

Natural England Performance Report as at December 2006

OVERALL SUMMARY OF NOVEMBER PERFORMANCE

Summary of Outcome 1:

England's Natural Environment will be Conserved & Enhanced

Good progress in most areas. 96% of Classic Scheme payments were made before Christmas, one month ahead of deadline. 2,400 new ELS agreements entered covering 375,000 ha. 96% of ELS payments made within one month. A 35% increase in staff productivity achieved since vesting. 793,821 ha (73.95%) SSSI land now in favourable condition. Increase mainly through WES and HLS agreements. Best estimate for end of March 07 is now 75.5% v target of 78%.

Summary of Outcome 2 :

More People Enjoying, Understanding & Acting to Improve the Natural Environment, More Often

Good progress in most areas. Alternative plans being prepared to offset missing out on a BIG Lottery bid for the 'Green Exercise Bid'. The 2005 English Leisure Visits survey has been published showing that the overall number of people taking trips has fallen and those who take trips are doing so less often..

Summary of Outcome 3:











The Use and Management of the Natural Environment is More Sustainable

Most targets on track, some concerns over the delivery of the Catchment Sensitive farming project and the target on intertidal habitats. Statutory obligations being discharged to deadlines and standards.

Summary of Outcome 4:

Governments, businesses, communities and individuals make decisions which collectively secure the future of the natural environment

Good progress has been made in assembling the evidence base for state of the natural environment
The momentum built up with energy crops work has stalled due to delays in the RDPE.

	Current	Outlook
Overall		
Outcome 1		
Outcome 2		
Outcome 3		
Outcome 4		







Key Risks and Issues

- Dependency on other agencies for delivery of SSSI condition target
- Pressure to find internal resources for health and the environment work.

Outcome 1: England's Natural Environment will be Conserved & Enhanced

Summary of Outcome 1

Good progress in most areas. Concern remains over the continued delay in RDPE and Nitrates Directive jeopardising HLS, as is the likelihood that the SSSI condition will not be achieved (75.5% v 78%).

	Current	Outlook
Outcome 1		
Objective 1.1		
Objective 1.2		

Objective 1.1: To conserve and enhance England's natural environment

- Natural England input to advising the SoS on appointment of SoS members to National Park Authorities and ANOB Conservation Boards is ahead of schedule and has been well received.
- 3,869 million hectares of England's total agricultural land is under Environment Stewardship agreement up 3% on the previous month. Just over 70% of the target (ie 60% total agricultural land by 2007) has been achieved.
- A further seven Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnerships now established and operating. The target for 90% of county and regional biodiversity partnerships meeting the standards has now been exceeded.
- Good progress in developing landscape, access and biodiversity conservation targets for 9 Catchment Sensitive Farming projects.
- 793,821 ha (73.95%) SSSI land now in favourable condition. Increase mainly through WES and HLS agreements. Best estimate for end of March 07 is now 75.5% v target of 78%.
- The good progress in reducing the long term decline in birds is being maintained.
- No Meyrick appeal result yet so the legal uncertainty on National Park boundary changes remains. It is likely to be the Spring before the outcome is known.
- OELS processing centralised in Crewe leading to more consistent advice to customers.

Objective 1.2: To conserve, recover and enhance the marine environment

- Content of the State of the Marine Environment Report now under development.
- Marine protected areas network establishment on schedule. All contracts for next year's marine SAC survey plan have been let. Marine policy review drafted.

Key Risks and Issues

- Dependency on other agencies for delivery of SSSI condition target
- Achieving the target for SSSI land brought into favourable condition of 78% by the end of March is very unlikely putting pressure on next year to catch up.

Outcome 1: Regional Flavour

Natural England have been successful in leading a bid with the London Biodiversity Partnership to secure £129K of SITA's Landfill Tax money to carry out heath land restoration on 5 key sites across London. This project makes a major contribution towards the achievement of London's Heath land Habitat Action Plan and builds on a successful HLF funded project raising the profile of London's Heath lands delivered by the partnership last year.

At Pakefield to Easton-Bavents Natural England recently confirmed the notification of a coastal SSSI which includes geologically important eroding cliff features. An application seeking leave to pursue a judicial review over this decision has been refused by the Courts.

The Environment Agency will be publishing consultation drafts of the Suffolk Estuary Strategies which (together with the next round of Shoreline Management Plans for this part of the coast) are expected to propose significant changes in coastal management with a shift to a more natural and dynamic coastal zone. These are likely to raise significant public interest and concern and have implications for the long term sustainability of designated coastal interests in the natural environment.

Wyre Forest NNR will be extended by 139 ha through a lease from the Worgan Trust. The management plan for the land will enable:

- Conifer reversion to start linking the earlier NNR coppice plots and ride networks.
- Rides linking open healthy glades and coppice areas.
- The pearl-bordered fritillary (a key open space invertebrate BAP species) will benefit from the management.
- Management of the woodland edge 'ecotone' habitats that are so crucial within the overall woodland setting.

The Wyre Forest NNR is now c.650ha and the new acquisition links directly with existing holdings thereby providing particular benefits for access and community use whilst also allowing us to secure favourable management condition.

Natural England is working in partnership with the Shropshire Wildlife Trust and the Forestry Commission (the Back to Purple project) to link up and restore heath land on a 10 km upland ridge of The Stiperstones.

The Finding Sanctuary Marine Protected areas project has successfully engaged with Prince of Wales with offer of support from the Duchy of Cornwall.

A contract was signed with the North West Development Agency to deliver a 'Natural Economy' project. This three year £2.8 million project aims to realise economic and social benefits from investments in natural environment projects throughout the region. The project will invest £ 1.5 million in biodiversity projects and also aims to promote 'natural tourism' across the region and to secure Green Infrastructure planning as part of the work of the RDA's sub-regional partnerships.

Outcome 2 : More People Enjoying, Understanding & Acting to Improve the Natural Environment, More Often

Summary of Outcome 2

- Good progress in most areas. Alternative plans being prepared to offset missing out on a BIG Lottery bid for the 'Green Exercise Bid'. The 2005 English Leisure Visits survey has been published, showing that the overall number of people taking trips has fallen and those who take trips are doing so less often..

Objective 2.1: Increase the number, diversity and frequency of people enjoying the natural environment









- Consultation on *Outdoors for All* shows overwhelming support for the Biodiversity Action Plan. Will be finalised to timetable and budget in time for Ministerial launch in June 07.
- The 2005 English Leisure Visits survey has been published (mid December).
- Despite a good bid funding for the 'Green Exercise Bid' through the Big Lottery's Well Being fund has not been forthcoming. An alternative plan is being actioned.

Objective 2.2: Increase everyone's understanding of and ability to take action for, the natural environment

- The scoping of a web-based information product to promote opportunities for people to experience/enjoy the natural environment now underway
- Lack of baseline data is restricting progress on measuring the increase in the number and diversity of volunteers in helping with conservation activities. Baseline survey being planned for 07 / 08.

Objective 2.3 : Improve places for people to enjoy the natural environment

- Projects with business partners to improve facilities and services to visitors to National Nature Reserves are now being prepared
- Good progress and on schedule to deliver this target. Of note is the partnership working on maintenance work on the Pennine Bridleway National Trail, South West coastal path and Hadrian's Wall.
- The timetable for submission of advice to Defra on coastal access now scheduled for February 07.
- Plans now in place for a February launch of 'A Natural Estate' as part of a new programme to connect people to the natural environment.
- CROW Section 15 stakeholder consultation meetings regarding preparation for a decadal review open country and registered common land have been completed.

	Current	Outlook
Outcome 2		
Objective 2.1		
Objective 2.2		
Objective 2.3		

Risks and Issues

- Pressure to find internal resources for health and the environment work may impact on other areas of delivery.

Outcome 2: Regional Flavour

'The Natural Estate - making space for nature on housing estates', guidance prepared by Neighbourhood Green (partnership between Natural England, Peabody Trust, Notting Hill Housing Association and Cabe Space) will be launched in February with a keynote address from Sarah Burton. This work forms part of the drive to transform housing estate landscapes for the benefit of residents health and wellbeing, and wildlife.

Natural England and Forestry (Enterprise) Commission have submitted a major HLF bid for a landscape scale project covering an area of 10km by 8 km just west of Bewdley, Worcestershire. Within this there is: SSSI * 1753 ha with 14 notified habitats/assemblages, 20 BAP species, 100+ RDB/Notable species. The overall project cost is £4million. The Forest already has 500,000 visitors annually and includes Sustrans Route 45 cycle route.

The bid includes:

- Educational works comprising new classrooms and facilities building on existing work by FE.
- Woodland and wider countryside management eg establishing coppice and rhododendron clearance and management of grasslands and orchards, both within SSSI and beyond.
- A wood fuel project to make sustainable use of the developing coppice and conifer reversion timber, targeted at local sites, conversion of boilers to wood chip, encourage uptake locally.

Stage one approval is expected in March 2007 with final approval following to allow project to be initiated 2008 to 2011.

The Somerset, Dorset, Torbay and Gloucester Rights of Way Improvement Plans are now in place and by the end of this month the Healthy walking groups have increased from 35 to 45.

The River Avon 'Living Rivers project' has been established working in partnership with Wildlife Trusts, Salisbury District Council and Salisbury festival – this project aims to bring the River Avon and its associated catchment to life to thousands of people. This is linked to the Salisbury International Arts festival whose theme for 2007 is Water. The project is supported by HLF.

Outcome 3: The Use and Management of the Natural Environment is More Sustainable

Summary of Outcome 3

- Most targets on track, some concerns over the delivery of the Catchment Sensitive farming project and the target on intertidal habitats. Statutory obligations being discharged to deadlines and standards

Objective 3.1: To improve the quality of environmental land and sea management through the development and adoption of sustainable practices, taking account of the impact of climate change

- Meetings with external contacts have been arranged to develop a programme to recognise achievement and innovation in environmental supplies
- We continue to meet fully our statutory obligations on wildlife management advice and licensing

Objective 3.2: Environmentally sustainable farming, fishing and forestry with protection of natural resources, reductions in diffuse pollution and enhancement of the natural environment

- The scope and format for the report highlighting most damaging and beneficial land and marine practices will be agreed in January. Research to underpin the report well in hand.
- Statutory obligations on under and overgrazing, EIA regulation fully met. Attestation certificate and report for under and overgrazing reviewed and agreed by RPA. EIA helpdesk successfully moved to Bristol
- The cross compliance advice, farm demonstration programmes and the Farm Business Advice service are all on track to meet 06/07 targets

Objective 3.3: To influence markets and supply chains to develop and adopt more sustainable practices and cut greenhouse gas emissions













- Catchment Sensitive Farming Project delivery remains about two months behind schedule due to procurement issues. Quality of delivery becoming an issue.
- Eat the view project brought to a close this month. Feasibility study to consider the costs/opportunities associated with sustainable food production now underway. Other projects progressing.

Objective 3.4: Secure commitment to natural environmental goals in EU, national, regional, local and sectoral, policies and strategies

- Backlog of cases on impact of development on European sites now cleared.
- Other planning case work on target and to deadlines.

Objective 3.5 : To increase investment in environmental enhancement and thereby the contribution of the natural environment to national, regional and local economies.

- Work on the intertidal habitat target stalled, issues raised by Associated British Ports still to be resolved
- Very good progress on creating 380 ha woodland on china clay areas in the South West
- Although the development of a second phase of the design for biodiversity and launch of a web site has been delayed progress in working with house builders in growth areas is picking up.

	Current	Outlook
Outcome 3		
Objective 3.1		
Objective 3.2		
Objective 3.3		
Objective 3.4		
Objective 3.5		

Risks and Issues

- Failure to reach agreement with Port Authorities threatening the intertidal habitat target.

Outcome 3: Regional Flavour

In December 2006 the Government published its proposed modifications to the Regional Spatial Strategy RSS following an Examination in Public (EIP). The proposed modifications constitute a significant improvement in the vision and strategic intent of the plan, recognising sustainable development as a core principle and protection and enhancement of the natural environment as a central objective of regional policy. The modifications also place a greater emphasis on climate change. In the East of England the RSS is accompanied by a Habitats Regulations Appropriate Assessment –being the first of its kind for a regional spatial strategy following a recent judicial ruling. These changes reflect the advice and recommendations made by Natural England.

The West Thurrock Lagoons in Essex attracted national media interest in November when proposals were brought forward to develop a Brownfield site of considerable invertebrate interest in the heart of the Thames Gateway. Natural England (and, prior to vesting, English Nature) have been actively involved in this case with the developer and the relevant planning authorities for nearly two years. These negotiations have secured the safeguard of the majority of the interest of the site and the long-term management of the site and the adjacent SSSI. Although a complex and challenging case, raising some difficult issues, Natural England's position has been carefully and thoroughly worked out and pursued vigorously and confidently.

Natural England is in negotiation with developers in the Northern Gateway container port expansion project on the Tees over possible bird disturbance, impact on Tees mouth and Cleveland SPA and the effects of dredging.

Northumbrian Water is proposing to switch off the UV filters at its treatment works which could result in a possible conflict in Natural England's position. Previously, English Nature had no objection to the filters being turned off, as bacterial levels will still be below bathing water quality (according to EA modelling) and there will be no impact on any designated sites. However Durham Heritage Coast (funded by Natural England) are 'voicing' objections.

Our input to the Black Country Strategy, (Phase 1 of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Review) has yielded a success. Our response to the Draft Revision last August, made in conjunction with EH, EA and FC was a joint note entitled 'The Black Country and Green Infrastructure', and advocated the adoption of a green infrastructure planning approach to environmental protection, enhancement and functions. This joint approach has resulted in;

- Green Infrastructure has been included as a topic for discussion at the EIP session on the Environment, and we will be asked to be one of the main contributors to the debate.
- In their final statement on the Environment session, the WM Regional Assembly and the Black Country Consortium stated that 'the BCC intends to embrace the recommendations of Natural England, EH, EA and FC to develop a Green Infrastructure planning approach in the Black Country as part of its implementation plan'.

Following our submission to Regional Spatial Strategy consultations in the South West we have been asked to participate in 95% of the Examination in Public reflecting the success of embedding/integrating the natural environment into all aspects of regional development.

Outcome 4: Governments, businesses, communities and individuals make decisions which collectively secure the future of the natural environment.

Summary of Outcome 4

- Good progress has been made in assembling the evidence base for state of the natural environment
- The momentum built up with energy crops work has stalled due to delays in implementing RDPE

Objective 4.1: Engage public and specialist audiences in debating what our future natural environment should be like.

- A evidence base about the future state of the environment is being assembled, and plans being made to fill any identified gaps in our knowledge.
- Establishing Green Infrastructure strategies in Growth Areas: is on track. Newly announced grow areas will be added, some are required to involve Natural England

Objective 4.2: Increase the ability of the natural environment to adapt to climate change and contribute to greenhouse gas pollution reduction.











- A methodology for establishing baseline condition for measuring climate change and risk assessments on four JCA's will be completed by the end of March
- Work to develop national guidance for wind energy generation underway, will inform local criteria for assessment.
- Energy crops scheme now closed, most regions report target for area planted has exceeded target. Working with Forestry Commission to explore opportunities to utilised waste wood. Progress delayed due to late introduction of RDPE

Objective 4.3: Ensure that future threats to the natural environment & opportunities for environmental improvement are identified and acted on

- 4.3.1 Framework for assessing cumulative effects of development: will be completed by the end of March

Objective 4.4: Ensure society lives within the limits of the natural environment, growing and developing the evidence base to support this

- 4.4.1 Projects for community projects linked to Breathing Places initiative still under development.
- 4.4.2 Preparation of systems and management arrangements to deliver the BIG lottery bid

	Current	Outlook
Outcome 4		
Objective 4.1		
Objective 4.2		
Objective 4.3		
Objective 4.4		

Risks and Issues

- National policy guidance urgently required on wind energy generation
- Continuing delays in implementing RDPE stalling the progress already made on energy crops work
- Increasing risks to lottery bid on access due to lack of Natural England capacity

Outcome 4: Regional Flavour

Natural England, in partnership with the Environment Agency, has formally opened the Alkborough Flats Managed Realignment Project. Sited at the confluence of the Trent and the Ouse, this is the largest project of its kind in Europe. It is delivering 440ha of new inter-tidal habitats on what was intensive arable land. With ailing flood barricades and no properties on the land, it was not deemed commercially viable to replace existing defences. Now Alkborough Flats can absorb enough water to negate the need for costly bank enhancements upstream on the Trent. The newly formed habitats are creating opportunities for locals and tourists alike to engage with wildlife and stretch their legs.

Natural England has established a working in partnership with Exeter University to undertake a climate change local impact assessment for Devon.