

# The Wildlife Enhancement Scheme in the uplands

No. 199 - English Nature Research Reports



working today  
for nature tomorrow

## **1. THE WILDLIFE ENHANCEMENT SCHEME IN THE UPLANDS**

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to examine the experience of Wildlife Enhancement Schemes (WES) in delivering positive nature conservation management. WES operate both as part of the Corporate Project and as Local Team schemes.

## **2. THE PILOT WILDLIFE ENHANCEMENT SCHEME CORPORATE PROJECT**

2.1 The Wildlife Enhancement Scheme arose out English Nature's intention (and that of the Department of the Environment) to move to a more proactive and positive approach to the management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). There was a recognition that land managers had management knowledge and skills which English Nature could draw upon and so a partnership approach should be developed. Consequently, an English Nature Corporate Project was initiated in 1990.

2.2 After canvassing Local Teams for their habitat priorities, four habitat types in discrete geographical areas were targeted with voluntary schemes incorporating simple prescriptions, and standard terms and payment levels. These were the Culm Grasslands and Pevensey Levels in 1991 and the Coversand Heaths and Craven Limestone Grasslands in 1992. The Corporate Project has since been expanded to include the Dorset Heaths, the Thames Basin and Wealden Heaths, Magnesian Limestone Grassland and the Hereford and Worcester Grasslands with the most recent addition being the White Peak.

### **2.3 Pilot Scheme Objectives**

The objectives of the pilot schemes were:

- i) to secure the active management required to maintain and enhance the nature conservation interest of SSSIs entered;
- ii) to obtain the willing participation of occupiers;
- iii) to harness the occupiers' capacity to implement management to an acceptable standard under simplified guidelines, with advice and support;
- iv) to improve occupiers' understanding of nature conservation;
- v) to learn lessons through effective delivery of a product and the development of partnerships with occupiers;
- vi) to use a system of recording management which informs future decisions and facilities for partnership.

2.4 Each pilot WES incorporated a series of nature conservation objectives for the targeted habitat type and a number of simple management prescriptions designed to deliver these. Payments were of two types: an annual standard payment and fixed cost payments for capital works.

## 2.5 **Payments**

A series of WES standard rate payments set nationally for different habitats is presented in the English Nature Lands Manual. These are a guide for Local Teams and give a range of payments for particular habitats. The valuations were based on a "model farm" taking into account the cost of management works, the payments of comparable schemes which incorporate the targeted habitat and profit foregone. If Local Teams wished to make payments substantially different from the national standards, they would have to provide a full justification of their amended valuations.

## 2.6 **Management prescriptions**

The standard management prescriptions for different habitats within WES were based on management judged by EN to be required to deliver particular nature conservation objectives and an assessment of what could be achieved for the standard payments. If additional management was required for the special interest of an SSSI, it was hoped that this would be realised through negotiation and without recourse to further payments. Although the pilot WES was not testing the effectiveness of prescriptions *per se*, it provides an opportunity to learn from best practice, etc..

## 2.7 **Common land**

WES agreements on common land are signed with the Commoners' Association or Management Committee representing all those with grazing rights. Not all commoners exercise their rights and so, in practice, agreements will be signed with those who are actively doing so. Judgements must be made on the risk of not including commoners who do not currently exercise their rights.

## 2.8 **Management records**

Owner-occupiers with pilot WES agreements are required to provide a record of management. This covers items such as type and number of livestock, grazing dates, area cut for hay, number of bales, etc.. Alongside the annual visit by English Nature staff, such records help in both checking compliance with the agreement and should inform future management of the site, especially regarding "best practice" for specific nature conservation results. This is seen as a valuable way of involving the owner-occupier in the environmental management of the site so assisting in fuller appreciation of the special interest and promoting the partnership approach. This type of information may also be an important input to ENSIS (English Nature Site Information System) in the future.

## 2.9 **Monitoring**

SSSIs are monitored by the Site Unit Recording (SURF) method. Using this technique, English Nature conservation staff make an assessment of the "interest features" on individual management units within a site. In cases where management agreements exist, this information is used by Local Teams to direct any necessary management changes. An annual SURF visit to the pilot WES sites is completed before any payments are made. This, along with the management record, enables both compliance and biological monitoring on the basis of indicator species or special features on the site. In addition,

the SSSI sample survey includes WES sites. In order to assess the effectiveness of WES in delivering positive nature conservation benefits, DoE have been particularly interested in the analysis of SURF for the WES sites. Pilot sites must show improvements in the nature conservation value attributable to management initiated through WES. The timescale for the pilot schemes (ie three years) means that not all the nature conservation objectives have yet been realised and may not be for some time. Despite this, positive results have accrued from the management instituted by WES (see details below).

## 2.10 **Top-up agreements**

Although not originally designed for this purpose, WES agreements have been used successfully as top-ups to other schemes such as ESAs and Countryside Stewardship. WES funding should not, however, be seen as a substitute for other mechanisms; rather it should only pay for management over and above that required by other schemes. As Stewardship, ESAs and the Moorland Scheme develop, English Nature will ensure that WES is also amended in the light of any changes to these schemes so that there is no risk of double-funding etc..

- 2.11 The pilot phase of the WES Corporate Project ended in March 1995 and a full report was submitted to DoE. The pilot scheme was deemed to be such a success that DoE continued to fund the project to the tune of £1.2m for 1995/96. English Nature no longer has to seek approval for additional WES and the approach may be used more widely. This will allow the amalgamation of the current geographically and habitat discrete WES and also the development of WES for individual sites or all habitats within a geographically defined area.

## 3. **Craven Limestone Grassland WES**

- 3.1 The only "upland" pilot scheme in full operation is the Craven Limestone Grasslands WES; the White Peak WES which is also part of the Corporate Project has only recently been launched and, whilst the Hereford and Worcester Grasslands WES also covers "in-by", there have been no relevant agreements signed to date. The discussion below is based on the report to DoE and cumulative data on agreements to 30.9.95.
- 3.2 The uplands of the Craven district of North Yorkshire include one of the largest areas of upland Carboniferous limestone in Britain; much of which is SSSI and all lies within the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The area is characterised by limestone pavement, scars and screes, and the associated calcareous tree/shrub, mire and grassland habitats including the largest areas of the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) calcareous grassland types CG9 and CG10 in the uplands. These habitats support important plant species such as bird's-eye primrose, rock rose and bloody crane's-bill as well as limestone fern growing amongst the screes and grikes. These, in turn, support birds such as breeding curlew, wheatear and wintering twite, and invertebrates such as the uncommon northern brown argus butterfly.
- 3.3 The limestone grassland and shrub communities are under threat from grazing pressure from both sheep and rabbits. Grazing levels have been such that grassland species rarely flower or set seed and shrub and tree regeneration has been prevented. The limestone

outcrops themselves have also been damaged in the past by the removal of pavement as ornamental stone.

3.4 The objectives of the Craven Limestone Grassland WES are:

- \* to enhance the nature conservation interest of the upland limestone habitats of the Dales, particularly the herb flora, and the invertebrate fauna;
- \* to encourage the development of greater structural diversity within the vegetation range, eg by encouraging local scrub development, particularly on limestone pavement, slopes and scars;
- \* to enhance the wildlife of special areas such as limestone pavement, scars, screes, bogs and woodland;
- \* to encourage owners/occupiers to adopt a positive and sympathetic approach, in nature conservation terms, to the management of the land;
- \* to demonstrate how traditional farming skills and local knowledge can deliver land management for wildlife conservation;
- \* to raise English Nature's public profile and emphasise the importance of the SSSI.

3.5 The land management objectives are:

- \* to modify stock grazing regimes so as to enhance the nature conservation interest of the limestone grassland and associated grazed habitats;
- \* to exclude grazing, including by rabbits, from appropriate areas which would benefit. Limestone pavement is particularly targeted but other areas benefitting would include woodland, scrub, scars, screes, steep slopes and some acid mires and heaths.

3.6 Management prescriptions apply in three ways:

- i) grazed land - prescriptions for grazing, stock feeding, drainage, rabbit control, etc.;
- ii) ungrazed land - additional requirements for stock exclusion and tree and shrub regeneration;
- iii) special management - eg. to enable Species Recovery Programme projects.

3.7 The standard payments are £60/ha for grazing land and £90/ha for ungrazed land. Fixed cost payments are also available.

### **Agreements to March 1996**

Number of agreements	81
Area in grazed land tier (ha)	3181.73
Area in ungrazed land tier (ha)	455.27
TOTAL	3637.00

- 3.8 Some 80% of the Craven limestone resource is covered by SSSI notification and the 81 agreements represent about two-thirds of the habitat which can be realistically enhanced within the area.

### **Impact of the Craven Limestone Grassland WES**

- 3.9 The Craven WES is seen as an important factor in strengthening working relationships with the Countryside Commission over Stewardship and has enabled the development of a partnership approach with the Yorkshire Dales National Park and Forestry Authority. It has also been a basis for ensuring that management requirements of the SSSIs have been integrated with management funded through the Pennine Dales ESA. The National Park are using the WES as a model in the review of their own woodland scheme.
- 3.10 Some eligible SSSI land has not been entered into the Craven WES, partly due to the significant coverage of ESA and Stewardship agreements in the area. There are also sites where it is believed that neither Stewardship nor the WES would achieve worthwhile enhancement of the resource; these tend to be limestone grasslands at higher altitudes with a history of hard grazing and high rabbit populations. Applications in these areas have reached a plateau.
- 3.11 The standard prescriptions are important in providing a clear communication of the direction in which English Nature would like management of the habitat to go. They are also easy to monitor. However, there is a need for flexibility to cater for the management needs of individual sites which the scheme provides.
- 3.12 The management records are seen as valuable in ensuring the necessary understanding between the occupier and English Nature and allow for corrections in management to be made. They are also helpful in developing individual agreements and special management programmes.
- 3.13 A range of landowners and farmers (including dairy, sheep, part-time and non-farming owners) have shown a positive interest in the WES. The Local Team has also produced a newsletter about the Craven WES and organised two evening events for applicants in partnership with the Countryside Commission and the National Park. These have helped maintain the "momentum" of the Scheme.
- 3.14 The Scheme has been adapted to enable some common land to be entered at a reduced payment level. One very effective example is Moughton Common on Ingleborough SSSI which was pioneered by Paul Evans (ACO, Leyburn office). In this case, a WES

agreement has been signed with the **active** graziers rather than all rights holders through the Graziers Association; a sub-committee of the Commoners' Association. Although the members of the Grazing Association represent only five out of 10 commoners, they manage some three-quarters of the grazing rights. A clause in the agreement states that the five members of the sub-Association will maintain the management agreed even if the remaining five commoners start exercising their rights. If this should occur, there are two courses of action available:

- i) the newly active commoner can join the Grazing Association and be bound by the WES management agreement, or
- ii) if this was unacceptable to either party, the members of the Grazing Association would have to manipulate their stock to account for the additional animals in order to maintain the agreed management.

3.15 Payments made on Moughton Common are £45/ha rather than the full WES payment of £60/ha. The justification for this lower payment was that restrictions already applied to the use of grazing rights so that no stock were allowed onto the common for 3 months over the winter. Consequently, any further management restrictions imposed by the WES agreement would apply to only 9 months of the year.

3.16 The commoners who are members of the Grazing Association are pleased with the results of the management restrictions imposed through the WES agreement. Comments have been made about how good the common is looking and that the sheep are doing well. Their positive reaction is further emphasised by the willingness of the active commoners to lease grazing rights from others (but keep them unused) in order to maintain the benefits of reduced grazing.

3.17 This approach has now also been used on two further commons: Long Scar on Ingleborough and Oxenber Wood adjacent to Ingleborough SSSI.

3.18 There have been significant nature conservation benefits derived from the Craven WES even after only three years of operation. Northern brown argus, common blue, small heath and meadow brown butterflies have all benefitted from habitat improvement resulting in improved populations. On the grazed areas, there have been reappearances of species such as fragrant, early purple and common spotted orchids whilst others such as limestone fern, heather and bird's-eye primrose have become more widespread. Species which have benefitted in ungrazed areas include Jacob's ladder, bloody crane's-bill, downy currant, ferns and all tree/shrub species. The conclusion reached is that the management prescriptions are achieving the objectives of the WES though there is a need in some circumstances to fine-tune the management further for individual sites or species. To this end, the "ungrazed" tier has been used to enable a range of very limited grazing regimes to achieve ideal management for sites such as wood-pastures and some limestone pavements. The standard grazing prescription has also been varied on some sites to achieve a completely stock-free period in the summer in exchange for higher stocking levels at other times of the year. The Local Team has developed rules to ensure consistency of approach to variations within the Scheme.

#### 4. The White Peak WES

4.1 A WES to operate within the White Peak Natural Area (covering parts of Derbyshire, Staffordshire and the Peak District) has recently been launched by English Nature's Peak District and Derbyshire Local Team.

4.2 The White Peak WES incorporates general management guidelines relating to all land as well as guidelines for seven categories of habitat present within the SSSI series in the Natural Area. These are:

- \* hay meadows
- \* tall grasslands
- \* unimproved pastures and dales
- \* grasslands on lead-rich soils
- \* woodlands
- \* ponds
- \* geological sites

4.3 The overall aim of the Scheme is to maintain existing habitat through appropriate management and, where possible, enhance habitats.

#### Management guidelines and payments under the White Peak WES by habitat

Habitat	Management guidelines relating to:	Payment (£/ha)
Hay meadows	* Mowing & grazing of existing hay meadows	150
	* Grazing only on existing hay meadows	100
	* Restoration	175
Tall grasslands	* Maintenance of naturally occurring flower-rich tall grassland	90
	* Management of long-abandoned tall grassland	60
	* Abandoning grasslands to develop into woodlands	40
Unimproved pastures and dales	* Where tractor access possible	90
	* Where tractor access not possible	70
	* Enhancement payments (available once every 3 years)	20
Grasslands on lead-rich soils	* Management of existing areas	90
Woodlands	* Management of non-coppiced broadleaved woodland	25
	* Management of historically coppiced woodland	25
Ponds	* Management of existing ponds and surrounding land	40/mgt zone
	* Restoration and creation	negotiable



Geological sites	* Maintenance of features	100/feature to max. £300
------------------	---------------------------	--------------------------------

- 4.4 In addition, there are general guidelines relating to stock feeding, poaching, use of artificial fertilisers, lime, slurry and farmyard manure, weed control, cattle grazing and access by EN staff.
- 4.5 Capital cost payments are also available for boundary management, provision of water supply, initial major scrub clearance and tree felling.
- 4.6 This is a novel approach in that all habitats of interest within a Natural Area will be covered.

## 5. THE WAY FORWARD

- 5.1 Following the completion of the pilot phase and the endorsement of the WES approach by DoE, an English Nature workshop was held in September 1995 to review experience and to make recommendations to develop WES from a Corporate Project to a national scheme forming part of Local Teams' core work.
- 5.2 On the organisation of WES, the workshop recommended that:
- \* WES should become locally based with overall national guidance and should be administered through the Conservation Services Team as are other management agreements;
  - \* there should be co-ordination and liaison between LTs across the same Natural Area or similar habitats, and new WES should come from LT priorities with funding from LT budgets;
  - \* an overview must be maintained to ensure that WES sits comfortably with other environmental land management schemes such as ESAs so to avoid double funding;
  - \* a project group should be initiated to set standards and provide guidance and advice;
  - \* there should remain a national co-ordination of payment levels;
  - \* a minimum standard for publicity should be set, with local leaflets being produced;
  - \* the record of management should be optional and, if required, the information collected should be of immediate use to the LT.

5.3 A project team was set up subsequently to provide:

- \* guidance and advice;
- \* overall control and co-ordination;
- \* monitoring of "best practice";
- \* scheme development;
- \* regular newsletter.

5.4 Action points for the project team included:

- \* a review and redefinition of "positive agreements";
- \* a review of standard payment rates;
- \* development of minimum standards for publicity.

5.5 In April 1996, the WES approach became part of EN management agreement work

## **6. LOCAL TEAM WILDLIFE ENHANCEMENT SCHEMES IN THE UPLANDS**

6.1 There are currently several Local Team WES in place or being developed. This is an endorsement of the approach and its success in delivering positive nature conservation benefits. Funding for these WES is from Local Team budgets.

6.2 Local WES in upland habitats currently are:

- \* North Pennines Moorland
- \* Yorkshire Dales Meadows and Pastures
- \* Pennine Dales Meadow, Pasture and Allotment
- \* North York Moors Meadows and Pastures
- \* Juniper in Northumbria
- \* Lake District Wethers pilot

### **North Pennines Moorland Pilot WES**

6.3 This WES covers the moorland of the North Pennines Moorland SSSIs from Nidderdale and Wharfedale in the south to the Tyne Valley in the north. The area is important for its blanket bog and dry heath communities and for its breeding birds. The area is a proposed

SPA and part candidate SAC under the Birds and Habitats and Species Directives and requires further SSSI notification to bring all appropriate moorland into the designations. The WES is designed to encourage sensitive management of the moorlands. The SSSI/SPA encompasses land covered by English Nature's North and East Yorkshire (Leyburn office), Northumbria and Cumbria Teams and the WES is a pilot approach to obtaining good moor management on SSSIs. During 1995/96 and 1996/97 has been piloted on three sites - Lovely Seat to Stainton Moor, Geltsdale and Glendue Fells and Bowes Moor and has been developed in consultation with MAFF, NFU, CLA and the Countryside Commission.

6.4 The objectives of the North Pennines WES are to:

- \* maintain, enhance and restore the heather moorland vegetation;
- \* restore wet areas on the moorland and the moorland edge;
- \* increase the area of native trees and shrubs;
- \* maintain and enhance bird populations; and
- \* demonstrate that upland farming and game management skills benefit wildlife.

6.5 The North Pennines WES is different from others so far set up in that it provides standard payments and management requirements for two types of land manager; the agricultural manager (different payments for the owner-occupier or unrestricted tenant and commoners or restricted tenants) and the sporting manager. Payments are also scaled up to a maximum depending on the area of land entered.

**Payments under the North Pennine Moorland WES (£/ha)**

	<b>AGRICULTURAL MANAGERS O/O or unrestricted tenant</b>	<b>SPORTING MANAGERS</b>
<b>First 100 hectares</b>	15	10
<b>Next 100 hectares</b>	10	5
<b>Further land</b>	1	1
<b>Maximum payment</b>	5000	5000

NB. Commoners and restricted tenants will receive £3 per hectare through a single agreement with a Commoners' Association or Committee.

6.6 In order to meet the objectives of the Scheme, agricultural managers are required to undertake prescriptions relating to grazing management, shepherding, away-wintering (and exceptionally off-wintering, ie. retained within the holding) of stock for which

additional payments may be available, stock feeding, vehicle use, fertiliser use, bracken and rush control and drainage. The guidelines for sporting managers must also be accepted by the agricultural manager and any requirements under the control of the farmer must be implemented. Finally, a record of management as described above is required.

- 6.7 The sporting manager must agree a burning regime, must not carry out further drainage (additional payments may be available for grip blocking), control vehicle use, discuss bracken control with English Nature, control legitimate pest species and create or enhance areas of native trees and shrubs. A management record must be kept and the sporting manager must provide information to English Nature on the number of breeding birds on his land.
- 6.8 In addition, a series of capital payments are also available for works which will enhance the benefits of environmental management.
- 6.9 The North Pennines Moorland WES was "launched" during summer 1995 with staff from the three Local Teams visiting potential agreement holders. Consultations have dealt with the notification of the additional SSSIs, SAC/SPA designation and the proposed WES. During these discussions, land managers have shown a high degree of interest in the management scheme and 18 agreements have been concluded in the pilot areas by April 1996. These cover some 10,000 hectares of moorland and comprise agreements with 7 sporting and 11 agricultural managers.
- 6.10 Because this WES covers the areas of three Local Teams, guidance notes have been produced to ensure that there is consistency among EN staff in the interpretation of the management requirements and provision of payments.
- 6.11 As MAFF's Moorland Scheme continues to develop, there is increasing scope for problems of double-funding from the moorland WES. This is particularly so now that it is proposed that the Moorland Scheme will reward farmers for reducing beyond the originally specified maxima of 1.5 ewes/ha in summer and 1 ewe/ha in winter. It is important that this pilot WES also develops to take into account changes to the Moorland Scheme and to ensure that English Nature resources are used most effectively, eg through making capital payments for habitat enhancing works not funded by the Moorland Scheme.
- 6.12 It is too early to make any judgements regarding the pilot scheme's success in enhancing moorland habitats in the North Pennines.

### **Yorkshire Dales Meadows and Pastures WES**

- 6.13 The Yorkshire Dales Meadows and Pastures WES covers all the relevant SSSIs in the dales of the Yorkshire Dales Natural Area and extends to include dales outwith the boundary of the Pennine Dales ESA. The Meadows and Pastures WES provides payments for positive management of these habitats and where SSSIs are already in an ESA agreement, provides a "top-up" for additional management for the special interest. Where this is the case, it is hoped that the ESA will maintain the wildlife value of the habitat whilst the WES will refine and enhance management.

- 6.14 The interest of the grasslands in the Yorkshire Dales is due to the continuing extensive grazing system practised in the area. Hay meadows maintain a rich diversity of wild flowers which are rare in much of England and Europe whilst pastures which have been lightly grazed and have had no artificial fertiliser are also species-rich. The meadows, pastures and in-bye also support breeding waders.
- 6.15 The objectives of the Scheme are to:
- \* increase the flowering and numbers of many special meadow and pasture plants;
  - \* maintain the diversity of plant species dependent on the range of local meadow and pasture management systems;
  - \* provide the right conditions for breeding birds;
  - \* demonstrate that farming skills can benefit wildlife.
- 6.16 General management prescriptions apply to all land entered into the WES and these include control of inputs onto the land, fothing, weed control, maintenance of fences, walls etc., cultivation, pest control, access and management records.
- 6.17 In addition, there are management requirements specified for meadow land and flower-rich pastures. A particular sward height is required in the spring (result-orientated prescription) and other prescriptions deal with hay making practices, aftermath grazing, farmyard manure application and maintenance of existing drainage systems.

#### **Payments made under the Yorkshire Dales Meadows and Pastures WES**

<b>£ per hectare</b>	<b>Meadow Land</b>	<b>Pasture Land</b>
Standard payment	250	150
"Top-up" to Pennine Dales ESA, tier 1	115 (meadow)	55 (grassland)

- 6.18 On meadow land, there may also be scope for "special management" payments for reduced farmyard manure application, reduced spring grazing or rabbit control measures. In addition, there are payments available for fixed cost works.
- 6.19 The Yorkshire Dales Meadows and Pastures WES was made available to SSSI owner/occupiers in April 1995. Since then, both new agreements and those converted from existing profit foregone agreements have been signed totalling 19 agreements by April 1996 and covering 107 hectares. As the agreements are very young it is still too early to make judgements concerning the "success" of this scheme.

#### **Pennine Dales Meadows, Pastures and Allotments**

- 6.20 The Pennine Dales WES covers all the SSSI meadows, pastures and allotment land in the North Pennine Natural Area and includes areas within the Pennine Dales ESA. This area abuts that covered by the Yorkshire Dales Meadows and Pastures WES to the south. The

two schemes cover habitats of similar importance with more emphasis on breeding bird populations in the Pennine Dales WES. Consequently, the management guidelines and payments are generally the same.

6.21 The objectives for the Pennine Dales WES mirror those of the Yorkshire Dales but have been expanded to include a more specific reference to habitat management for birds:

- \* To improve the habitat quality for the breeding birds by:
  - increasing the diversity of grassland types through grazing management;
  - increasing the quality of the heather allotments;
  - creating wetland areas;
  - providing small areas of tree and shrub cover for black grouse.
  
- \* To demonstrate that traditional farming and game management skills conserve wildlife.

6.22 As shown in the table below, the meadow and pasture (herb-rich limestone) payments and management prescriptions are the same as for the Yorkshire Dales WES. There are additional habitat categories of "other pastures" and allotment land with corresponding management prescriptions.

**Payments made under the Pennine Dales Meadows, Pastures and Allotment WES**

<b>£ per hectare</b>	<b>Meadow Land</b>	<b>Herb-rich limestone pasture</b>	<b>Other pasture</b>	<b>Allotment land</b>
Standard payment	250	150	100	35
"Top-up" to Pennine Dales ESA, tier 1	115	55	30	n/a

6.23 For "other pasture", management requirements relate to the sward height and the non-application of farmyard manure or lime. Top-up to the ESA is available where additional fertiliser restrictions or wetland enhancement are sought. In the case of allotment land, areas which are subject to an ESA agreement will not normally be eligible for any additional payment although top-up may be available in particular circumstances. In addition, EN may reward farmers for reducing winter grazing pressure on allotment land by paying for off-wintering.

6.24 The Pennine Dales WES is being used to convert compensatory agreements on meadows and pastures to positive management agreements. Of some 60 such agreements, about 90% have been successfully converted since 1994. All the WES agreements on allotment land are new with negotiation starting in 1994 under a separate allotment scheme (which is now part of the meadows and pastures WES). Following the notification of more of the North Pennines as SSSI/SPA, the Pennine Dales and Yorkshire Dales WES will be used alongside the North Pennines Moorland WES to ensure appropriate and sustainable management of SSSIs.

6.25 The majority of agreements signed under the Pennine Dales WES have converted existing management compensatory agreements where habitats were already being managed optimally. Consequently, the "success" of this WES can be measured in the ability to convert compensatory to positive agreements and the continuing management of the special interest.

### **North York Moors Meadows and Pastures WES**

6.26 The North York Moors Meadows and Pastures WES uses a different approach from that being pursued in the two Dales WES. In the North York Moors, the WES is targeted at SSSIs of these habitat types not currently under EN management agreement of which there are about 25 sites covering some 160 hectares. The majority of these sites lie within the North York Moors National Park though there may be some which will be brought into agreements under the WES outwith the Park boundary.

6.27 The National Park itself has recently developed a "whole farm" environmental management scheme targeted at particular dales within the Park. Although the WES offers slightly more remuneration for meadows and pastures than does the Park scheme, it is unlikely that the schemes will compete as EN plans to avoid dales where the Park scheme is operating. Also, there will probably be little overlap as the WES only covers specific habitats rather than the whole farm and so the use of WES as a top-up is unlikely.

6.28 The management requirements of the North York Moors WES, although covering the same habitats and objectives as in the Yorkshire Dales and Pennine Dales WES, are simpler and less prescriptive. The payments in the Dales are higher due in part to the existence of the ESA. Nevertheless, the lower rewards in the North York Moors are deemed to be attractive enough to encourage the targeted owner/occupiers to enter the WES: evidence for this will come to light in 1996.

### **Payments made under the North York Moors Meadows and Pastures WES**

<b>£ per hectare</b>	<b>Meadow Land</b>	<b>Ungrazed Land</b>
Standard payment	120	40
Supplement	15 (aftermath grazing)	n/a

6.29 The table below outlines the different prescriptions for meadow land in the Dales and North York Moors schemes. The North York Moors Meadows and Pastures WES also covers ungrazed land which may be managed by cutting and removing the vegetation. Fixed cost payments for capital works are available under both schemes.

**Comparison of management requirements for meadow land under WES in the Yorkshire Dales and the North York Moors**

	<b>Yorkshire Dales</b>	<b>North York Moors</b>
Payment £/ha	250/115 as top-up	120 plus 15 for aftermath grazing
No overgrazing	✓	✗ - not specified though stocking limits should prevent overgrazing
Specified sward height	✓	✗
Agreement of hay-making practice	✓	✗
Shutting up of meadows	✓	✗
Hay cutting dates	✓	✓
Occasional late cut	✓	✗
Removal of cuttings	✗	✓
Agreement on haylage crop	✓	✗
Agreement on change to silage production	✗	✓
Graze aftermath	✓	✓
Aftermath grazing dates specified	✗	✓
Allowed dressings specified	✓	✗
Drainage	✓	✗
Special management payments	✓	✗

6.30 It is hoped that agreements signed under the North York Moors WES will be operate from April 1996. Consequently, it is too early to compare the success of the different approaches.

**Juniper in Northumbria**

6.31 The Juniper scheme has been designed to meet the habitat needs of a specific shrub species.

6.32 Juniper is under threat at nearly all known sites in Northumbria. There is no regeneration from seed and, in both woodland and open hillside situations, older shrubs are declining or have disappeared. Grazing pressure is the main cause of the decline in juniper.



- 6.33 The objectives of the Juniper scheme are to:
- \* maintain and extend Juniper habitats in Northumbria;
  - \* improve the habitat quality of Juniper;
  - \* enhance the species interest of Juniper habitats;
  - \* develop partnership, trust and respect between the farming community and English Nature.
- 6.34 Managers are required to agree a grazing programme with English Nature to include fencing for stock exclusion as necessary. A habitat management programme must also be agreed which may include non-intervention, juniper planting, protecting natural regeneration and scarification to encourage seedling development. Other management requirements cover fertiliser use, rabbit and other pest control, and weed and bracken control. Payments for special management may also be available and a record of management must be kept by the farmer or landowner.
- 6.35 Prior to "launching" the Scheme, juniper cuttings were taken from each of the sites to be targeted. These are currently being propagated in a nursery. Where the need to undertake juniper planting is identified, English Nature will supply rooted cuttings taken from the individual site for replanting by the agreement holder.
- 6.36 Payments under the Juniper Scheme are:
- \* £100/ha on all land where stock exclusion is necessary
  - \* £45/ha on land currently ungrazed
- 6.37 There are about 6 juniper sites being targeted for this Scheme in Northumbria. To date, every owner/occupier approached has entered a new or converted an existing agreement.

### **Lake District Wethers pilot WES**

- 6.38 The Lake District Wethers Scheme is another approach to enable environmental management which is being piloted under the auspices of WES by the Cumbria Local Team. This pilot WES acts as a top-up to the Lake District ESA to ensure the appropriate management tool (the wether or castrated male sheep) is being used to benefit particular habitats.
- 6.39 Traditionally, Herdwick flocks in the central and western Lake District fells included wethers. As wethers tend to be territorial, they have an important role in maintaining the heft system especially on the open fells. There is also some evidence that wethers will limit the spread of coarser vegetation through their grazing preferences. Due to market and subsidy changes, many farmers have reduced the number of wethers in their hill flocks with a consequent detrimental effect on important plant communities.

- 6.40 The Wether Scheme runs on specific SSSIs in conjunction with the Lake District ESA. On sites where the ESA has facilitated appropriate stocking levels, the WES aims to improve nature conservation management by re-establishing the use of wethers within flocks so strengthening the heft system on specific habitats.
- 6.41 The Wethers WES is being piloted on 3 SSSIs covering a range of upland habitats; these are Scafell Pike, Honister Crag and Pillar and Ennerdale Fells. The vegetation on these sites ranges from species-rich rock ledge communities and montane species to dwarf-shrub and moss heath.
- 6.42 The objectives of the Wethers WES are to:
- \* substitute wethers for a percentage of the breeding ewes in specific hill flocks, which in turn will:
  - \* maintain and enhance areas of moss and dwarf-shrub heath, cliff and outcrop vegetation and flushes.
- 6.43 Farmers eligible for the Wethers WES must already be in an ESA agreement. They will then be offered a WES agreement covering the remaining period of their existing ESA agreement. Payments will be reviewed every 4 years.
- 6.44 There is a requirement to increase the proportion of wethers in the flock to a maximum of 20%. These wethers must be lambs from ewes hefted to specific areas of nature conservation interest. Wethers will be phased in over three years to ensure a spread of age classes reflecting the ages of the ewes in the flock. No additional management requirements are specified as these should be covered under the ESA agreement.
- 6.45 There is an annual payment of £41 per ewe replaced where 80% or more of the flock is covered by sheep quota. Where this is not the case, the payment will be £52 per ewe replaced. Further payments may be available for specific additional management.
- 6.46 The Wether WES has been carefully targeted at specific owner/occupiers on sites where this approach was thought to offer best potential nature conservation benefits. It has been offered to and accepted by 5 farmers and it is unlikely that any further agreements will be signed until the impact on the vegetation can be assessed. English Nature has set up a vegetation monitoring programme to assess the nature conservation effects of the Scheme over the agreement period although it is unlikely to show any real nature conservation gains until four years into the Scheme, ie. once the agreed proportion of wethers in the flock has been reached.

## DISCUSSION

7.1 English Nature regards the WES Corporate Project as a success in piloting a new approach to the positive management of SSSIs. This view has been endorsed by DoE, and EN can now proceed to develop further schemes without need for DoE approval.

7.2 In terms of measuring the success of the pilot project:

- \* WES has been well-packaged and marketed;
- \* standard payments have been sufficient to attract entrants and are "good value for money";
- \* simplified prescriptions are "farmer-friendly" and there is evidence that they are delivering enhanced nature conservation interest;
- \* there is a clear customer focus producing a high level of participation and commitment from land managers;
- \* WES has enabled the establishment of constructive partnerships;
- \* EN staff are positive about the new approach;
- \* EN's profile has been heightened;
- \* and, the approach has helped in EN's understanding of land management and scheme development.

7.3 Following the success of the Corporate Project, Local Teams are developing their own positive management schemes. New WES are already in existence and others are being developed, ie South Pennines Moorlands, whin grasslands. All existing local WES are in their infancy and, consequently, it is too early to reach many conclusions on their effectiveness in terms of benefits for nature conservation. However, the local WES are important in the continuing development of this mechanism with different approaches being trialled within different schemes. They allow for these different approaches and management prescriptions to be monitored and demonstrated. This information can then be used to advise other organisations in the development of their own environmental land management schemes, ie MAFF, National Parks, etc..

7.4 Currently, the different approaches being pursued through WES are:

- \* new agreements vs conversion of existing agreements;
- \* schemes as an integral element in SPA/SAC/SSSI notification;
- \* simple management prescriptions vs more complicated or result-orientated requirements;
- \* different habitat types;

\* separate payments for agricultural and sporting managers

\* Natural Area approach;

\* funding the use of a land management tool.

- 7.5 At this stage in the development of WES, it is important that innovative schemes are encouraged to allow the approach to continue to develop. It is vital that there is co-ordination of the schemes so that lessons can be learnt and built upon to deliver maximum nature conservation benefits.
- 7.6 There are a number of environmental land management schemes delivering nature conservation management in the uplands. These have been the subject of a recent MAFF review. Schemes such as ESAs and the Moorland Scheme provide the basic enhancement necessary to maintain sustainable management of semi-natural habitats. Countryside Stewardship, with its greater flexibility, is able to provide "fine-tuning" of management and agreements in habitats and locations not covered by ESAs or the Moorland Scheme. National Park schemes, etc., tend to be carefully targeted on specific issues or habitats. In order that WES maintains a role in the uplands as a valuable mechanism delivering nature conservation, the schemes must prove themselves to be the most effective way of providing the special management required by SSSIs and adjacent land either as stand-alone schemes or as "top-ups" to any other environmental land management schemes.
- 7.7 To maintain this niche, WES needs to continue to develop in the light of improving knowledge of nature conservation management within English Nature and other developments in other mechanisms. WES should be sufficiently flexible in approach to take account of changes in agricultural commodity regimes (eg. environmental conditions attached to livestock premia) and other environmental management schemes (eg. changes to ESAs following policy reviews). It is also important that WES benefits from the experience of other environmental land management schemes and their treatment of issues such as common land, etc.. However, English Nature should continue to pilot new approaches through WES so that other organisations can also learn from our experience.
- 7.8 English Nature should continue to encourage MAFF to develop their suite of environmental land management schemes delivering tangible nature conservation benefits whilst ensuring that WES maintains a niche for fine-tuning management on special sites or piloting additional special management requirements. Maximum nature conservation benefits would then accrue from limited English Nature resources.
- 7.9 The role of the Wildlife Enhancement Schemes and English Nature in providing a lead in nature conservation management in the uplands can be summarised as:
- \* piloting of new schemes and approaches to nature conservation management within the prevailing land use system;
  - \* demonstrating the efficacy of these approaches in delivering positive nature conservation management through practical illustration and training;
  - \* demonstrating farmer acceptability through good uptake and targeting of

resources;

- \* using this practical experience to provide advice, expert comment and information to other organisations and individuals whilst building on existing knowledge within English Nature;
- \* using the WES approach to continue to develop this expertise by providing opportunities to test latest knowledge.

Siâron Hooper  
Upland Policy Officer  
Uplands and Freshwater Team

11 July 1996