

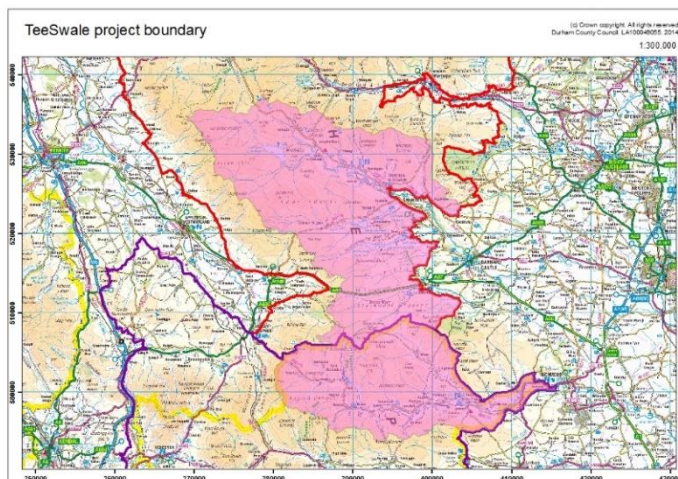
# Tees-Swale: naturally connected

## Introduction

This project is a collaboration between the North Pennines AONB Partnership and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, working with a broad range of partners but especially the farming and landowning community.

Together, Teesdale and Swaledale are the most biodiverse part of the English uplands and are the heartlands for some of our most threatened and precious habitats and species, including blanket bog, upland hay meadows, unique plant associations and breeding wading birds such as curlew. Farmers are key to managing these habitats and their associated wildlife but as we leave the EU, both farmers and the wildlife that depend on their management face an uncertain future.

Through Tees-Swale, we will collaborate with farmers, landowners and environmental bodies to generate the behaviour change that will sustain our 'High Nature Value' farming systems. Taking the 'Lawton approach' to nature conservation - 'more, bigger, better and joined' - as our starting point, we will work with farmers and landowners to enhance, expand and connect habitats across Teesdale and Swaledale on an unprecedented scale – showcasing how public funds can deliver multiple public goods. New audiences will discover, explore, enjoy and understand our heritage and we will make this a place of high quality learning and training. Our results will generate the evidence to influence post-Brexit policy on support for the uplands, delivering change that lasts. The new collaborative ways of working that we will pioneer will create resilient landscapes, engaged communities and long-term sustainability for our outstanding heritage.



The area targeted by this project covers 829 square kilometres in Upper Teesdale and Upper Swaledale. 61% of the project area comprises priority habitat and 67% of the project area is designated as SSSI. The character of the area results from a combination of its physical constraints, relative isolation and, critically, the retention of 'High Nature Value' (HNV) farming - low-intensity farming systems that are particularly valuable for wildlife, the environment and people.

## Our philosophy

The philosophy that underpins this project is closely aligned with the vision presented in the 'Lawton Report', *Making Space for Nature*: a step-change in our approach to wildlife conservation to one of large-scale habitat restoration and re-creation, under-pinned by the re-establishment of ecological processes and ecosystem services, for the benefits of both people and wildlife. Professor Sir John Lawton will chair our project Board.

Our approach will be founded on the concept of knowledge exchange, with farmers encouraged to share their land management skills and experience in order to target effective habitat improvement and restoration, in a way that allows the whole farm to work as a system. Conservationists will also share their expertise with the farming community in more collaborative partnerships than before - both parties will learn and find solutions together.

## Why is this project needed?

The upland landscape of the Tees and Swale provides a wealth of benefits to society but the people who own and work the land – and the organisations that support them – know that it could provide much more. Progress is currently constrained by a number of factors:

- Even in this biodiversity stronghold, natural assets are declining
- High Nature Value farming is economically marginal and almost entirely reliant on public support
- The benefits that HNV farming provides are not widely recognized and are not yet properly rewarded by the market
- There is a history of lack of sharing of knowledge and expertise between farmers and agencies
- There has been a reduction in funding for agri-environment schemes and within current schemes management prescriptions are inflexible and sometimes counter-productive
- There is a disconnect between the majority of the population and the assets and functions provided by this landscape

## The Project

### Nature Improvement

Conservationists, farmers and landowners will engage in a new collaboration through which we will undertake a large-scale programme of habitat improvement. Together, we will enhance, restore and create priority habitats in locations identified as making the greatest contribution to a resilient habitat network that can deliver multiple public benefits (such as biodiversity, flood mitigation, carbon sequestration, improved water quality). This will include:

- (1) Restoring our internationally important but degraded peatland – we will build on our outstanding track-record of peatland restoration to provide the best quality, best connected, upland peatland habitat in England.
- (2) Restoring our internationally important upland hay meadows – through improved management and seed addition, we will restore and connect hay meadows across the project area.
- (3) Expanding and enhancing woodlands – we will bolster and link fragmented woodlands and will establish a scheme for detecting and monitoring the incidence of ash die-back which will feed into advice provision to woodland owners and managers.
- (4) Managing rush for the benefit of species, habitats and farming – through carefully targeted rush management, we will prevent it from invading flower-rich meadows, reducing habitat suitability for breeding waders and reducing forage availability for grazing livestock.
- (5) Protection and management of flower-rich grassland – some of the best remaining areas of flower-rich grassland are in the least accessible places, for example, on steep slopes. Easy to ignore or damage by accident, we will ensure these places are managed effectively and expanded where possible. Road verges support a distinctive community of flower-rich grassland; we will work with local authorities and contractors to mark priority verges and ensure appropriate cutting regimes.
- (6) Wetland creation – wetlands provide a vital habitat for wildlife and play an important role in natural flood management. We will create new, small-scale wetlands across the project area for the benefit of wildlife and flood storage.
- (7) Recovering rivers – we will work with partners to reduce the impact of diffuse pollution from heritage sites, use experimental techniques to create rare calaminarian grassland and improve habitats for fish.

Priority species and habitats supported, created or restored through the project are highly likely to be eligible for future agri-environment payments which will support on-going management beyond the lifetime of the project.

## **Training and Skills**

- (1) Land management traineeships to empower a future rural workforce, fit to embrace the challenges and opportunities of working in a complex upland environment.
- (2) Training for farmers in repeatable habitat assessment techniques to build connections between farm management and its wider impact, enable progress measurement and evaluation of the impact of habitat restoration measures. These techniques will demonstrate to policy-makers potential approaches for outcomes-based agri-environment schemes and help prepare farmers for such schemes.
- (3) Training for agricultural contractors to improve the services they offer in terms of habitat management and restoration which will in turn reinforce HNV farming systems.
- (4) Knowledge exchange scheme to address broken relationships and failing trust between conservation professionals, agency staff and farmers.
- (5) Exploring alternatives that improve the financial resilience of farm businesses whilst maintaining key habitats and ecological networks.
- (6) Working with HNV farming Champions to showcase their approaches to farming and land management and the benefits society derives from these.
- (7) Moorland management events to demonstrate best practice and promote the IUCN UK Peatland Code.
- (8) Recruitment and training of Tees-Swale volunteers to empower local people, increase their understanding of the landscape and provide skills for the future.

## **Access and Engagement**

- (1) Reaching new audiences - We will work closely with a series of communities to the east of the project area enabling young people aged 8-25 years old to engage with the uplands and exploring with them why these places matter. Teaming up with outdoor education providers, we will offer a range of new opportunities for young people to directly engage with habitat management, access improvements and on-farm education schemes.
- (2) Community-led art inspired by nature and the landscape - a comprehensive programme of visual art, sculpture, performance, film or music generated through working with communities both within and outside the project area.
- (3) Hill Farming Live - Teaming up with suitable farms, we will offer local people and visitors the opportunity to experience life on a working hill farm.
- (4) The most accessible uplands - We will take forward targeted structural improvements in access provision that exceed statutory requirements and match these with clear and coordinated signage.
- (5) First class interpretation - we anticipate using the latest high quality, future-proofed ICT tools to bring the landscape to life and enable people to explore new routes.

## **Budget & Timescale**

Tees-Swale is an £8.5 million project. Following submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Major Grant programme in November 2017, we have been granted an eighteen-month development period. This will run from September 2018 to February 2020. We anticipate the start of the full five-year project will be in autumn 2020.

For more information please contact Rebecca Barrett, Tees-Swale Project Manager at [rebecca@northpenninesaonb.org.uk](mailto:rebecca@northpenninesaonb.org.uk), 01388 528801 or 07918 361996