

The potential of National Landscapes to contribute to 30by30

A technical working paper

Bruce Winney



Briefing May 2023

Background

30by30 is a global ambition adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal 2022 (specifically, Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework)¹ and has been driving environmental policy in the UK since 2020². The aim is to "*Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed...*"³

The 34 English National Landscapes comprise 15% of England but contain a disproportionate area of England's SSSIs (28%), woodland (24% deciduous), and 17% of Priority Habitats⁴.

This means that National Landscapes should be making a significant contribution to the terrestrial 30by30 target within England. The situation is likely to be the same for the National Landscapes in Wales but the data has not yet been analysed.

The ecological recommendation is that 40% of Protected Landscapes (PLs) be high quality semi-natural habitat for nature as one of a suite of measures to ensure ecological resilience⁵. Understanding that 72% of National Landscapes is farmland, compared to 66% in National Parks, a refinement would be 30% of lowland and 40% of upland PLs⁶.

This is an opportunity for National Landscapes (and PLs in general) to be ambitious with their targets towards delivering Nature Recovery and 30by30.

We are making efforts to understand the current area within the National Landscapes that could count⁷ to give us our potential. Not all of this is in a good state for nature at the moment and we have made an estimate of what the current contribution of National Landscapes is to 30by30. The National Landscapes have committed to ambitious targets for Nature recovery in 2019 with the Colchester Declaration⁸ and adding these in allows an understanding of National Landscapes potential contribution to the national 30by30 target.⁹

¹ <https://www.cbd.int/article/cop15-final-text-kunming-montreal-gbf-221222>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-commits-to-protect-30-of-uk-land-in-boost-for-biodiversity> - note the understanding of what counts towards 30by30 has evolved considerably since then.

³ <https://www.cbd.int/article/cop15-final-text-kunming-montreal-gbf-221222>

⁴ GIS analysis using the Protected Habitats Inventory version 3.0, November 2022.

⁵ Isaac. N.J. *et al.* (2018) Defining and delivering resilient ecological networks: Nature Conservation in England. *Journal of Applied Ecology* (55), 2537-2543.

⁶ Although the Cotswolds, a lowland PL has opted for 30by30 and 40by50.

⁷ This would ideally go beyond conventional habitats to include, for example, recent mosaic habitats.

⁸ <https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/projects/colchester-declaration>

⁹ This was written in May 2023 and finally published in August 2025.



Bigsweir Bridge, Wye Valley (Adam Fisher)

What do we have?

A simplified proxy for 30by30 potential, albeit with caveats that are being unpicked at the level of individual National Landscapes, would be adding up deciduous woodland areas and non-woodland priority habitats. These were chosen because data is readily available across all English National Landscapes.

The potential 30by30 area would be a combination of Protected Sites (87% land in National Landscapes' SSSIs is priority habitat)¹⁰, along with areas outside Protected Sites, which will need to be managed long-term for nature.

Across the 34 English National Landscapes, the current (2021) extent of deciduous is 12%¹¹, with 19% non-woodland priority habitats¹². This means that the potential wildlife-rich habitat covers 30% of National Landscapes but there is an issue with how much of that is in good condition for nature.

Using data for actively managed woodland¹³, along with the understanding that only 34% of SSSIs within National Landscapes are in favourable condition as a proxy for the remaining priority habitat outside SSSIs, we estimate that about 13% of National Landscapes is in good condition for nature, with an estimated range of 9%¹⁴ to 16%¹⁵.

This figure of 13% is also the same area as the area of SSSIs that are either in favourable condition or unfavourable but recovering, which is the metric that Wildlife and Countryside Link use for Protected Landscapes¹⁶.

Where do we go?

In 2019 the Colchester Declaration set out a series of targets for English and Welsh National Landscapes that included 36,000ha planting of new/regenerated woodland and creation of 100,000ha of wildlife-rich habitat outside designated sites created or restored by 2030. There is also a target to get 200,000ha of SSSIs into favourable condition for nature.

If these targets are added to the current habitat inventory, then the potential area that could be considered for 30by30 is 37% of the total area of National Landscapes. This exceeds the target that would come out of the 40/30 rule for upland/lowlands above (which would be 31% of National Landscapes) and is closer to the 40% CEH recommendation. This is also more ambitious than the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) targets (35%).)

¹⁰ Measuring Outcomes in Protected Landscape (MEOPL), Natural England, 2021. However, the MEOPL total for non-woodland priority habitats is 16% lower than the CEH figure, so this figure may be higher.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Morton, R. D., Marston, C. G., O'Neil, A. W., & Rowland, C. S. (2020) *Land Cover Map 2019 (20m classified pixels, GB)*. NERC Environmental Information Data Centre. <https://doi.org/10.5285/643EB5A9-9707-4FBB-AE76-E8E53271D1A0>

¹³ MEOP, 2021.

¹⁴ Using the figure of 16% of SSSI priority habitat being in favourable condition within NLs, *ibid*

¹⁵ Using data from a deep dive into 6 NLs where 46% of PHI is in current Agri-environment schemes.

¹⁶ https://www.wcl.org.uk/assets/uploads/img/files/WCL_2022_Progress_Report_on_30x30_in_England.pdf

Gaps

Assuming that National Landscapes hit the Colchester Declaration SSSI condition target, and all new woodland and wildlife-rich habitat is managed for nature, then there is potential for 26% of National Landscapes to be managed for nature. To hit the 31% target (40 upland/30 lowland), National Landscapes will also need to work to improve the condition of at least 5% of woodlands/priority habitats outside Designated Sites. The Colchester Declaration or EIP targets in themselves are not sufficient to hit even 31% by 2030. This means that there is a need to improve the condition of habitat in at least 5% of National Landscape area (97,000ha).

Risks

There are three main risks that could prevent reversing the decline of nature in National Landscapes:

- Climate change and other 'forces for change'.
- Without sufficient resources and stronger duties, it will be a challenge to deliver functioning 31by30 in National Landscapes, let alone the ambitious Colchester Declaration target of 37by30.

National Landscapes as a collective may hit the target but miss the point by going for quicker wins at the expense of holistic measures required for nature recovery. For example, simply protecting isolated Protected Sites hasn't worked – a connected landscape approach is essential. There are also many species that need multiple habitats and a simplified habitat approach is likely to fail them.

About this Briefing

This is an initial piece of work to assess, using non-spatial data, what the potential is within the 34 English National Landscapes to delivering 30by30 without major land-use change. The potential is around 30%, although in reality somewhere between 9% and 16% is actually being managed for nature (as of 2021).

About the National Landscapes Association

We are a registered charity that supports the mission to conserve and enhance natural beauty in National Landscapes and other protected areas. National Landscape teams across the UK work to achieve a sustainable balance of priorities at the landscape scale. One of our key aims is to support and develop a network of ambitious National Landscape teams and partnerships that have a strong collective voice and a positive impact on the places for which they care.



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Recommended citation: Winney, B. J. (2023) *The potential for National Landscapes to contribute to 30by30*. Shrewsbury: National Landscapes Association.

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