

Natural England Standard

Land Management: why we do what we do



1:0 An introduction

Strategic standards for 'why we do what we do'

We have a set of standards for 'why we do what we do' for each of the main areas of our work where we help deliver environmental outcomes. These are: Access, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Ecosystem Approach, Engagement, Landscape, Land Management, Land use and Marine. They describe the relevant legislation and Government policy, our role, and the principles that we apply to our work.

The standards are for all our staff and will provide:

- a common framework to help us work more consistently
- a coherent picture of our role, Government policy and how we deliver for the natural environment, people and places
- a clearer and shared understanding of our role as a science-led, impartial delivery body
- our customers with a better understanding of what we do and why.

A number of common themes are listed below which run through the principles in the standards. As such they illustrate key attributes that will be evident across our work and our contribution to national and local priorities.

1. Gathering, interpreting and providing evidence and information that those making decisions and choices need.
2. Practical advice that helps secure a high quality and diverse natural environment, which provides services of benefit to people and the economy and is resilient to climate change.
3. Enabling and supporting people to act for and engage with the natural environment.
4. Ensuring that the natural environment contributes to green growth and quality of life.
5. Working with and through others.
6. Responsive to local circumstances and customer needs.

2:0 Land Management strategic standard - definition and scope

We use the term land management to refer to our work on conserving the natural environment, including biodiversity, landscape and cultural heritage, mainly carried out by working in partnership with farmers, foresters and other land managers to influence the way land is managed. We do this using the protected areas network, various forms of payment (most notably agri-environment schemes) and advice. This area of our work does not cover most decisions on land use, especially those which involve the planning system. Although

we directly manage land for conservation on our National Nature Reserves (NNRs), the focus of our work is mainly on privately owned rural land, most of which is also managed for agriculture and other purposes.

3:0 Government policy and statutory context

The European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has a major impact on the way most rural land is managed. Almost all farmers claim their Single Farm Payment under Pillar 1 of the CAP. This means they are subject to the cross-compliance conditions associated with these payments, which set an environmental baseline for the management of farmed land.

Almost 70% of farmed land and a substantial area of woodland are also currently subject to agreements which, in return for an additional payment, require environmental land management that goes beyond this baseline. These schemes are funded from Pillar 2 of the CAP via the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). This programme was agreed between the UK Government and the European Union and sets out how the second pillar of the CAP will be implemented in England during the period from 1 January 2006 to 31 December 2013. Under this programme, Environmental Stewardship, the Energy Crops Scheme, Catchment Sensitive Farming, the England Woodland Grant Scheme and the Environmental Training and Information Programme (ETIP) all provide payments and/or advice to farmers and other land managers.

Government is keen to see agriculture becoming more competitive and contributing to economic growth. It follows that the public benefits that society expects land management to deliver need to be secured largely through integration into commercially viable, market oriented and competitive businesses.

Government policy on land management flows from the [2011 Natural Environment White Paper \(NEWP\)](#) and is also influenced by the scale of the Government's ambition for biodiversity, as set out in [Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services](#). This policy recognises the many competing demands on land, the need to maintain and increase food production and the desire for more local control. Following the approach set out in the Foresight report [The Future for Food and Farming](#), it describes a policy of sustainable intensification, where increased food production is achieved alongside a better rural environment, recognising that this poses a range of technical and policy challenges. The NEWP also emphasises the importance of responding to climate change, both through mitigation and adaptation, and of ensuring that land is managed to maintain the full range of services that society needs from the natural environment. It advocates the adoption of an ecosystem approach in order to achieve this.

Domestic environmental legislation, starting with the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act and running through to the 2006 Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act, has established a system of protected areas in England including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). SSSIs cover approximately 7% of the land surface of England, whilst National Parks and

AONBs between them cover about 25%. SSSIs have the strictest legal controls on their management. There are set procedures for specifying the operations likely to damage these sites, for consenting such operations where they are judged not to be damaging and for advising on the positive management necessary to maintain sites in favourable condition or to return them to that condition. Where this management goes beyond a baseline level, there is an obligation to offer a management agreement to assist with the additional cost of this management.

Land management is also an area where European Union legislation has major impacts. A subset of SSSIs are designated as Natura 2000 sites under the EU Habitats & Species Directive. This, and the earlier Birds Directive, also place some obligations on the UK Government in respect of the management of land outside protected areas.

4:0 Natural England's role

Natural England has delegated responsibility from Defra for the delivery of major elements of the Rural Development Programme for England. The policy for these schemes is set by the Managing Authority (Defra) and we deliver these schemes in accordance with the scheme rules and the requirements of the Paying Agency (Rural Payments Agency). The legal framework for our involvement is set out in a Collaborative Partnership Agreement (CPA) between Defra, Rural Payments Agency and Natural England. The principal RDPE activities undertaken by Natural England are as follows:

- Delivery of Environmental Stewardship, a multi-objective scheme offering payments to farmers for forms of land management that benefit the conservation of biodiversity, landscape or the historic environment, the protection of soils and water and the promotion of access and engagement. This last objective has recently been focused on educational access.
- Setting up and running contracts under the Environmental Training and Information Programme (ETIP) to provide advice to help Entry Level agreement holders use the scheme to deliver environmental benefits.
- Delivery of advice to farmers on diffuse water pollution management and capital grants for projects aimed at reducing water pollution using the Catchment Sensitive Farming scheme.
- Administration and maintenance of existing Countryside Stewardship and Environmentally Sensitive Areas agreements, including advice on options for transfer to Environmental Stewardship.
- Work to implement the changes to Environmental Stewardship agreed with Defra such as those resulting from the Making Environmental Stewardship More Effective (MESME) project.
- Monitoring the results and outcomes achieved by the current programme and working with Defra to commission the research and development necessary to refine future delivery.
- Providing our evidence and delivery experience to Defra to assist in the design and implementation of environmental land management measures in the next rural development programme that will run until 2020.

Single Farm Payments and their associated cross compliance conditions, which also form the baseline for Environmental Stewardship, are administered by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). We do provide advice to RPA on some of the cross-compliance conditions relevant to our remit.

In addition to delivering rural development programmes our role includes:

- Duties and obligations in relation to SSSIs, including the duty to notify new sites. The main focus of land management is on working with owners and occupiers to ensure that the SSSI series is maintained and that site condition continues to improve. This involves monitoring, advice on maintaining favourable condition, account management, reviews and notifications, consents and assents. It also includes offering and negotiating management agreements where positive management beyond the baseline level is required.
- Directly managing 143 NNRs, providing the organisation with hands-on experience of environmental land management. It also sets standards for the management of the remainder of the NNR series by a range of Approved Bodies.
- Advising on landscape, including implementation of the European Landscape Convention and the UK Geodiversity Action Plan. Our land management activity seeks to integrate and achieve environmental outcomes that benefit landscape character and quality, including cultural heritage, and geodiversity conservation.

A small but significant area of work is the direct delivery of Inheritance Tax Exemption advice on behalf of HMRC.

These delivery activities are underpinned by a range of supporting and enabling activities. These include:

- Relationship management with key national and local delivery partners and other stakeholders
- Development of the evidence base necessary to the effective delivery of environmental land management in partnership with Defra and using both RDPE and Defra funding. This includes programmes of monitoring, research and development
- Translation of the evidence base into practical advice and guidance.

Natural England brings to land management a workforce of locally based staff, whose combined knowledge of environmental legislation and scheme rules with environmental expertise, knowledge of their local areas and an appreciation of local farming systems. Natural England supports these advisers through access to a range of guidance, in-house specialist advice and the practical experience of our NNR managers. The organisation also seeks to achieve administrative efficiency through streamlined, centralised procedures and administration. Natural England can therefore combine the benefits of locally based staff who have an intimate knowledge of the local area and its land managers, with a range of specialist expertise, economies of scale and consistency of service that come from being an evidence-based national organisation.

5:0 The principles we apply to our work

LM1 Working in partnership with farmers and other land managers, we will provide a high level of customer service to enable them to use payment schemes effectively to deliver environmental outcomes

Environmental outcomes will be most favourable where we offer farmers and land managers good service and efficiently operated schemes, we understand and take account of their aspirations and business needs, and explain clearly how they can provide value for money in return for the payments they receive.

LM2 Advising and supporting farmers and others who manage their land for the benefit of the environment and protecting areas of high environmental value

We will provide advice and support to help farmers and other land managers to manage their land for the benefit of the environment. Our role requires us to protect areas of high environmental value and, where we have evidence of adverse impact, we will also use our regulatory powers in accordance with the principles set out in our Regulation standard.

LM3 Taking an evidence-based approach to our land management work

This means we will continue to commit resources to monitoring the environmental condition of land and the way this changes in response to management. Our monitoring work will be undertaken to defined standards to ensure the collection of accurate, reliable and relevant evidence within the constraints of current resources. This also means that our advice to farmers and other land managers will be based on the best available evidence, including the results of both monitoring and research and development work. We will work closely with Defra to develop the evidence base for Environmental Stewardship. This work will be guided by an Evidence Plan agreed with Defra and carried in close cooperation with Defra, who provide the funding. This Evidence Plan should be compatible with the Natural England Evidence Strategy.

LM4 Whilst ensuring that the environmental priorities set by central government are addressed, progressively adopting an ecosystem approach to our land management work

In accordance with the direction set by the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) we will seek to adopt this approach to our land management work wherever possible. This will involve much more up-front effort to involve local people. The financial and human resources available are unlikely ever to be sufficient to meet all the needs for environmental protection and enhancement, so we will still need to target resources where the benefit is greatest. Specifically, we will still need to help Government make strategic choices on the deployment of RDPE resources in accordance with the targeting strategy agreed with Defra. Within this framework however, Natural England will increasingly involve farmers and local community representatives in decisions about how the scheme is used to influence the management of land at local level. This implies a focus on larger scale projects connected to place and community. Evidence and understanding of the landscape and biodiversity context will underpin the targeting, development and delivery of such projects via the ecosystem approach.

LM5 Wherever possible, promoting the concept of outcome-focused adaptive management

We will encourage land managers to take ownership of the environmental outcomes for their land and to use their own skills and experience to find the best ways of achieving them, in partnership with our advisers, whilst respecting statutory requirements and scheme rules, where applicable.

LM6 Providing Government with impartial, high quality advice about the design and running of its land management schemes, based upon the practical experience and evidence we have gathered

We do not own the RDPE schemes that we deliver for Government, but we will use the evidence and practical experience gained from our land management delivery work to provide Defra with advice on the effectiveness and future development of these schemes. This advice will not seek to influence or pre-judge any decisions about our role in the delivery of future programmes.

LM7 In all our land management work addressing the challenges posed by climate change and future food security

We will address the problem of making England's wildlife resilient to the challenges posed by climate change, both direct and indirect. We will help to ensure the delivery of the Biodiversity 2020 targets and will adopt the approach set out by the *Making Space for Nature* report, working towards habitats that are 'better, bigger, more and joined'. We will do this in ways that are compatible with the Government's desire to promote 'sustainable intensification', looking for win-wins where possible and seeking sensible trade-offs that optimise the delivery of ecosystem services. We will contribute to climate change mitigation by promoting forms of land management that genuinely reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural and land management sector.

Quick reference

Type of standard	Strategic standard
Purpose:	Explains why we do what we do across our main work areas and sets out the principles that all staff are expected to apply to their work
Sign-off:	Natural England Directors and Heads of Profession
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