



Investing in Nature's Capital: WEL Biodiversity Priorities

August 2010

Wales Environment Link (WEL) is a network of environmental and countryside Non-Governmental Organisations in Wales, most of whom have an all-Wales remit. WEL is officially designated the intermediary body between the government and the environmental NGO sector in Wales. Its vision is to increase the effectiveness of the environmental sector in its ability to protect and improve the environment through facilitating and articulating the voice of the sector.

Budget for biodiversity: invest in all our futures

We are all shareholders in nature, but this is one company that simply can't go bust. Biodiversity is our basic life support system; we cannot live without it. And we should not take it for granted. 2010 is International Year for Biodiversity – the perfect time to check nature's balance sheet. The risk of neglecting nature comes at too high a price. The answer has to be smart investment in restoring the natural systems we all depend on. To help wildlife and people to prosper we need:

- A new green network of places where wildlife and people can thrive.
- Every school child to have a natural world experience every year.
- Well-being prescriptions to encourage outdoor exploration.
- A doubling in area of native woodland by 2050.
- A biodiversity budget for Wales.
- A legal requirement for public bodies to care for biodiversity.
- A planning system which delivers net-gain for nature.
- Our special sites in good condition by 2026.
- Safe havens for marine wildlife.
- Glastir to make the countryside better for wildlife and give value for money.

1. A new green network of places where wildlife and people can thrive

Land provides a range of services we all need: the production of wholesome, affordable food, protection from flooding, carbon storage, clean drinking water. We enjoy the great outdoors, exploring attractive landscapes peppered with historic features, whilst a diversity of wildlife makes a variety of habitats their home. These heavy expectations on land will be ever harder to meet as society and the climate change.

By managing land effectively and making space for all these services we can ensure that Wales adapts to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. And by making the most of our green spaces we can give wildlife a better chance of survival through future uncertainty. If habitats are restored and recreated in the right places they can help reduce flood risk and store carbon. We know that green places and spending time with nature is good for our well-being, so people will benefit as well.

A new green network would:

- link, expand and buffer Wales' special habitats, allowing wildlife to survive, thrive and move
- restore and create new habitats, partly to replace areas which might be lost to climate change, particularly at the coast
- protect and enhance the services land provides and trial ways to get maximum benefits from land;
- create beautiful new places for communities to enjoy healthy exercise, and revel in the wonders of nature
- encourage the removal in some areas of fly-tipping and other sources of pollution, which can be harmful to wildlife and people

The first step will be to properly understand how climate change will affect the Welsh countryside. Then we can map where new green spaces will deliver the greatest benefits, with each spatial plan area identifying their potential green places. Mapping areas for other reasons, such as identifying areas at risk from poor management, will also be important to identify spaces where multiple benefits can be gained. Some important headway has already been made with mapping areas of importance for certain species¹, but an important next step will be to combine information on Section 42 species with habitat/landscape spatial planning. A combination of private and public leadership and investment is required to create the network. Proportions of the Government's budgets for agri-environment schemes, flood risk management and public health can be diverted to the network in return for the future savings which will be delivered.

Useful fact:

In the wake of the devastating floods at Boscastle, it is estimated that changing the upstream catchment management could significantly reduce the cost of defending the village (£7.4m) from future floods with hard defences by as much as £3m.

Further Reading:

Natural Fit, RSPB, October 2004

Nature's Capital, National Trust, March 2008

Shifting Shores: Living with a changing coastline, National Trust, 2005

Case study - Wicken Fen: wetland re-creation for people and wildlife

An ancient fenland landscape and internationally renowned wetland site, Wicken Fen is home to more than 7800 species of plants, fungi and animals making it one of the most species-rich nature reserves in Britain. A raised boardwalk makes this rare and unique wildlife haven accessible and enjoyable for everyone, all year round.

Wicken Fen is particularly important because it is a surviving fragment of the once huge area of fen wetland that stretched from Cambridge to the Wash. Many of the species that live there are now very rare, and the Fen is too small to provide a sustainable home. The National Trust has therefore established the Wicken Fen Vision, our most ambitious landscape-scale habitat restoration scheme.

¹ Including Important Plant Areas, Important Bird Areas and Living Landscapes.

The Vision project aims to create a new nature reserve covering around 56 square kilometres (22 square miles) between Cambridge and Wicken Fen over the next 100 years. This will give the wildlife at Wicken Fen the space it needs to thrive and survive, as well as help compensate for loss of freshwater habitat through coastal squeeze on the Norfolk Coast. The project will also provide a huge and accessible area of countryside for people to enjoy on Cambridge's doorstep in one of the fastest developing parts of the country.

Since the Vision project started in 1999, and with the support of partners, the Trust has more than doubled the area of the nature reserve and there is land in various stages of restoration. The mosaic of habitats being developed will include wet and dry grassland, reedbeds, pools and woodland. The primary guiding principles will be to manage the land to enhance its nature conservation value, protect the depleting peat soils, secure sufficient water resources, and provide improved visitor access to the countryside.

Case Study: Keep Wales Tidy, Tidy Towns The Friends of St Cadocs and Penygarn chapel

200 members from the local area, with 10 regular hands-on volunteers, have been working to regenerate and maintain St Cadocs church grounds. This eight acre site was fast going into decline because of maintenance costs. A dedicated group of volunteers formed to help with the maintenance of the grounds and subsequently this also benefited biodiversity. It was unfeasible to keep the whole site neatly mown so a large part of the site was fenced off and turned to meadow.

A survey was conducted by the Chair of the Friends, a retired ecology lecturer, and volunteers. The whole site is now managed with wildlife in mind, ensuring a broad spectrum of habitats exist on the grounds. This is done in conjunction with keeping pathways clear to encourage people onto the site.

Another local landmark, Penygarn chapel, was also disappearing under bramble, knotweed and willow herb. Keep Wales Tidy brought in outside help, schools and other groups to help with the initial clearance work. This whole site is managed with wildlife in mind, so a rotation system has been set up, dividing the yard into 4 quadrants and clearing two per year to allow existing wildlife to remain at the site, whilst encouraging new species to move in. Paths were re-opened to encourage residents to visit the site, and benches and a bird feeding area were installed. New mixed hedges were also planted around the perimeter to encourage greater diversity of wildlife.

Case Study: Lake Vyrnwy

Lake Vyrnwy, an area of farmed landscape managed by the RSPB, is one of just four remaining upland blocks in Wales containing the diverse characteristics of heather moorland, woodland, grassland, blanket bog and the distinctive wildlife that thrives in these habitats. Its natural systems and species provide essential ecosystem services such as pollinating crops, growing food, carbon sequestration and water storage, whilst maintaining a rich level of biodiversity. RSPB Cymru and partners have showcased through a number of initiatives, including an EU LIFE-funded blanket bog restoration project, that it is possible to deliver biodiversity objectives, such as conserving and restoring breeding bird populations, alongside these essential ecosystem services. As a focal point for access to the natural environment, the area also offers physical and mental health benefits to nearby communities and visitors from across the UK, whilst simultaneously being a viable farm business, nature reserve, tourist destination, school resource, top quality producer of organic mountain lamb and Welsh black beef and finally, a source of clean water for thousands of people.

These diverse outputs are the reason RSPB Cymru have designated Lake Vyrnwy to be at the forefront of RSPB's distinctive UK partnership framework, Futurescapes, contributing to the revolution in landscape-scale conservation that is needed to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Through Lake Vyrnwy they aim to highlight that coordinated land management can

deliver a healthy thriving countryside for farming, species, habitats and people in a way that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. Futurescapes will allow the RSPB and partners to demonstrate innovative management techniques to conserve and restore upland ecosystems and their characteristic species and habitats across whole landscapes, helping them to adapt to a changing climate, at the same time as contributing to climate change mitigation (through increased carbon sequestration) and other vital services.

2. Every school child to have a natural world experience every year

Out-of-Classroom or 'real world' learning, including first-hand experience of the natural world and cultural heritage, has been shown to be one of the most effective forms of education. It broadens children's outlook, improves their motivation and personal and inter-personal skills, and creates a sense of place, nature, culture and history that can lead to citizenship and political engagement. It provides inspirational experiences, which teachers can use as a springboard for wider curriculum-based work, across core subjects. In itself, and by fostering an interest in outdoor activities, it helps keep children fit and healthy, physically and mentally. It is the foundation for a full life, to which every child should have access.

Research² indicates that out of classroom learning, properly planned, and integrated with classroom learning, improves pupil performance across all curriculum subjects. Out of classroom learning provides relevant, challenging and inspiring activities which help children to develop a deeper understanding of their environment, their community and themselves. This approach to learning underpins all levels of the new curriculum introduced in Wales since September 2008, in which education for sustainable development and global citizenship plays an integral part. By taking learning outside the classroom, children acquire real, first-hand knowledge and skills through inspirational and unforgettable experiences.

Out-of-Classroom learning in the real world offers children the opportunity to go out-of-doors and experience nature and culture for themselves rather than learning solely from a textbook, blackboard, whiteboard or computer screen. It's a chance to hunt for bugs, experience the dark mystery of a cave, hear birds singing, smell and feel the woods or paddle in a stream. The International Eco School initiative, Eco-Schools, run by Keep Wales Tidy here in Wales, encourages pupils to start this process in their school grounds. They are encouraged to review their school grounds, put an action plan into place for improvements, which they then monitor and evaluate to see the effect of their actions. By using this framework, pupils get a real sense of ownership and understanding of how they can make a difference and gain confidence to explore nature in the wider outdoors.

Learning experiences in the real world add significantly to pupils' education, including their appreciation of the natural environment. They can improve long-term memory, enable higher-order learning and give children a better grasp of, and more confidence in, the natural environment. It is through contact with – and developing a better understanding of – the natural environment that children and young people are inspired to help care for and want to protect biodiversity for future generations. For example, via Young Reporters for the Environment, another international programme run by Keep Wales Tidy, secondary school pupils can report on local environmental issues that are important to them on topics such as biodiversity and climate change and, through this, raise awareness of these issues to a wider audience. This year schools in Wales achieved two international awards for their entries in the biodiversity and energy categories³.

² Stuart Nundy referred to in the NFER/Kings College research into Out of Classroom Learning, 2004.

³ For more information visit <http://www.keepwalestidy.org/4712>

To encourage and support natural world experiences, the relevant training and guidance must be available to teachers, so they are confident in running outdoor visits and activities. Some of this guidance is already available via partnerships such as Real World Learning Cymru, and Forestry Commission Wales. Parents, grandparents and carers should be encouraged by schools to take part in natural world activities and support outdoor learning for their children. Funding for transport, outdoor educational materials and weatherproof clothing will aid such initiatives, as will guidance on fundraising activities that teachers and parents could organise. It is important that natural world learning is endorsed through the national curriculum so that it becomes a standard part of a child's education.

Case study:

The following quotations from secondary school pupils describing their experiences, illustrate the value of added value of out of classroom learning.

"I went to Bluebell Wood. I thought it was very interesting - we learned about plants and wildlife".

"Learning outdoors is a lot better than indoors because you can understand things better - you can see and feel them."

3. Well-being prescriptions to encourage outdoor exploration

Increases in heart disease, obesity and stress related illness have catalysed recognition of, and support for, a much greater emphasis on enhancing wellbeing and on preventative health care, particularly through encouraging more active lifestyles. Over half of adults in Wales are currently overweight or obese⁴. By 2050 it is expected that 60% of the UK population will be obese according to a UK Government Foresight report.

The natural health services provided by our green spaces and countryside are often overlooked, yet access to green space and the natural environment plays a significant role in sustaining people's physical and mental health and wellbeing, in addition to helping people on the road to recovery after illness⁵.

For many people, taking up exercise, especially to improve health, needs some form of structured programme and inspiration. Activities such as walking, running and cycling are growing in popularity and are the most affordable means of improving physical health. Initiatives such as BTCV's Green Gym and Mentro Allan indicate the valuable contribution that formalised outdoor activities can make to improving health and wellbeing, not to mention the benefits to physical and mental health of projects which create new green spaces and wildlife habitats, such as those undertaken by Keep Wales Tidy's Tidy Towns volunteers⁶.

There are potentially very significant cost savings for the health service in more widely recognising green exercise as a clinically valid treatment option for mental and physical ill health. It has been estimated that a 10% increase in adult physical activity would benefit the UK by £500 million per year, saving 6,000 lives⁷. Research by Mind (The National Association for Mental Health) has also shown that a supervised programme of exercise can be as effective as antidepressants in treating mild to moderate depression. This could present

⁴ Health Survey Wales 2005-6

⁵ Ulrich R S. 1984. View through a window may influence recovery from surgery. *Science* 224, 420-21.

⁶ Keep Wales Tidy are currently undertaking research into the Social Return on Investment that such activities produce.

⁷ Department of Health. 2004. At least five a week: Evidence on the impact of physical activity and its relationship to health. A report from the Chief Medical Officer. London

another potentially significant saving, when in 2007 more than £13.5 million worth of antidepressant prescriptions were written in Wales⁸.

More could be done to maximise the health benefits that our land can provide by introducing a framework in which local health funding is directed towards prescribing greater activity, encouraging green exercise and through partnership working. GPs should be encouraged to promote volunteering and outdoor activities to patients who would benefit. Through a well-being prescription system, health practitioners would be linked to groups able to offer healthy activities. Some of the savings from prescribing more traditional treatments could be redirected to organisations to run activities and create healthy environments. This has already been proven by some Primary Care Trusts in England. We should also expect more in the way of green space provision on the back of new development.

Case study: Community Walks

The aim of *Community Walks* is to promote and provide opportunities for led walks in Flintshire and its neighbouring counties in order to increase healthy living, physical activity and social and mental well being. *Community Walks* came into being on April 1st 2010 and consists of 3 communities that were previously a part of *Walkabout Flintshire*. The Group run free guided walks designed to appeal to those with little experience of outdoor activities, and as participants walk as a group with leaders they also benefit from the social contact that the walks provide. All walkers complete a health questionnaire and have the opportunity to receive advice on nutrition and healthy living. In their first 3 months of operation *Community Walks* has provided walks for over 2200 people in the 3 areas. The scheme is funded by town councils and, as an affiliate group, has the support of Ramblers Cymru.

Case Study: Hafan Hedd Tidy Towns and Woodlands Group (Ceredigion)

In the last four years, Hafan Hedd Tidy Towns Group has made a huge improvement to the Coastline in Ceredigion. When the project started, they were averaging 35 bags of rubbish at every visit. They are now averaging 12 bags of rubbish, which demonstrates that their litter-picking work is having a positive impact on the amount of rubbish left by beach visitors. In total, over the four years, the group has collected 1,868 bags of rubbish, mostly from the stretch of coastline between Aberaeron and Llanrhystud. As well as litter-picking, the group has made improvements to the safety and appearance of the steps leading down to the beach. The local community and regular holidaymakers have remarked on the huge improvement to the area and thanked the volunteers for their hard work.

The Hafan Hedd Woodlands Group has cleared a large area of woodland, which was overgrown and had been used as an illegal dumping area for many years. They have now improved and developed this area further by creating footpaths, waterfalls, and planting young willow trees. They have also carried out dry stone walling, rustic fencing, and are in the process of building a wishing well. The long term goal of the group is to educate children of school age about the importance of woodland areas within our natural and social environment.

Both groups consist of clients and staff from the Community Mental Health Team in South Ceredigion. All the clients suffer with a serious mental health illness. Involvement with these groups has had a positive impact on the well-being of these clients. They have been able to learn new skills, gain self confidence, and improve their communication abilities. These projects have made them feel trusted by being able to use different tools, and being part of a team. It has made them feel socially included within their community.

Some of these clients have now moved on, and have gone on to college, voluntary work, and part/full time work. These are achievements that they had previously only dreamed about, yet

⁸ Prescription Cost Analysis Wales 2007

they have become a reality due to the benefits they have gained from their involvement in the environmental and community work carried out in partnership with Keep Wales Tidy.

4. A doubling in area of native woodland by 2050

Well managed woodland provides a wide range of benefits for biodiversity. Many plants animals and birds rely on woodland and trees for shelter and food. The myriad of trees and other plants together with many different height levels found in a wood, from the woodland floor to the tree canopy, provide a wide range of different habitat niches. Ensuring that the right management is delivered across all woodland, delivering habitat mosaics, is the best way to ensure that the benefits of quality, as well as quantity, are secured for the long term. It is this diversity within woodlands that provides homes for the fantastic range of plants and animals that frequent woods and enable so many wildlife species to exist alongside one another.

Woodland also has other benefits, including the provision of sustainable fuel, creating leisure and education space, improving water quality and assisting in flood management. By creating a sustainable planning system which considers woodland and trees as an integral part of every planning application, very considerable environmental gains could be achieved. By creating a user-friendly grants scheme, which encourages landowners and farmers to plant trees and manage woodland in a sustainable way, for the greatest environmental benefit, we can help to protect our biodiversity and our built environment from the effects of climate change. New and existing woodlands, particularly in urban areas, must also be managed to ensure they do not become illegal dumping or fly-tipping areas.

To achieve a doubling of native woodland cover, measures must also be put in place to minimise the further loss of existing native trees, especially ancient trees. The current Tree Preservation Order system has significant loopholes that limit its value as a positive conservation measure. It provides no protection for very old 'veteran' trees, including those that could be categorised as 'dying', although these trees are often the most valuable in heritage and wildlife terms. Veteran and genuinely ancient trees should be recognised as 'Green Monuments', and their owners given proactive support to conserve them.

Case study: Pontbren Scheme

One excellent example of what increasing native woodland cover could look like across Wales, and also an excellent example of how this could be achieved, is the [Pontbren scheme](#) near Llanfair Caereinion in Powys.

Here, 10 neighbouring commercial farmers have cooperated to plant 120,000 native trees, creating 20.5 ha of new woodland cover. As well as biodiversity benefits, planting of this nature can increase the infiltration rate of rainfall, reducing peak water flows so as to help reduce flooding. It can also help improve the quality of rivers and streams by reducing sedimentation and run off of nutrient from manures thereby benefitting fisheries and riparian biodiversity. The trees can act as useful shelter belts for livestock. They can produce a renewable supply of biomass, which can either be chipped and used as valuable animal bedding, or as firewood. They provide welcome new habitats for wildlife as well as soaking up carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, thus helping to mitigate climate change.

Moreover the hydrological benefits of the project have been analysed by Imperial College, who published a report in December 2008 which concluded that optimally placed tree belts were

found to reduce the median peak flow by 29%⁹. So if farmers across the country were able to take a similar approach, they would be doing a great deal to reduce the frequency and severity of floods that have been increasingly common at a time of climate change and have an inevitable knock on effect for other habitats.

Otters have returned after an absence of 30 years. Britain's most endangered mammal, the water vole, has been sighted. Pontbren is now home to three birds on the UK Red List of species of highest conservation concern (Hen Harrier, Skylark and Linnet).

5. A biodiversity budget for Wales

Within any new framework for addressing biodiversity decline a clear budget is required. This will enable WAG and the statutory agencies to clarify what they will be spending money on in order to deliver biodiversity targets. WAG, statutory agencies and NGO's should draw up a funded strategy to ensure a 2026 Wales Environment Strategy target can be progressed. This will ensure WAG leads the UK and the EU on implementation of a binding 2020 biodiversity target.

There are opportunities to generate investment from existing public spend, and the private sector. Current biodiversity grants should be tested against priorities identified by the Wales Biodiversity Partnership to ensure that they are being spent smartly and are 'plant-proofed' to ensure that the fundamental building blocks of all habitats, our plants and fungi, are given due consideration in their role of sustaining and sheltering all our other wildlife. The principle of 'net environmental gain' should be applied to WAG policy and implementation by WAG, Local authorities and wider society. The Government should also assess current funding streams for their biodiversity potential and aim to maximise the benefits for the natural environment.

A Biodiversity Levy (similar to the Landfill or Aggregates schemes) should be raised on activities where there is an impact on biodiversity that cannot be directly mitigated, and for the wider indirect impacts of policies or developments. However, it is important that such a levy is not misused. Wales Environment Link would not support a Biodiversity Levy being used in such a way as to allow organisations or individuals to cause damage to important habitats and ecosystems so long as they are able to pay the levy: safeguarding biodiversity must be the first priority¹⁰.

6. A legal requirement for public bodies to care for biodiversity

Public bodies, including Local Authorities, oversee a significant proportion of the land of Wales. One key action to prevent further loss of biodiversity would be to legislate for all public bodies to maintain their biodiversity¹¹ and, where possible, to improve the diversity of their wildlife. In furtherance of this, they should be required to produce and publish a register of their biodiversity holding and record any losses and gains. Such a register should be available for inspection on demand. Public bodies should also make an annual public report listing any losses and gains.

⁹ Impacts of upland land management on flood risk: multi-scale modelling methodology and results from the Pontbren experiment. FRMRC Research Report UR 16. Available online at:

http://www.floodrisk.org.uk/images/stories/Phase1/ur16_impacts_upland_land_management_wp2_2_v1_0.pdf

¹⁰ RSPB Cymru is currently undertaking further research into this subject.

¹¹ Maintaining biodiversity means that there should be no loss of biodiversity due to activities undertaken or controlled by public bodies. There may be occasions when, due to an imperative and over-riding public interest, and where there is no other reasonable alternative, there will be some loss. However losses should not be allowed to take place until adequate replacement has been put in place and shown to be functioning.

The register of biodiversity will require an audit of the wildlife within the administration of public bodies, as far as is reasonably practical to do so. For Local Authorities this will be within their administrative boundary as well as their own land holdings. For other public bodies, this will be land in their ownership or control. This will require the following:

- Habitats – type, extent and location of habitat at Phase I level. Much of this can be obtained through CCW Phase I survey, which is currently being updated. This should also include hedgerows, trees under TPO, ASNW.
- Species – identify locations of key species at an appropriate geospatial level. It is recognised that there are sensitivity issues i.e. identifying locations of sensitive species and private homes in respect of bats, so this will need to be considered.

Much of this information is, or is being, provided to Local Records Centres so it should not mean an onerous task for public bodies to undertake, nor should it involve a significant cost. In fact this work could help to forge links between Local Records Centres and public bodies.

7. A planning system which delivers net-gain for nature

Planning Policy Wales and the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act identify the objective of planning as being to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. In practice, many developments result in harm to the environment. The cumulative consequence is an erosion of biodiversity, landscape and townscape. A net environmental gain approach would ensure that environmental harm is minimised.

There are developing ideas about how a net environmental gain approach could be embedded into the planning system¹². WEL believes that a net-gain approach to planning should work on the following principles:

- New development should be considered carefully and, where it impacts on biodiversity, the need for development on economic grounds should not automatically outweigh the need to protect biodiversity
- Sensitive development, which makes space for wildlife, should be encouraged, including:
 - making space in roof structures and gardens for birds and bats
 - landscaping that takes into account existing habitat and works with this, rather than removing and replacing it with sterile gardens
 - working with NGOs to create attractive developments that are rich in wildlife
- Where harm to biodiversity cannot be mitigated directly, compensation must be paid in some form

A Biodiversity Levy, as suggested above, may be one way in which harmful activities could be used to raise funds for habitat creation or protection in other areas. However, this, as with other methods of compensation such as land banking, has the potential to be misused. WEL would like to see further research into the uses and methods of compensation, and would like an assurance that “those who can afford to pay” will not be able to use such methods to damage important habitats and ecosystems which are impossible to replace.

8. Our special sites in good condition by 2026

¹² RSPB Cymru is currently researching this subject in detail, and their results will inform WEL's thinking on this.

Wales' special sites are the jewels in the biodiversity crown. But too many are degraded and are subject to pressures or inappropriate management. They risk becoming ever-shrinking islands in a sea of inhospitable countryside. They need to become healthy hubs of robust ecosystems which can sustain delivery of services, from which wildlife can spread through the countryside, and where most threatened species are allowed to recover.

Much work has been done to understand what each site needs. We now need a concerted effort to deliver the actions and ensure that sites are in good condition. This will often mean an injection of resources and advice. It is challenging, but possible, to implement effective management across a landscape for a number of important biological components (as well as ecological functions and processes). Our approach to protected sites must deliver sustainable land/water management, livelihoods and biodiversity conservation. These combined factors are crucial in ensuring our countryside is managed effectively to meet sustainable development goals, adapt to climate change and ensure ecosystems are functioning effectively. They must be able to deliver the benefits and services we, as a society, value.

To ensure the good work to date is not wasted, sustained and focused investment is required to enable land managers to effectively address issues on those sites still in unfavourable condition and to support the management of sites that have started on the road to recovery. Investment in protected sites offers excellent value for money. Recent studies have shown an investment ratio of 1:3 in terms of the potential benefits returned to the public for the public funds invested in SSSIs on agricultural land¹³. With so much of the land area of Wales under agricultural management, this suggests proper investment in designated site management through the management agreement process, as well as other mechanisms, will go a long way to achieving both Environment Strategy Wales objectives as well as *One Wales: One Planet* commitments. However, it is essential this be undertaken in combination with investment in the wider countryside through such measures as Glastir, Better Woodlands for Wales and the Natural Environment Framework.

9. Safe havens for marine wildlife

Existing SPAs and SACs, collectively known as European Marine Sites (EMSs), cover more than 30% of Wales' marine area and 70% of the coast. Despite the level of protection these designations confer, Wales' marine biodiversity continues to be degraded in many places. Improvements are needed in implementation of the legal framework and practical management of these sites in order to allow recovery and increase the resilience of the marine ecosystem as a whole.

Following the completion of the Highly Protected Marine Conservation Zones (HPMCZ) Project (currently underway) the Minister has a duty under the Marine and Coastal Access Act to lay a report before the National Assembly for Wales, assessing their efficacy, when combined with the existing suite of sites, in contributing towards an ecologically coherent UK network of Marine protected areas. This review should take full account of S42/BAP objectives, identifying, where appropriate, the need for further action beyond completion of the HPMCZ project, including further designations if necessary. We request a commitment that the need for any further designations to support these objectives will be identified and actioned as soon after 2012 as possible.

10. Glastir to make the countryside better for wildlife and give value for money

¹³ NAO 2008. *Natural England's Role in Improving Sites of Special Scientific Interest*. Also, Jacobs & SAC 2008. *Environmental Accounts for Agriculture*. Defra

Farming covers at least 80% of Wales' land, which means it really makes a difference for wildlife. Glastir is a great way to reward farmers for benefiting people and the environment, and we need it to do this efficiently. To make sure Glastir works for wildlife we need:

- a monitoring system to measure the scheme's impacts on biodiversity in place before the scheme opens;
- an annual assessment of which options participants have chosen, to make sure a good range of biodiversity management is being delivered;
- fine-tuning of the scheme to redress any issues brought to light, such as poor take-up of more challenging options;
- easily accessible, good quality advice on wildlife-friendly farming for all farmers as part of a programme to deliver skills for sustainable land management;
- excellent project officers with the skills and capacity to work with land managers and conservation experts;
- support for commons' graziers so they can access the scheme.

In the past we have not been able to check that public money has been soundly invested in land management because there was no proper baseline information or monitoring system. By having such a system in place before the scheme starts it will be possible to check that Glastir is benefiting the environment and that public money is being wisely invested. We also need to check the scheme's success as it gets underway. Annual checks will allow the scheme to be adjusted to ensure that the whole range of management options is being used. Not all farmers are confident to deliver what Glastir requires, and those who are not should be able to turn to advice and training, or be guided by a skilled project officer.

The complexities of commons will make it particularly challenging for commons' graziers to access the scheme. However, 45% of the area of Welsh commons are designated SSSIs¹⁴, making it essential that dedicated advice and support is in place. The experience and expertise of National Park Authorities could usefully help shape the scheme in their areas to ensure maximum benefit for landscape and biodiversity.

The public will benefit from protected and enhanced biodiversity; beautiful landscapes with conserved historic features; plentiful good-quality water and soils. The monitoring system will give people confidence that public money is being invested wisely in a scheme which is delivering results.

How WEL members can contribute

WEL members will work to inspire people to value and care for biodiversity. We will provide opportunities to explore the natural world, including out of classroom learning for school pupils. We will carry out practical conservation work to protect, conserve and restore habitats and species, and will continue to contribute to the Wales Biodiversity Partnership and help deliver the Biodiversity Action Plan. We are also putting significant expertise and time into the development of the Natural Environment Framework. In short, we are ready to help shape a nation of nature lovers.

¹⁴ National Assembly for Wales Rural Development Sub-Committee, Future of the Uplands Inquiry, April 2010

The following WEL members support this document:

Bat Conservation Trust

Butterfly Conservation Wales

Campaign for National Parks

Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales / CPRW

Coed Cadw / Woodland Trust

Keep Wales Tidy

National Trust / Ymddiriedolaeth Genedlaethol

Plantlife Cymru

Ramblers Cymru

RSPB Cymru

Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust

Wildlife Trusts Wales

Wales Environment Link unites voluntary bodies whose primary aims include the conservation, protection or quiet enjoyment of landscape, wildlife or amenity in Wales
Mae Cyswllt Amgylchedd Cymru yn uno cyrff gwirfoddol sydd â'u hamcanion pennaf yn cynnwys cadwraeth, gwarchodaeth neu fwynhad tawel o dirlun, bywyd gwylt ac amwynder yng Nghymru
Reg. Charity No: 1022675 Rhif Elusen Gofrestredig: 1022675