

November  
2011

## Customer focus

Welcome to our year-end edition of Land Management Update. In this issue, our main features focus on upland farming and the recognition of what farmers are achieving, and the importance of managing our SSSIs and how the Government's new 'Biodiversity 2020 strategy for wildlife and ecosystem services' will guide conservation efforts in England over the next decade.

We are making good progress with the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and feature an article on this year's Higher Level Scheme proactive approach based upon more than 100 target areas where HLS objectives are specially concentrated.

We are doing a lot more to engage with our partners and customers and our chair Poul Christensen will be hosting the first meeting of the Land Management Industry Group in January. The group will bring representatives from the farming industry together with food retailers and our agri-environment customers with the aim of improving our support for a vibrant and sustainable farming industry. I hope to report back on this in our next issue in January.

This year we have been working with existing, and in some cases establishing new, local farming groups and grazing forums, and I am confident that by working more closely with local farmers and the industry we will be able to deliver joint solutions that will deliver our environmental objectives whilst supporting a competitive sustainable farming industry.



Ian Fugler Director Land Management

### This issue's photo

Fens under snow  
SSSI/NNR: Holme Fen  
Cambridgeshire  
© Natural England/Peter Wakely

### In this issue:

Natural England and upland farming

SSSIs at the heart of government plans to halt the loss of species.

Evidence matters: Monitoring HLS upland agreements

ETIP and best practice farm walks

Supporting biodiversity habitats under the Higher Level Scheme

The 3-tier process: a farmer's view

Facts and figures

Notice board and latest publications

and more.....

## Natural England and upland farming



Some of the most treasured landscapes in Britain can be found in the National Parks and AONBs of the English Uplands, such as the Lake District, North Pennines, Peak District and Dartmoor to name but a few. Equally, many important wildlife habitats and iconic species are associated with the uplands – heather moorland, species-rich hay meadows, black grouse and curlew. The uplands we see and value today are a product of man's interventions since the last ice age, with upland farming playing a major role in shaping the landscape.

From a Natural England perspective Agri-Environment Schemes are our key mechanism of working with farmers, but in doing so we must recognise the important role upland farmers play in the nation's food production. Many farmers have years of experience combining food production with environmental management, with thousands signed up to Environmental Sensitive Areas (ESAs), Countryside Stewardship (CSS) and Environmental Stewardship (ES) schemes. These schemes provide solid support for a vital industry, and in upland areas hit by years of poor prices, they have helped keep many hill farmers farming. We are proud of that - it is real collaboration.

Working with farmers, the outcomes we are looking to deliver, range from maintaining and enhancing the biodiversity (including SSSIs) of the uplands through to protecting the landscape and historic environment. Other activities include work on resource protection, such as grip blocking on moorland to slow the movement of water in to rivers during periods of high rainfall, and looking at ways to make the uplands more resilient in a time of climate change.

Across the upland areas of England, defined as Severely Disadvantaged Areas (SDA)/moorland, there are now over 1 million ha of land in some form of environmental management agreement – about 84% of the agricultural area of the SDA. In total we now have 8,236 agreements covering 1,087,500 ha. Of these there are 3,553 Upland Entry Level Stewardship (UELS) only agreements; 1,525 UELS/Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) combined agreements and 3,158 Classic Schemes (ESA & CSS) agreements. In total these schemes inject some £86 million into the local rural economy each year.

Currently, about 48% of expiring upland classic agreements are transferring to HLS and we are working closely with our stakeholders and customers to identify those expiring classic agreements that best meet the targets and are appropriate for HLS. We are also offering free advice to those whose classic agreements are not suitable for HLS, to help them develop UELS agreements that fit with and support existing farming practices, and that maintain and enhance the environmental benefits already delivered through the classic schemes.

Agri-environment payments have long been an integral part of farm businesses in upland areas, often making up a substantial part of the net farm income. Even with better livestock prices, the future of hill farming and environmental management are dependent on one another, this is a key relationship for us as well as the farming community.

Exciting work with farmers and others in Dartmoor, the Lake District and South Pennines has been exploring how best to combine these key services in upland farmed landscapes. One example of this is on the upper catchment to Bassenthwaite Lake which includes Mungrisdale Common and the larger Skiddaw Massif. Via an HLS agreement, we have been working closely with local farmers to create strategic areas for woodland scrub planting to slow down rainfall runoff, increase infiltration rates and stabilise soil surfaces identified as being vulnerable to erosion.

These sites typically have covered land of limited grazing value, for instance bracken beds or steep sided, often scree covered gill areas, and yet these new woodland scrub sites can be influential in mitigating against flash flooding downstream, which is an issue in Cumbria. The local farmers have worked hard with Natural England to ensure the designs of the enclosures facilitate their stock gathering at particular times of the year, whilst blending into the Lake District landscape. They see the woodlands in the future providing additional services beyond stock shelter in these exposed locations, including recreational interest and improving the range of wildlife in the area.

Finally, we are consulting more regularly and in more detail with industry groups including the NFU and TFA, National Sheep Association, local groups of commoners and sheep breeder's associations such as those representing Herdwick and Blackface farmers. We will be using their industry expertise and local knowledge to help shape the agri-environment schemes of the future.

For more information, please contact: [David.L.Shaw@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:David.L.Shaw@naturalengland.org.uk)

# Spotlight on

## England Biodiversity Strategy puts SSSIs at the heart of government plans to halt the loss of species.



An ambitious objective for Sites of Special Scientific Interest has been set out in the Government's new biodiversity strategy. '[Biodiversity 2020: a strategy for wildlife and ecosystem services](#)' will guide conservation efforts in England over the next decade and ultimately seeks to halt the overall loss of biodiversity.

The new strategy places SSSIs central to the task of improving the quality of natural habitats, setting out the objective to increase the proportion of sites in favourable condition to 50%. Currently, 37% are in favourable condition, to achieve 50% will require a net increase of 146,000 ha - an area roughly the size of the New Forest, Salisbury Plain, the North York Moors, and The Wash combined.

'Biodiversity 2020' represents a huge challenge for Natural England and the owners and managers responsible for the 4,113 SSSIs across England: Not least because the attainment of favourable condition is due in a large part to the way in which the natural features of the site respond to management regimes. This can include the re-growth of heather moorland, and the establishment of mature woodland or grassland responding to the introduction of new grazing patterns. We know that some of these processes take longer than others and that the impact of similar management regimes can differ between locations. It is likely that lowland SSSIs will represent a significant proportion of the area gaining favourable status by 2020, since it is in these habitats that nature responds most quickly and is most predictable.

For Natural England's advisers and land managers at each site, achieving the new goal will require an emphasis on measuring the impact of existing management plans and, where necessary, adjusting them to take account of the way the natural features of a site are responding. Such plans may be part funded through a Natural England agri-environment scheme (e.g. HLS or UELS) a Forestry Commission woodland grant, or as part of a landscape scale multi-partner approach. Agencies and operating authorities may also have agreed plans for reducing effects of pollution or managing water levels.

As well as getting more SSSIs into favourable condition, continuous effort is also required to ensure that other sites do not slip out of condition. For that reason, another objective of 'Biodiversity 2020' is to ensure that the combined area of sites in favourable and recovering condition does not fall below 95% - it currently stands at just over 97%. This will require responses to the multiple pressures on site condition, including those which are beyond the scope of on-site management, such as sea level change, coastal squeeze, and diffuse pollution.

Ian Fugler, Director of Land Management, said: "As I mentioned in my opening note to you, our task for the coming decade is a significant one. Improving the condition of more SSSIs will require a new approach to their management - one that moves smoothly from ensuring that management agreements are in place, to ensuring that agreements have the desired effect. It should see the development of a closer working relationship between Natural England advisers and land managers – and one that will benefit the interests of nature and enterprise."

While striving to improve the condition of sites, another vital aim of Natural England's SSSI programme is to promote the value of the sites, both for biodiversity and for the wider benefits they provide. A recent study by [Defra](#) has detailed the contribution the sites make to public benefits such as the conservation of genetic diversity, the reduction of carbon emissions, and the provision of recreational space. **The study suggested that every £1 invested in SSSIs, led to £8 worth of environmental benefits.**

For more information, please contact Jonathan Blowers: [Jonathan.Blowers@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:Jonathan.Blowers@naturalengland.org.uk)



## Evidence matters

### Monitoring HLS agreements in the uplands

We have been working with the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) on a three year project to monitor the effectiveness of HLS. The project has involved collection of baseline data on the extent and condition of environmental features being managed under HLS, together with a predictive assessment of the likely effectiveness of each agreement, based on assessment of field survey data alongside agreement documentation.

In summer 2010, a total of 50 upland HLS agreements were surveyed. Fieldwork involved mapping and assessing the condition of the environmental features present on each agreement including habitats, historic features such as monuments, and other landscape features. Field data were collected using hand held electronic devices with appropriate GI software and electronic forms.

The collected data were summarised for each agreement and presented to a panel of environmental specialists for appraisal against a series of defined criteria, to enable the potential outcomes of each agreement to be assessed. The panel scored each agreement independently and then came to a consensus about the score for each criterion.

#### Key panel findings included:

- Overall, the panel found that 90% of the agreements had been well targeted, and they addressed appropriate environmental features for the locality in a comprehensive way.
- But cases were often identified where a feature appeared to have been placed in a sub-optimal management option for its existing condition, for instance placing features in need of restoration in a maintenance option.
- The panels identified some deficiencies in the setting of prescriptions and indicators of success, especially where generic prescription and indicator sets were being used on large moorland blocks. The need for clear links to management plans and/or favourable conservation tables in setting prescriptions and indicators was noted.
- In judging the likely success of each option, the panel noted the difficulty of evaluating the potential success of management of complex moorland blocks, often containing a wide diversity of environmental features, and recognised there was some uncertainty over their assessments of feature and option outcomes.
- As a result the potential success of management to maintain moorland tended to score higher than the equivalent management to restore moorland. A conclusive evaluation of outcomes would only be obtained through future resurvey.
- Field assessments of SSSI condition by CEH were broadly consistent with the most recent Natural England assessment.
- At the agreement level, the panel judged that around 70% of agreements were at least 'likely to be effective at achieving most outcomes', 20% had 'significant weaknesses but potentially effective in some areas, and 10% had 'serious weaknesses, but could deliver limited scheme outcomes'. In the latter category, a lack of additionality in grassland management was often cited as a key reason during panel discussions.

The field programme has continued in 2011, focusing on agreements in six target landscapes together with further baseline assessments of agreements with wetland, calcareous grassland and heathland management options. In the meantime, the findings from 2010 are being disseminated to Natural England scheme managers and advisers for use in HLS development and delivery. A final report covering the full three-year programme will be produced in spring 2012. For more information, please contact: [Andrew.I.Cooke@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:Andrew.I.Cooke@naturalengland.org.uk)

# Entry Level Stewardship Training and Information Programme (ETIP)



ELS was originally designed to be a hands-off scheme to deliver simple environmental benefits across a significant proportion of the farmed landscape.

In 2008, the Environmental Stewardship Review of Progress (ESRoP) reviewed this approach and concluded that the environmental outcomes from ELS would be improved “if a significantly enhanced, geographically differentiated programme of advice” was provided to farmers and land managers. And the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010 recommended that Defra developed ways of making ELS more effective in delivering environmental benefits through better targeting.

This approach is now in place in the form of the Environmental Stewardship Training and Information Programme (ETIP), and is organised through Natural England.

Part of this programme focuses on providing ‘Best Practice’ activities, either on a one-to-one basis, on farm; or by attending various group events, farm walks, meetings, and workshops, to existing ELS agreement holders.

The aim is to help farmers get the most out of their agreements; to review how their ELS/UELS/OELS options are working on the ground; and to identify any changes needed. We are initially contacting agreement holders in their second year, offering them a one-to-one visit, but any existing agreement holders can request one. And we are also inviting all agreement holders to attend various group events in their local area.

The current England-wide programme of these ELS ‘Best Practice’ group events is focussing on farm walks hosted by existing ELS agreement holders, on a range of farm types across the country. Walks cover specific ELS option themes, such as farmland birds, hedgerow and margin management, upland management, soil and water resource protection, and conserving the historic environment.

To find out about planned events please contact the [farm events team](#)

## County Durham focus on hedgerows and margins

One Best Practice farm walk held recently, in the North East, on a County Durham farm focussed on managing hedgerow and margins.

On a dull wet day 14 farmers, the farmer host and his wife, gathered on a 430 acre mainly arable farm, and were led on a walk around the farm by an experienced adviser, stopping at various points along the way to highlight and explain how best to manage the ELS option at that location.

There was much debate on how wide and high a hedge should be, how often it needed to be cut, to be laid or to be coppiced, and whether gaps within the hedge needed to be planted up.

Attention next turned to field margins and managing buffer strips, with farmers discussing margin width, cutting frequency and height, identifying the plants present in the sward, and identifying potential weed control options.

Other questions from farmers included how best to establish wild bird cover, and how to manage pollen and nectar mixes.

Over the course of the walk, farmers who didn't know each other began discussing issues between themselves, and posed various questions on which they were seeking advice and clarification. These were answered by the adviser, and attendees were then able to relate what they were seeing in the field to their own options at home, and apply the advice provided to their own situation after the event.

The adviser also challenged existing practices, recommending practical solutions to some of the option management issues covered. This led to lively discussion about the use of amendments and derogations within existing agreements.

At the end of the walk, the questions and answers continued over a cup of coffee, and farmers completed feedback forms so that we could gauge their views of what they had heard, seen and discussed.

A farmer who attended the walk commented: “This has been a worthwhile event for me, and gave me the chance to talk through with an adviser and other similar agreement holders, my individual and more generic issues in managing my agreement on the ground”.

# Supporting biodiversity habitats under the Higher Level Scheme

Natural England has considerably changed the way in which it works with farmers on HLS agreements over the past few years. We have gone from a reactive approach, using very broad scheme targets, to a proactive approach based upon more than [100 target areas](#) where HLS objectives are specially concentrated, plus other agreements for important features such as farmland birds outside these target areas.

We have also introduced faster procedures to allow us to complete more HLS agreements. The number of HLS agreements offered each year has risen, so that in this financial year we expect to offer around 2,400 agreements, worth £41m. Last year we offered about 1,700 agreements.

However, our work on HLS is not just about providing more agreements, faster. We are also focusing increasingly on the most important environmental outcomes of the scheme. In this article, we look at the agreements we offer for the most important biodiversity habitats.



This financial year, we are aiming to offer agreements that will bring over 80,000 ha of priority Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats into HLS, using options that will restore and conserve these habitats. We have already secured more than 68,000 ha of these important habitats and are on track to complete a further 12,000 by March 2012. The habitats, which are identified from the Farm Environment Plans include uplands, lowland and coastlands.

New agreements completed this year include measures to conserve or restore more than 5,000 ha of lowland chalk or limestone grassland, over 3,000 ha of lowland meadows and pastures and more than 3,600 ha of grazing marsh. In the uplands, more than 19,000 ha of upland heath and over 15,000 ha of blanket bogs have come under agreement, along with more than 500 ha of the restricted upland hay meadows. Over 2,800 ha of the most important coastal BAP habitats have come into HLS, including saltmarsh, sand-dunes, vegetated shingle and cliff tops.

The invertebrate interests of old and veteran trees has also featured in this year's programme: more than 2,400 ha of parkland and over 250 ha of traditional orchard now have their management supported and secured under new HLS agreements this year.

The proactive approach to HLS, and the ability to identify and plan agreements in advance, provides the certainty that we know our customers want. We are now beginning to look at possible agreements starting from April 2013 onwards. BAP habitats objectives will continue to be a very important element in the HLS agreements that we seek to offer.

## A farmer's view

**Tony Bambridge, who farms in Marsham Norwich, gives his opinion on the HLS 3-tier process he has recently experienced.**

"Following the recent 'Fast Track' application processed for my HLS application I would like to make the following comments.

This type of process seems entirely logical for the smaller farm, particularly where a previous relationship and knowledge has been gathered through a previous scheme.

The direct face to face discussion on options and potential to fund or not fund with the project officer is very refreshing and reduces both time and anxiety and improves understanding on both sides of the equation.

Whilst not diminishing the benefit of advisory bodies such as FWAG in conservation management, the ability to short circuit a process and exercise that would have had to be repeated virtually by the project officer in relation to the FEP is commendable, and I can see the cost benefit advantage to Natural England in this methodology.

The success of this type of approach will benefit from experienced and well trained project officers and selecting the farmers who have made some efforts in terms of quality preparation. Therefore I would recommend that this type of approach is objectively targeted at applicants and not to be a subjective area/value cut off/include rational."

# Facts and figures

## Environmental stewardship

The table below gives agri-environment scheme uptake statistics as at 21 November 2011

Scheme	Area (ha)	% of UAA	-/+ % in UAA since 1 March 2010	Number of Agreements	-/+ of Agreements since 1 March 2010	Annual Value
CSS	172,962	1.9%	-2.0	6,063	-4,523	£38.3 M
ESA	342,419	3.7%	-1.3	5,730	-1,356	£28.8 M
ELS	5,270,300	56.7%	3.1	39,116	1,389	£149.5 M
OELS	355,376	3.8%	-0.3	2,477	-213	£29.7 M
HLS (Combined with ELS/OELS*)	775,449	-	-	7,384	3,381	£128.7 M
HLS (Standalone)	102,827	1.1%	0.3	1,046	480	£21.8 M
Total HLS	878,276	-	-	8,430	3,861	£150.5 M
UELS	781,202	-	-	5,103	5,103	£63.9 M
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>6,243,884</b>	<b>67.2%</b>	<b>-0.2</b>	<b>54,432</b>	<b>-4,223</b>	<b>£396.8 M</b>

\*Most land in HLS is already accounted for in ELS or OELS. Numbers in italics not included in overall total. UAA is Utilisable Agricultural Area, by which is meant farmland and associated land such as woodland and scrub. Annual Value: for CSS and ESA, the figures relate to the annual value of live agreements in the current agreement year. For ES, the figures relate to the first year value of the agreements (the value may vary in other years).

## High priority ELS options

In the May issue of *Land Management Update* we reported that we were moving towards a more sophisticated, outcome focused target for ELS. Rather than judging the success of ELS simply in terms of scheme coverage we are now seeking to increase the uptake of the specific high priority ELS options contained within the [ELS option bundles](#).

At the end of March 2011 the high priority options accounted for 114.8 million points of the total 203 million points contained within live ELS agreements (56%). By March 2012 we aim to increase this to 120 million points (61%) by a combination of:

- offering free support to those (re)applying for ELS;
- better support for commercial agents working on ELS applications;
- the continued refocusing of new ELS/HLS agreements; and
- the assistance of the Campaign for the Farmed Environment.

As can be seen from the figures below, we are on course to deliver the target by the end of March. **Since April this year there have been 24% more ELS agreements issued than have expired. In November 609 ELS applications were received.**

GO Region	Total points contributed by High Priority ELS options	Total ELS points	High Priority option points as a % of total ELS points
<b>Midlands</b>	<b>26,715,697</b>	<b>46,597,652</b>	<b>57.33%</b>
East Midlands	14,886,541	26,340,715	56.52%
West Midlands	11,829,156	20,256,937	58.40%
<b>North</b>	<b>38,208,364</b>	<b>66,373,565</b>	<b>57.57%</b>
North East	10,713,487	18,990,802	56.41%
North West	12,334,116	21,898,913	56.32%
Yorkshire & The Humber	15,160,761	25,483,850	59.49%
<b>South East &amp; East</b>	<b>30,938,409</b>	<b>52,739,233</b>	<b>58.66%</b>
East of England	16,454,487	29,031,002	56.68%
South East & London	14,483,922	23,708,231	61.09%
<b>South West</b>	<b>22,384,803</b>	<b>41,363,737</b>	<b>54.12%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>118,247,273</b>	<b>207,074,187</b>	<b>57.10%</b>

## Where there's muck, there's brass

### Catchment Sensitive Farming - Capital Grant Scheme update

The Capital Grants Scheme plays a key role in helping land managers in priority catchments to manage water resources in a sustainable manner by providing funding to help tackle diffuse water pollution from agriculture. A total of 2,115 applications were received this year, with 67% approved for a grant.



Some of the main areas the scheme is helping to fund this year are 139,489m<sup>2</sup> of roofing for manure storage and livestock gathering areas, 29,187m<sup>2</sup> of roofing of silage stores, 182,432m<sup>2</sup> of concrete yard renewal works, 62,849m of cattle tracks/ farm access and 67,983m of watercourse fencing. Great news for the environment!

Grant recipients are reminded that claims can be submitted as soon as work has been completed and paid for in full. The deadline date for submitting claims is **29 February 2012**, and claims need to be accompanied by receipted invoices and/or proof that the work has paid for in full. **For help or further information about making a claim**, please contact Natural England's CGS team: Block 7, Government Buildings, Chalfont Drive, Nottingham, NG8 3SN Tel: 0300 060 1111 or email [catchmentsensitivefarming@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:catchmentsensitivefarming@naturalengland.org.uk).

The 2012/13 Capital Grant Scheme will open again on **1 March 2012** with extended coverage across England. Further information will be available early in the New Year. In the meantime, potential applicants are advised to keep in contact with their local Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer or the Catchment Sensitive Farming pages on the Natural England [website](#)

---

## Notice board

✚ **A study commissioned by Defra and Natural England to evaluate upland farmers' attitudes to Uplands Entry Level Stewardship** has recently been completed by the Countryside And Community Research Institute and their partners the Royal Agricultural College. It included 804 telephone interviews followed by 40 more in-depth face to face interviews. The survey report is being prepared for publication as a Natural England Commissioned Report and further details will appear in our February issue. The survey's key findings can be found [here](#).

### STOP PRESS!

Our congratulations to Andrew Hughes of Trinley Estate, Hants who was recently announced the winner of the BBC Farmer of the Year award.

"Andrew has been in Environmental Stewardship since 2006 and in the intervening five years it has been pleasing to see just how much more wildlife there is on the farm and the dedication that has been put into making the schemes work. Andrew puts the same amount of effort into the scheme options as he does into growing his crops. It has also been heartening to see the way that over the years Andrew has become much more engaged with conservation and environmental management and his enthusiasm and energy is key to making the HLS scheme such a success as will be seen when you look at the [website](#)"

**Harold Makant – Natural England Land Management adviser**



**Campaign for the Farmed Environment celebrates its second anniversary:** – see how the [campaign](#) is supporting uptake of ELS and targeting key options for better environmental outcomes.

continued/...

## Notice board (continued)

---

- ✚ [Common land and shared grazing: supplement to the Environmental Stewardship handbooks.](#)  
is now available on our website.
- ✚ A new [land management contacts webpage](#) has been created to improve clarity for land management customers and enable easier access to the correct phone numbers/mailboxes.

### Latest publications

- ✚ [NECR071 - Lugg Meadows SSSI, Herefordshire: Assessment of vegetation change and management efficacy following five years of monitoring](#)
- ✚ [NECR073 - Monitoring and modelling ecosystem services: A scoping study for the ecosystem services pilots](#)



**LM Update** is our regular bi-monthly newsletter for organisations that represent the interests of farmers, land managers, agents and others who are interested in land management and agri-environment schemes. We would be very interested in hearing your suggestions for future articles and other feedback. Please click the [feedback form](#).