

Evidence based landscape approach to 30 by 30

National Landscapes Association Working Paper

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This is a working paper of policy in development, intended to inform thinking and discussion. It is not an adopted policy position.

Summary

National Landscapes and National Parks are Protected Landscapes and Protected Areas; all are landscapes which are the result of interactions between people and nature. These landscapes involve human interaction to maintain and shape them, and despite their protected status and high societal value they should not be included in their entirety in the 30 by 30 target. But, if 30 by 30 is to make a meaningful contribution to nature recovery, beyond site-based protection, then the role of Protected Landscapes requires proper acknowledgement and investment.

The 34 National Landscapes in England cover 15% of England and contain a disproportionate area of England's Sites of Special Scientific Interest (28%) and broadleaved woodland (24%). Their area will contribute significantly to 30 by 30. Our view is that National Landscapes should be properly equipped to enable nature recovery in the wider landscape of the Protected Landscape and beyond to ensure the ecological connectivity which is required to allow nature to both thrive and adapt to a climate changing world.

Background

The declining state of nature in the UK is well documented¹ and a welcome response was the UK committing to a goal of 30% of land and sea managed for nature by 2030 (30 by 30) in 2020². 30 by 30 is one of many tools needed to halt and reverse the decline. It has recently gained prominence since becoming Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework signed at COP15 in 2022:

*"Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of **protected areas** and **other effective area-based conservation measures**, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories."*³ [our emphasis].

¹ https://stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TP25999-State-of-Nature-main-report_2023_FULL-DOC-v12.pdf

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-commits-to-protect-30-of-uk-land-in-boost-for-biodiversity>

³ <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf>

The UK and devolved Governments' commitment to this international target is important and it is the binding requirement to report on progress which should galvanise the work to achieve the goal, through regulation, policy, work on the ground and mobilisation of resources.

There are two components required for a 30 by 30 framework. These are Protected Areas and Other Area-based Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs). An accepted definition of a Protected Areas is that put forward by the IUCN:

*"A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values."*⁴.

OECMs were defined in COP15 in 2018 as:

"Other effective area-based conservation measure means a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values."

Analysis

National Landscapes and National Parks in the UK are Protected Landscapes and Protected Areas, where interactions between people and nature have produced a distinct landscape⁵. We recognise that these landscapes in the UK, which involve human interaction to maintain and shape them, should not be included in their entirety in the 30 by 30 target but, for example, the 34 English National Landscapes cover 15% of England and contain a disproportionate area of England's Sites of Special Scientific Interest (28%) and broadleaved woodland (24%). This means that they need to make a significant contribution to the 30 by 30 target.

How could 30 by 30 work in the National Landscapes? These Protected Landscapes give us an opportunity to work at a scale far greater than is likely possible through a traditional protected site approach. They can, and should, be vehicles for a whole landscape approach using Lawton's principles (which can be summarised as *more, bigger, better and joined*)⁶. Indeed, many National Landscapes are already collaborating across vast areas through collaboration with other Protected Landscapes (for example, in the Great North Bog)⁷, enabling connectivity across Protected Landscapes and realizing their convening power and the scale it brings. In the south of England, Big Chalk⁸ goes even further by working with partnerships outside Protected Landscapes with the aim of connecting across the whole calcareous landscape of the south.

⁴ <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/pag-021.pdf>

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20130402170324mp_/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf

⁷ <https://greatnorthbog.org.uk/about/>

⁸ <https://national-landscapes.org.uk/themes/big-chalk>

Our vision

Our vision is that National Landscapes will contribute significantly to nature recovery through a 30 by 30 approach in a wider landscape, delivering the critical ecological connectivity which is demanded if nature is to both thrive and adapt to a climate changing world.

The component parts of this may be:

- 1) A **core** made up of designated sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protected Areas, Ramsar sites, National Nature Reserves, Local Nature Reserves, and Local Wildlife Sites because of their importance in Local Nature Recovery Strategies⁹).
- 2) **Buffered, expanded and linked** by appropriate woodland, peat, water bodies and other priority and locally important habitats.
- 3) **Supported** by sustainable nature friendly farming throughout the National Landscape.
- 4) **Connected** with neighbouring Protected Landscapes, both directly and working with partnerships across areas as the backbone of a national Nature Recovery Network¹⁰ that is better integrated with the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

The first component should meet all the criteria for inclusion in 30 by 30 reporting. We need to explore further how as much as possible of the second component could also be counted when it may not meet a strict definition but where it is crucial to support coherent ecological networks.

When thinking about 30 by 30, it is important to use consistent, internationally recognisable and relevant terminology, which means working with the terms Protected Areas and OECMs. In this system, National Landscapes are Protected Areas but which won't count in their entirety towards 30 by 30 but have components that do. It is appropriate to have site-based Protected Areas, the designated sites, within a larger landscape-scale Protected Landscape.

OECMs are more problematic because they, by definition, exist outside Protected Areas and are incompatible with being inside a Protected Area such as a Protected Landscape. We are exploring a model of Protected Landscape Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (PLECMs). We have more work to do to build the thinking on this model, but in the UK these will be OECM-like elements such as the Local Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites, along with the other priority and locally important habitats which could achieve 30 by 30 criteria for an OECM but be within the Protected Area of a National Landscape.

Mapping the Protected Areas and areas that could be PLECMs is only the **potential** that could count towards 30 by 30 in the absence of any significant land-use change. To **actually** count, areas will need to have a **purpose** for conservation (primary for Protected Areas but could be an additional purpose for PLECMs) to be **managed** appropriately and, if not in favourable condition, be going in the right direction, backed up by appropriate long-term **monitoring** and **reporting**. The current reality means there is a long way to go, with, for example, Wildlife and Countryside Link estimating that only 3.1% of land in England should be included for 30 by 30 as of 2023¹¹.

⁹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1146160/Local_nature_recovery_strategy_statutory_guidance.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nature-recovery-network>

¹¹ https://www.wcl.org.uk/assets/uploads/img/files/WCL_2023_Progress_Report_on_30x30_in_England_1.pdf

What are the numbers in National Landscapes?

Since May 2023, we have been working to understand the scale of work required for nature recovery within the National Landscapes. To do this, we have established the baseline of what land could **potentially** count and then estimate how much of that **actually** counts towards 30 by 30. This is a two-step process, with an initial estimate across all 34 National Landscapes in England followed by ongoing work to map in detail six individual National Landscapes to sense check the national estimate and explore what the local opportunities and issues are. We intend to do similar work for the National Landscapes in Wales.

A simplified proxy for 30 by 30 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 data are readily available across all National Landscapes in England.

From this, we estimate the current potential land available, without land-use conversion, is 30% across all 34 National Landscapes in England and our estimate is that about 13% (with lower and upper estimates of 9% - 16%) of land could count towards 30 by 30 now¹². This suggests there is at least a further 17% required to reach the minimum of 30% and will require bringing land under suitable management alongside any restoration and creation targets. This would appear to demand at least some land-use conversion to meet or exceed the 30% target and further work is required to explore the implications let alone the practicality of such an approach.

Final thoughts

Nature's recovery is a society-wide challenge, and 30 by 30 is one essential piece of the patchwork. It is an important tool but needs to be supported and connected by other nature recovery work that might not fit the 30 by 30 criteria. For example, work that has no defined edges such as Curlew conservation in food producing areas or a series of medium-term interventions such as rotational felling and restocking of conifer woodland. Such activity may not count for 30 by 30 but will still have an important part to play in supporting the wider ecological landscape.

To focus attention, energy and resources solely on 30 by 30 is high risk for nature. We need a higher ambition which delivers both more than 30% and connectivity across landscapes to give nature a chance.

We need to be thinking at a landscape, or even a multi-landscape, approach using the principles of the Lawton report if we are to have a chance of reversing the long-term decline in nature we are experiencing. In the UK and many other parts of the world Protected Landscapes will play a vital role in nature recovery. Here, an entire National Landscape or National Park should not count towards 30 by 30, but significant portions should and they should be embedded in wider nature friendly practices and management to ensure a landscape that is ecologically connected, viable and resilient to climate change.

¹² The upper estimate may well change with further mapping of individual National Landscapes.