

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 4 November 2024

Net Zero with Nature - establishing a robust and consistent evidence base

Report by: John Stride, Net Zero with Nature Programme Manager

1 Summary

- 1.1 An outcome of the 2024/25 New Forest National Park Annual Work Programme is for a robust and consistent evidence base for climate action to deliver a net zero National Park by 2050, with some priorities set out for this work. This paper seeks to update RAPC members on progress towards the outcome

Recommendation:

It is recommended that Members note the report.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 Since declaring a climate and nature emergency in 2020 (Ref AM594-20) regular papers have reviewed the work of the Authority in aiming to develop and deliver a plan for the National Park and surrounding area to be “net zero with nature” by 2050. This paper focusses on the specific outcome of developing a robust and consistent evidence base for climate action and the associated actions set out in the 2024/25 annual work programme:

- Gain Partnership Plan Leadership Group endorsement of the net-zero pathway.
- Agree a framework to address evidence gaps regarding the carbon storage and sequestration rates of the National Park’s habitats.
- Take forward the agreed actions of National Parks UK in relation to net zero.
- Develop a means of tracking progress towards net zero goal by 2050.
- Build an understanding of climate risks the National Park faces and the adaptations necessary to manage those risks.

3 Endorsement of the net-zero pathway

- 3.1 For the NFNPA to secure endorsement of the net-zero pathway our partners and stakeholders need to be assured of the evidence base we are using. [The Net Zero Pathway](#), produced by Small World Consulting (SWC) gives us a sound base on which to work but there are two elements of challenge that need to be addressed: the apportionment of land use change targets identified in the Net Zero pathway and the use of the consumption-based model which is different to the territorial model of emissions reporting.
- 3.2 In addition, the Protected Landscapes Target and Outcomes Framework details 10 targets and outcomes must be incorporated into Management/Partnership Plans by July 2025. Three of these targets have relevance to our Net Zero pathway.

3.3 Apportionment of land use change targets

(Note - since its original publication in 2022, the net zero pathway has been updated for all National Parks based on new data and some changed methodologies. As such, the figures below differ to those published in the original report.)

3.3.1 Target - 107 additional hectares of woodland creation each year

Opportunity mapping by SWC highlighted suitable land cover that could achieve around 70 hectares of woodland creation per year, increased to 107ha/yr to reflect the high ambition Climate Change Committee scenario for the UK to achieve 50,000ha of woodland creation per year scenario. 'Suitable' land cover within this methodology includes the SSSI open heathland and grassland habitats of the New Forest as designated sites were not automatically excluded.

3.3.2 To 'correct' the apportionment target, we have commissioned SWC to rerun the modelling to exclude all designated (SSSI, SPA, SAC, RAMSAR) sites. This will reduce the area suitable for woodland creation and thus the net zero pathway will be altered. This update is due by the end of November 2024.

3.3.4 Target - 1 additional hectare of peat restoration each year

The peat map for the New Forest is not of a quality to accurately determine the true extent and depth of peat within the National Park and the opportunity for restoration to support our route to net zero. Natural England, funded by the Nature for Climate Fund, are updating this map with surveys in the New Forest undertaken in summer 2024. The expected timeline for delivery of the updated map is due in March 2025. Depending on the outputs, we may commission a bespoke update to our net zero pathway based upon this revised peat map early in 2025/26. The updated peat map will enable better analysis of carbon sequestration rates and storage within the New Forest.

3.4 Consumption based approach and territorial modelling

3.4.1 Through Small World Consulting, the family of England's National Parks have adopted a consumption-based approach to calculate all greenhouse gas emissions associated with producing, transporting, using, and disposing of products and services consumed by a particular community or entity in a given time period. At a national level the UK formally reports emissions based on a territorial model, calculating emissions that are produced within a given boundary.

3.4.2 Territorial emissions do not account for emissions embedded in global trade, where emissions may be imported or exported in the form of traded goods, whereas consumption emissions do. If we compare the 2022 consumption emissions baseline for the New Forest National Park produced by SWC to the territorial emissions reported for the same year, we can see the scale of difference in the starting point. (Fig 2)

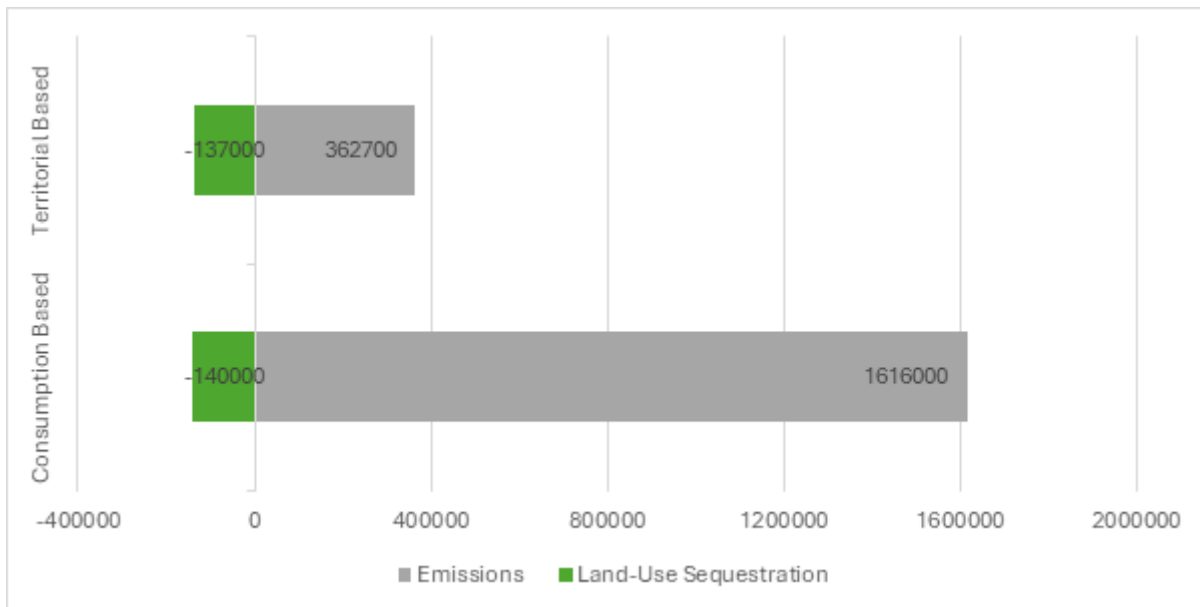


Figure 2: Comparison of territorial and consumption-based emissions estimates for the New Forest National Park for 2019 (TCO₂e/yr)

3.4.3 With regard to land use sequestration the two estimates are largely similar, underlining the need for the National Park Authority to continue its approach of “net zero with nature”. The major reductions across energy-use, food & drink, other goods consumption and travel are needed to make significant progress towards net zero and these are areas that are more within the scope of our partners and stakeholders such as the local authorities and the commercial sector.

3.4.5 We have prioritised working with New Forest District Council (NFDC) to align our approach to net zero. NFDC report emissions based on the territorial model. We have been working together to ensure that we are prioritising action based upon our organisational strengths and critically to have a united approach when working with other partners and the local community such as through our work with the New Forest Green Groups. The technical detail of net zero can be a barrier to engagement, so we are working to make sure messaging is clear and the ask of our communities is accessible but impactful.

3.5 Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF)

3.5.1 All National Parks and National Landscapes are being asked to report on quantifiable targets to help achieve national outcomes in the Environment Improvement Plan. Of relevance to our net zero with nature programme are:

- i) Restore or create more than 250,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats within Protected Landscapes, outside protected sites by 2042 (from a 2022 baseline).
- ii) Restore approximately 130,000 hectares of peat in Protected Landscapes by 2050.
- iii) Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from 2022 baseline).

3.5.2 An initial apportionment of these targets (September 2024) has created a baseline target for the New Forest of:

- 223 hectares per year of wildlife-rich habitat
- 0.75 hectares per year of peat restoration
- 60.25 hectares per year of woodland creation.

These figures correspond reasonably with those generated by the net zero pathway.

3.5.3 There is a requirement to agree local targets, using these baselines as a starting point, and to publish them on the NPA website by July 2025. It is critical that our Partners understand the interaction between the net-zero pathway and the PLTOF, the baselines of each, the ambition, the methodology and the current scale of incentive and investment available to drive land-use change for nature and for climate.

3.5.4 So, when we refer to ‘endorsement of the net zero pathway’, we all must understand that what is ‘endorsed’ is the spirit of ambition to achieve net zero with nature by 2050 but also with the Relevant Authorities understanding their duty to further the purposes of the National Park and support achievement of these targets.

4 Agree a framework to address evidence gaps regarding the carbon storage and sequestration rates of the National Park’s habitats

There are some evidence gaps that need to be addressed to help us move along the net zero pathway. These include:

4.1 Woodland creation opportunity mapping

We have commissioned Small World Consultancy to carry out a bespoke remodelling of the woodland opportunity mapping to exclude all designated land (SSSI, SAC, SPA, RAMSAR) as well as other priority habitats identified through other data sources such as the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre. This will likely reduce the average annual target area for woodland creation. Historically there has been very little woodland creation in the New Forest National Park and we are working with the Forestry Commission to examine how this can be improved.

4.2 Relationship between land-use change and bespoke New Forest needs such as back-up land for Commoning livestock

4.2.1 Working within the unique economic structure of the New Forest and its Commoning heritage is critical to successful long-term adoption of land-use change for climate change benefits and to ensure unintended negative consequences are minimised. The extent of back-up land for Commoning livestock fluctuates and as such the impact of any land-use change is variable dependent on location, site conditions, ownership and other factors. Filling this evidence gap is an ongoing need.

4.3 Ongoing impacts of land-use change which alter the baseline

4.3.1 The SWC emissions baseline and net zero pathway assume that the land cover understood in 2022 will remain throughout the pathway. For example, the 464 hectares of open habitat restoration planned within the New Forest Inclosures between 2019 and 2029 are not accounted for (either for their reduction in woodland cover or their potential improvement in peat condition) and neither are other potential land-use changes such as salination of coastal margin habitats due to sea-level rise. Such changes could be analysed to understand their

impact on emissions and sequestration of greenhouse gases at a landscape scale as part of ongoing annual revisiting of the SWC methodology as detailed in section 6 below,

5 Take forward the agreed actions of National Parks UK in relation to net zero.

5.1 As part of the family of National Parks UK, the New Forest is playing an active role in:

5.1.1 Race to Zero

We have supported communications around the launch of the [UK National Parks Race to Zero](#) pledge in July 2024. This pledge, agreed by the NFNPA in October 2023 (AM 664-23) commits us to effort towards net zero across the National Parks. New Forest wetland restoration features on the website, showcasing that this ongoing work is critical to our net zero ambition by rewetting peat, creating more areas of carbon storage in freshwater habitats and providing more space for nature, increasing the resilience of habitats and species within the-landscape at the same time.

We completed the first annual report on Race to Zero in October and can expect our feedback towards the end of the year.

5.1.2 National Adaptation Plan Reporting

As well as reporting on our commitments around Race to Zero, we are part of a national working group producing a report to Defra on climate adaptation of the England National Parks. This work is ongoing and is expected to be submitted by the end of December 2024.

6 Develop a means of tracking progress towards net zero goal by 2050.

We are tracking action and progress in two ways, as part of the national programme in terms of impact based upon the SWC methodology and locally by recording action across the landscape that will likely have an impact on emissions reduction and climate resilience.

6.1 National tracking of impact

6.1.1 SWC have been commissioned by National Parks UK to rerun their model on an annual basis to track changes in emissions over time. We have committed to support this at a cost to the New Forest NPA of £500 per year recurring. In addition to this tracking of the impact of climate action on overall emissions, we will be tracking nature recovery action via mandatory reporting on the PLTOF which, as we have seen, is intrinsically linked to our net-zero pathway.

6.2 Local tracking of action

- 6.2.1 We are developing a Climate Action Tracker to build a record of actions across the landscape which will likely support our net zero efforts or help to build resilience of the landscape. This tracker will help to provide case studies to share ideas and opportunities and includes action at a strategic level as well as community and individual scale such as action taken by the New Forest Green Groups.

7 **Build an understanding of climate risks the National Park faces and the adaptations necessary to manage those risks.**

- 7.1 We are taking action to develop our understanding of climate risks but also to interpret and share that understanding so that it leads to meaningful action and a truly engaged community.
- 7.2 We have let a contract for a consultancy to prepare an updated climate risk and adaptation opportunities report. This report will link climate impacts on assets, such as woodlands or footpaths, to the ecosystem services they deliver such as landscape character, carbon sequestration and health benefits to get a more rounded understanding of how climate change may affect people's lives in and around the New Forest. This will be delivered by March 2025 and is being funded as part of the YouCAN project.
- 7.3 As well as understanding the risks, we are developing materials to share these and raise the baseline knowledge and understanding of our staff, partners and communities through Carbon Literacy Training. The materials have been accredited by the Carbon Literacy Project and our first training event was delivered to a YouCAN partner, Theatre for Life in October. We have plans to roll this out to all interested staff and members as well as local communities through the YouCAN project. NFDC are taking a similar approach, and we are liaising to ensure our teams converge in terms of climate expertise. They will also draw on the risk report to develop their plans and training so that we have coherent messaging across the New Forest community.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that Members note the report.

Papers:

AM 594-20 Responding to the Climate and Nature Emergency
AM 664-23 Working with UK National Parks – Net Zero with Nature

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