 and provides free and open access to geographic products for download in multiple formats (CSV, KML, Shapefile and ESRI File Geodatabase), web services (ESRI REST and GeoJSON APIs), web applications and story maps. All content is available under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#) except where otherwise stated.

To find out more contact [Jen Almond](#)

Resilient landscapes and seas: *Protecting and restoring wildlife and natural beauty for future generations*

Saving seagrass: LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES

An exciting marine restoration partnership project, LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES will save seagrass and maerl beds across England. The £2.5 million project has been given £1.5 million from EU LIFE.

Natural England will lead the project in partnership with the National Marine Aquarium (Ocean Conservation Trust), Marine Conservation Society, Royal Yachting Association and Plymouth City Council. The project will also work with other organisations such as local harbour authorities.

The Lush green underwater meadows of seagrasses targeted in the five project areas are havens for marine animals and are important fish nurseries, but are a critically endangered red-listed habitat. Seagrasses are underwater wonder plants: they stabilise the sediment and clean surrounding seawater. Seagrass around our shores is estimated to store as much carbon per hectare as the UK's trees, helping prevent climate change. Maerl, present on one of the project sites, is also an important carbon store. This purple-pink seaweed forms underwater carpets that shelter many sea creatures.



Anchoring, mooring and launching of boats can damage seagrass and maerl beds. LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES will work on: habitat management including collecting seed and replanting seagrass inspiring the boating community to care for underwater habitats and behaviour change including the roll out of more gentle mooring systems. ReMEDIES stands for “Reducing and Mitigating Erosion and Disturbance Impacts affecting the Seabed.”

The five project sites are all Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). All five are also popular with recreational boaters. The sites are: the Isles of Scilly, Fal & Helford, Plymouth Sound & Estuaries, Solent Maritime and Essex Estuaries.

Natural England's Chief Executive, Marian Spain said: “We want to make sure that everyone can enjoy England's rich coastal landscapes. The LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES project has brought together a wide range of partner organisations and demonstrates Natural England's ability to successfully lead positive restoration of our natural environment. This project will restore important habitats and help reduce future damage to the seabed.”

For further information contact LifeRemedies@naturalengland.org.uk or visit the [website](#)



LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES (LIFE18 NAT/UK/000039) is financially supported by LIFE, a financial instrument of the European Commission.

Feel the Bern



The [Bern Convention](#), adopted in Switzerland in 1979, was the first and largest commitment to [Favourable Conservation Status \(FCS\)](#) in history.

Now, 40 years later, Natural England's Defining Favourable Conservation Status project is driving efforts create thriving habitats and species.

The project is using Natural England's expert evidence and specialist knowledge to produce two key products for use across England – Definitions and Strategies. A definition will set out our aspirations for a habitat or species and a strategy will guide our work to get it to a good condition so it can thrive.

Project manager, Julie Erian explains;

“In the past we and partners have used all of our expert evidence and specialist knowledge to make decisions. I'm really pleased that in the 40th anniversary year of the Bern Convention we are, for the first time, setting out our vision for what Favourable Conservation Status looks like for a habitat or species.”

Recent project findings found that applying FCS definitions to areas of Natural England's work, not just in protected sites, could have a number of benefits. Case studies demonstrated that using evidence-based FCS products could help to;

- Deliver efficiency,
- Reduce risk for the organisation using the product
- Improve decision-making leading to better outcomes for nature

One of the clear benefits of the FCS strategies is that they bring together and summarise a wide variety of information. This has proved particularly beneficial in species licensing case studies and to inform decisions at the landscape scale.

Four decades ago, the Bern convention gave birth to the Favourable Conservation Status terminology. Now Natural England is working with partners and rising to the challenge, creating thriving nature for people and planet.



To find out more about our work to create thriving habitats and species contact [Julie Erian](#)

Science, evidence and partnership working at Amberley Wild Brooks

Amberley Wild Brooks SSSI is an internationally important grazing marsh in Sussex, with rare species such as the Small Water-pepper and Cut-grass growing along ditches.

The site has benefitted from long term partnership working to try and understand the ecology and management needs of the site. Local botanist Frances Abraham and others from [Sussex Botanical Recording Society](#) surveyed the ditches in 1998. This was followed up in 2016/17 when the RSPB, Sussex Wildlife Trust and Natural England Field Unit ecologists and local staff joined the Environment Agency to resurvey the site.

This enabled some analysis of trends over the last 18 years by Natural England analyst Damien Hicks, culminating in a paper published in [British and Irish Botany](#). The data analysis showed there was no decrease in overall presence of the rare and scarce species of the 1998 survey except for Greater Water-parsnip but vegetation traits suggest drier and more saline conditions with localised indicators of increase in nutrients.



To find out more contact [Mags Cousins](#)

Message to SSSI Owners occupiers and managers

A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is a conservation designation denoting a protected area. Designation is usually for the land's flora, fauna or geological interest.

There are certain things you cannot do on SSSI land without consulting Natural England and getting permission and seeking our advice first. We are making changes to how permitting authorities, managers, owners and occupiers of SSSIs will be able to request permission and advice from Natural England.

From 10th February 2020, we are asking all customers to send your requests into Natural England using a single mailbox ProtectedSites@naturalengland.org.uk. There is no change to how you request land-use planning advice. We have begun speaking to our external partners about this work and will continue to do so. Over the coming weeks, we will be contacting our customers to let them know further details and what that means for them.

To find out more contact [Charlotte Rose](#)

Natural England's Register of Enforcement Actions

Natural England has recently made some changes to how we publish our enforcement actions to make it clearer where and with whom these actions have been taken forward. Our published enforcement actions include all the Civil and Regulation specific sanctions we have served, the enforcement undertakings we have agreed and prosecutions we have carried out to protect wildlife and the natural environment. Further information can be found [here](#).

The register is updated quarterly and an update should be published at the end of January.

If you have any comments or queries please contact [Protected Sites](#)

SSSI consenting processes

Natural England has recently undertaken an initial review of our procedures for dealing with Notices for SSSI consent in order to ensure that our decision making is timely and clear. Owners and Occupiers of SSSIs are legally obliged, prior to undertaking certain activities within a SSSI, to submit notice to Natural England. Before works can take place Natural England's consent is required. Natural England has four months in which to provide a decision around consent and as part of our decision making process we consider all the potential implications for the SSSI notified features.

SSSI owners and occupiers are unlikely to see significant changes when they submit a Notice for consent but might see some differences in terms of Natural England's response. These might differences might include:

- NE more formally seeking, in writing, further information from applicants regarding their Notices
- Where NE consent is not required we will make this clear in our response
- Increased detail relating to Natural England's decision around individual activities contained within Notices

If you have any comments or queries please contact [Protected Sites](#)



Connecting people with nature: *Promoting health and wellbeing through the great outdoors*

Celebration, reflection and striding out in 2020

During 2019 we celebrated 70 years of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act and 50 years of the Cleveland Way National Trail.

The 1949 Act was just one piece of flagship legislation introduced by the post-war Government to help shape a society fit for returning servicemen allowing the establishment of Long Distance Trails (now National Trails). The first of which was the 268 mile (431km) Pennine Way in 1965.



The [Cleveland Way National Trail](#) in the North of England is 109 miles long. It runs in a horseshoe from the historic market town of Helmsley across the North York Moors National Park to the coast at Filey Brigg. On its 50th anniversary (May 24) 150 partners walked 3 miles of the Cleveland Way from Helmsley to Rievaulx Abbey led by young apprentices from the North York Moors National Park.

Colin Speakman (Academic, writer and Broadcaster), was at the opening in 1969 and at the 50th anniversary, he said: *“In another 50 years when many of us here today are just memories, specks of dust in the sunlight, walkers yet to be born will be here to share the beauty and sheer exhilaration the Cleveland Way has brought to our lives - Thank you Cleveland Way!”*



Defra Minister Lord Gardiner of Kimble and Marian Spain (Natural England's Chief Executive Officer) also attended the celebrations. Marian spoke of the importance of the 1949 Act and its significance to the National Trails family, highlighting how National Trails through partnership deliver significant health, wellbeing and economic benefits for all. Marian said *“Natural England remains fully committed to National Trails as part of our broader work to re-connect people with nature”*

National Trails are a major tourism asset enjoyed by millions of people including hikers, runners, artists, local families, volunteers, stargazers and bird watchers. Recording approximately 70 million¹ day visitors per year. The Cleveland Way estimated in 2017 that day visitors generated £14.9 million to the local economy, providing opportunities for many, the total welfare value for all National Trails is an estimated £348² million per year.

A national treasure with a captive audience

To further mark the anniversary [a new Cleveland Way video](#) has been produced by Teesside University students. It is an uplifting take seen through the optical lenses and interpretation of young people; inspiring hope for future generations by connecting them with nature.

[BBC's Songs of Praise](#) Reverend Kate Bottley presented a Cleveland Way Special in which Natural England's Hazel Thomas talks about the value of National Trails and the Cleveland Way, while sharing her personal thoughts on how the natural environment supports her faith.



The celebrations continued with a visit to Saltburn in July from Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal. Where she met partners and unveiled a new Cleveland Way signpost in Valley Gardens.

To find out more contact [Sara Schultz](#)

¹ TNS (2013) Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment National Trails Report of additional [analysis](#) and questions
² University of Exeter 2016 ORVal Recreational Valuation Tool Case Study on National Trails

Economic and health impacts of walking on English coastal path: a baseline for future evaluation (January 2020)



[A new study](#) commissioned by Natural England reveals the huge popularity of [England's coastal paths](#). Over 29 million leisure walking trips were made over a six-month period, boosting local economies. It shows the significant value of coastal walking for health and wellbeing, with 97% of people feeling refreshed and revitalised as a result of their visit.

The data provides an assessment of the benefits of England's coastal paths to local economies and communities in 2017. It can be used as a baseline to help assess the benefits of The England Coast Path if the study is repeated in future. The information is provided at a national scale, not a regional or local scale.

Coastal visits boosted the economy by £350 million, with day-trippers spending on average £8.65 per day in coastal shops and overnight visitors spending on average £36.73. This supported more than 5,900 full-time equivalent jobs along the English coast.

The number of visits to the path were estimated using automatic people counters (managed by Natural England), a survey of 2,000 people walking on English coastal paths and counts of visits made during the survey.

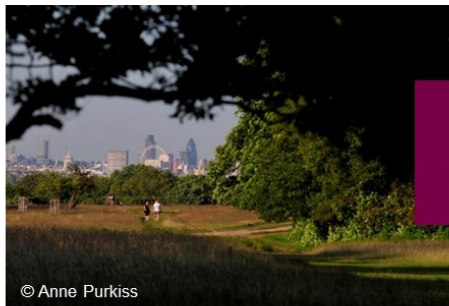
Natural England Chair Tony Juniper said: *'England's wonderful coastline is a national treasure. This research reveals how the coast brings people closer to our magnificent wildlife, contributes to local economies while promoting our health and wellbeing. Our flagship England Coast Path is taking people through some of the finest and most important landscapes in England, opening up access to historic landmarks, natural wonders and breath-taking scenery, enabling more visitors to experience, recognise and value the benefits of our environment.'*

To find out more contact [Martin Shaw](#)

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Landscapes
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We welcome your feedback and suggestions for future issues.

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