

**AM 686/24**

## **NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

### **AUTHORITY MEETING – 25 July 2024**

#### **TAKING LEADERSHIP ON NATURE RECOVERY**

**Report by:** Paul Walton, Head of Environment and Rural Economy

#### **Summary:**

The UK, like most other countries worldwide has experienced a significant loss of biodiversity. The fourth State of Nature report, published in 2023 shows this decline is continuing and there is increasing expectation that National Parks could, and should play a key role in reversing biodiversity loss. This paper sets out how the family of National Parks and we, with partners in the New Forest National Park, are responding to the challenge.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

- 1. It is recommended that the Authority note the content of this report.**

#### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1** The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries on earth. Urgent action is needed to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and in England there is an expectation that National Parks should be at the heart of Nature Recovery.
- 1.2** The Lawton Review (2010), the 25 Year Environment Plan (2018), the Environment Act 2021, the Environment Improvement Plan 2023 (EIP) and Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023 all identify key roles for National Parks to help reverse the decline in biodiversity. There is a Targets and Outcomes framework being developed to help National Parks prioritise delivery of EIP goals, with an emphasis on the role SSSIs play in supporting the UK's commitment to manage 30% of land for nature by 2030. The 2019 Landscapes Review (the Glover report) called for National Parks to do more for nature. More recently in April, the Campaign for National Parks [National Parks Health Check Report](#) on Nature Recovery published in April stated that "making National Parks better is fundamental to tackling species extinction and biodiversity loss".
- 1.3** National Parks are reservoirs of important habitats and home to endangered species. If nature cannot thrive in National Parks, then where can it? This paper provides an update on how England's National Parks are responding to these challenges and how we are working to ensure the rare wildlife and habitats of the New Forest can drive and inspire nature recovery not just in the National Park but across our whole region.

## **2 Nature Recovery in the New Forest**

- 2.1 The New Forest can be regarded as an ark for nature in southern England, with the long cultural association of traditional commoning and its system of grazing by large free roaming animals creating unique habitats rich in biodiversity. Nature recovery has long been a key theme of the work of the Authority and its partners, most notably the near 15 years of agri-environment investment in the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. This has meant the condition of the New Forest SSSI representing the priority habitats at the core of the forest is either Favourable (47.1%) or Unfavourable recovering (42.1%). We are bringing together stakeholders into a ReNew Nature Partnership (AM-655-23) and championing a spatial approach around four nature recovery themes (Appendix 1). We have also secured resources through the Species Survival Fund to enable partners to deliver nature recovery projects across the National Park.
- 2.2 However, with continued uncertainty over future Environmental Land Management Schemes and development of “Green finance” markets in particular there remains much to do to ensure National Parks can deliver nature recovery at scale.

## **2 Team Nature**

- 2.1 National Park Authorities have limited control over what happens on most land in National Parks and limited resources available for nature recovery. However, by working together across the family of National Parks there are opportunities to do more for nature recovery. This is being championed by Alison Barnes as Lead Chief Executive for Nature Recovery across the UK’s National Parks with the development of a “Team Nature” approach. This means working together as a team in each landscape, convening across sectors to develop plans and win resources to deliver nature recovery projects.
- 2.2 NPAs have the benefit of being place based, responsible for the preparation of statutory management plans. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 strengthened the role of protected landscapes and their management plans in relation to biodiversity. It amended the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 by placing a duty on relevant bodies to further the purposes of National Parks and requires a relevant authority to contribute to the preparation of a Park management plan. It also requires National Park Management Plans to contribute to meeting the targets of the Environment Act 2021, which include targets for biodiversity. These changes give NPAs the opportunity to focus management plans on the multiple public goods provided by a nature rich national park landscape, to work in partnership with others and to influence national policy and allocation of resources in relation to the environment.
- 2.3 By working more closely together “Team Nature” can set clear goals and targets for nature recovery, connect with communities and landowners to build trusted relationships and convene these partners to chase the resources to needed for delivery.
- 2.4 To be effective, this policy approach and consensus building must also develop into the partnerships needed for the delivery of practical projects. Across the National Park family there are many different examples of how this is done but all have key things in

common - working with farmers and land managers, developing bilateral agreements with key NGOs such as the RSPB and Wildlife Trusts and working with National Parks Partnerships to help scale up projects to have the level of impact necessary to bring about nature recovery. The ReNew Nature Partnership (AM655/23) is an example of how we are developing this approach here in the New Forest.

- 2.5 Together the English National Parks have developed a business case for nature recovery, setting an ambition of restoring 165,000 hectares for nature recovery by 2030 and identifying the level of investment needed to deliver it - £800million. Most of the land identified for nature recovery is outside of protected sites and focusses on four key habitat themes: new native woodland, freshwater system improvements, grassland and heathland restoration and peatland restoration. The finance will need to be secured from a broad range of funders, including Agri-environment schemes, water industry funds, Environment Agency funding, habitat mitigation, BNG and charitable funding and philanthropic donations
- 2.6 To deliver this 165,000ha of nature recovery requires demonstrable leadership across a range of different areas (Appendix 2):
- Data and evidence - working with Natural England on the development of a Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework
  - Funding – making best use of the core grant and seeking external funding and private investment
  - Policy – ensuring national parks remain a focus for agri-environment delivery through the agricultural transition; the creation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies with national parks prioritised in the development of a Nature Recovery Network
  - Planning – using the National Parks planning role and delivery of the Partnership Plan to focus on nature recovery
  - Partnership – working through the Protected Landscape Partnership (with National Landscapes and National Trails) to deliver at scale, sharing learning and best practice.
  - The vast majority of land in National Parks is privately owned. Engaging with landowners, farmers and land managers and developing joint approaches to delivering nature recovery at scale will be needed.

### **3 Team Nature priorities**

- 3.1 UK National Parks have identified priorities for the next 12 months. These include:
- Making the case to the new government for National Parks to play a key role in nature recovery
  - Influencing the development of the of the agri-environment schemes, learning lessons from the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme
  - Strengthening relationships with environmental NGO's and national agencies to help prioritise and focus on delivery on their land in National Parks
  - Developing a call to action for Nature in National Parks, similar to the recent National Parks involvement in the Race to Zero programme
  - Inspiring the next generation to do more for nature through opportunities for engagement and training.
- 3.2 Through closer working we can be exemplars, making the case for National Parks to be "Nature Capitals", leading rather waiting for agencies to direct us.

## 4 Nature Recovery in the New Forest

- 4.1 There are numerous examples of how we are working to deliver the principles of our leadership role on nature recovery here in the New Forest. These include:
- A Partnership Plan that sets out a clear ambition for nature recovery. Re:New Nature is one of our five themes and we have set targets for biodiversity in the Partnership Plan highlighting the collective commitment to nature recovery. The Partnership Plan themes – which also includes a specific theme on working as Team New Forest, for which building partnership and a Team for Nature is a key part.
  - Working with Natural England to improve SSSI condition data. With 56% of the National Park designated SSSI it is essential that up-to-date, good quality data underpins work to enhance the condition of the protected areas within the National Park.
  - A specific focus on Nature Recovery through the Re:New Nature Partnership –
  - developing a portfolio of projects that shows the potential for 9000ha, at an estimated cost of £24m, (based on Countryside Stewardship rates in 2021); working together to identify the most likely areas for that investment and to secure the funding to support it. This focusses on opportunities for woodland restoration and hedgerow creation, extending grassland and heathland habitats and wetland and peatland restoration.
  - Using our core grant and our strong partnerships to lever in external resources. The most recent example of this is the successful Species Survival Fund application that secured £1.2million for conservation across 20 sites covering up to 250ha. The application was prepared and submitted by the NPA, but delivery of the project is through 6 key partners: Freshwater Habitats Trust, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Wild New Forest, RSPB and the New Forest Commoners Defence Association.
  - Continuing to make the case for a bespoke successor scheme to HLS. The NPA convenes the Forest Farming Group, which is looking to ensure the successor to the Verderers HLS scheme, due to end in 2027, brings investment to help nature in the Forest recover and be more resilient in the face of climate change. The unique complexities of the New Forest are not well served by national agri-environment schemes and we are working with Defra and others to develop bespoke elements that will address the needs of the commoning and farming communities in the National Park.
  - The delivery of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme is a major contribution to support of land managers to deliver climate and nature objectives. £456,000 in grants have been allocated since the start of the programme in 2021
  - supporting the planting of over 6km of hedgerow and 3km of hedgerow restoration, the creation of 23ha of wildlife rich habitat and the planting of over 1100 trees.
  - Through our planning role we are helping direct Biodiversity Net Gain and nutrient neutrality credits, and habitat mitigation/compensation measures in the areas where they will best support nature recovery in the National Park.
- 4.2 There is an expectation that National Parks will be a cornerstone of nature recovery in the UK. Through the actions highlighted above - convening partners, winning resources and working together across the family of National Parks - we are demonstrating the leadership needed to try and make this happen.

## Recommendation

**It is recommended that the Authority note content of this report.**

**Contact:** Paul Walton, Head of Environment and Rural Economy  
[paul.walton@newforestnpa.gov.uk](mailto:paul.walton@newforestnpa.gov.uk) 01590 646631

**Previous Papers:** AM-655-23

## Appendix 1 Re:New Nature in the New Forest



## APPENDIX 2 National Parks Leadership role in Nature Recovery

