

A Manifesto for the Natural Environment



Natural England is here to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity that it brings.



The state of the natural environment matters to everyone in England. A healthy natural environment is an essential national asset that provides the foundations for our economic and social well being.

The natural environment provides essential public services, such as:

- The **basic necessities of life** – clean air, clean water and productive soils.
- **Support for economic activity** – providing raw materials for sustainable energy production and construction.
- **Security against climate change** – reducing our carbon emissions, moderating temperature extremes, helping to protect against the risk of flooding and the spread of diseases.
- **Our natural health service** – with the potential to make a major contribution to the health and wellbeing of the nation, free for everyone to use.
- **The foundations of our cultural identity** – our landscapes bring pleasure to millions, and underpin profitable tourism and recreation industries.

A call to action

By taking action now, Government, business and communities can put England on a greener path to a more secure future, while conserving the nation's rich and diverse natural environment.

Taking difficult decisions for the future

- Space must be found for renewable energy, even if this means taking difficult decisions in return for long term gain. We urgently need a strategic assessment of the options for renewable energy, rather than a piecemeal approach.
- Our national flood management strategy must work with nature, not against it. Using natural habitats on the coast instead of hard defences; restoring the uplands to reduce run-off; and re-creating wetlands in our river valleys to increase flood storage capacity, will be important elements of our flood defences of the future.



Better management of the natural environment

- The proposed Marine Bill must deliver a network of marine protected areas by 2012 to protect the 10,000 different species of marine life in the seas around England.
- The government should follow up on its commitment to stop wildlife loss by 2010 by planning for and funding nature conservation at a landscape scale.



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Reconnecting people and nature

- The Government should ensure that the schools, hospitals, office and housing developments of the future include high quality natural greenspace to better connect people and nature.
- GPs should be encouraged to promote physical activity in the natural environment through incentives added into the 2009 review of their contract.
- Local authorities must deliver on their published strategies to improve rights of way and connect people to their natural environment.

Using the natural environment sustainably

- The £2 billion per year that land managers and farmers currently receive from the public purse must buy services for the benefit of everyone – with the most environmentally sustainable land management receiving the greatest financial reward.
- The Government's new National Policy Statements, which shape the development of the nation's infrastructure, must contribute to the conservation of the natural environment and should not be used to over-ride proper environmental protection.



Our commitments

Natural England is the Government's advisor on the natural environment.

- We will demonstrate that significant cuts in carbon are achievable in the short-term by halving the carbon footprint of our estates and business travel by 2010.
- We will better target the £2.9 billion of taxpayers' money that we manage through our land management schemes to help people and nature adapt to climate change. Priorities will include: locking-in carbon; absorbing excess rainwater to prevent flooding; and connecting existing wildlife sites.



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- We will ensure that our National Nature Reserves do more to connect the public with the natural environment and will transform selected National Nature Reserves into first class visitor destinations.
- We will use our statutory position to ensure that planning and transport proposals (including road building, local development frameworks, port proposals, and airport expansion), and water extraction licensing contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment.
- We will help find the space for renewable energy by publishing a map of suitable locations for onshore wind energy developments.

The current situation

A healthy natural environment is the key to solving many of the problems that confront us. It is not too late to take the difficult decisions needed to put this country on a pathway to a greener, healthier and, in the long-term, more secure future.

But the pressures on our natural environment compounded by the unprecedented scale and rate of change mean that coordinated action is needed now, not just by government but by a wider coalition with business and communities.

Natural England's report State of the Natural Environment shows that our natural environment is not well placed to withstand these challenges.

The current system of conservation has often focused on protected areas such as National Parks and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

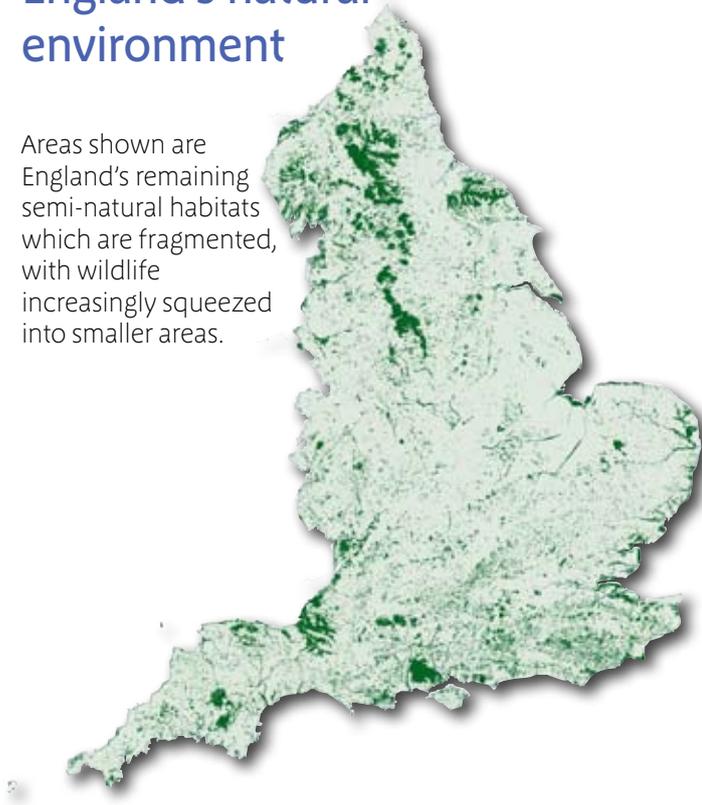
But away from these areas, the natural environment is increasingly under threat. It has less diversity and less local distinctiveness than in the past, with much more homogenous agricultural businesses.

We need a new, more dynamic approach to conservation that allows nature to adapt to a changing climate and reconnects people with the natural world.



England's natural environment

Areas shown are England's remaining semi-natural habitats which are fragmented, with wildlife increasingly squeezed into smaller areas.



The challenges

- Our land and seas are under more pressure than ever before. We have a growing population with growing aspirations, meaning increasing demand on the natural environment to provide food, energy, leisure and space for development.
- We are now locked into at least 50 years of unavoidable climate change. Wildlife is increasingly isolated in protected areas unable to move with the changing climate.

The need to build natural connections

80% of the population live in our towns and cities, often separated from the natural world and deprived of the benefits that it brings by poor design and lack of investment in urban green spaces.

Rapid improvements in medicine and science mean that we are living longer but less healthy lives. The nation's finances are beginning to groan under the cost of prescription medication.

Contact with nature boosts people's physical and mental health. Exercise in the outdoors reduces obesity and is

shown to reduce heart disease, blood pressure and diabetes – among England's most common medical problems.

People's lives are often blighted by low level crime and anti-social behaviour. Studies have shown that the presence of natural greenspace and vegetation is associated with a 50% reduction in the incidence of violent crime and property damage.

A healthy natural environment near to where people live, designed and maintained by communities can offer solutions to many of the social problems of modern life.







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ENGLAND**

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