

Nature Recovery Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2032:

A Strategy for Halting and Reversing the Loss of Biodiversity



*Bigger, Better
Managed And More
Connected Nature.*



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Depairtment o'

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

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Contents

Foreword	3
Introduction	8
Northern Ireland Policy Context	13
The Convention on Biological Diversity and Global Biodiversity Framework	20
Strategic Objectives	24
Resourcing, Monitoring, Reporting and Governance	37
Annexes	39

Foreword



Foreword

In Northern Ireland, we have some of the world's most beautiful landscapes, precious habitats and several thousand different species of plants, animals and fungi. Yet, many of these habitats and species are under threat or in serious decline, increasing our vulnerability to climate change, reducing the benefits to society and undermining our economy.



But nature can recover if we start recognising its value, stop doing things that are harming it, and start treating it with the respect it deserves. By putting in place plans and actions, to restore and manage nature, and adopt more nature positive policies and using the best available science and evidence, we can ensure it is protected for future generations. I am therefore delighted to bring forward this much needed Nature Recovery Strategy to halt and reverse the loss of Biodiversity.

Globally, nature is in crisis, and urgent action is required to deal with the continued decline in nature and biodiversity. Such consensus was reached at Conference of the Parties (COP)15 under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which produced the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, where 23 targets aiming to halt and reverse biodiversity loss were agreed. One of the most widely recognised targets of the CBD Framework is known as “30by30” (or 30x30), where 30% of the Earth’s land and ocean is effectively conserved and managed for nature by 2030, reflecting the importance of safeguarding and enhancing the best of our remaining places for nature. This is recognised in our Programme for Government, which contains a commitment to develop a Nature Recovery Strategy to help deliver the CBD 30by30 target in Northern Ireland.

A healthy, functioning natural environment underpins many of DAERA strategies and objectives. That is why I have set my Departmental vision to achieve a net zero nature positive future, supporting sustainable agriculture and thriving rural communities. This recognises the interdependency between nature and climate and the need for coherent and aligned measures for both. Ongoing declines in biodiversity exacerbate the climate crisis and a changing climate continues to accelerate biodiversity loss.

Protecting and restoring nature is not just a ‘nice thing to do’. We have a moral and legal obligation to protect and enhance the habitats, species and ecosystems that we share this planet with and there are huge societal benefits of returning to a world rich in nature. Our natural capital is what our future well-being and prosperity depends upon. Nature provides us with food, water and shelter; it regulates our climate and prevents disease; and provides us with opportunities for recreation which can enhance our health and well-being.

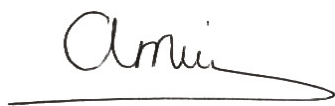
While we have a long way to go to halt and reverse current trends and achieve a nature positive future, there are signs of hope and clear examples of nature recovery in action. With the right strategic direction and leadership, collaboration of stakeholders through partnership, funding and practical action at scale it is possible to halt and reverse the decline of nature. We can take inspiration from conservation successes, such as the breeding wader recovery project in the

Antrim Hills and Lough Erne¹, the peatland restoration project at Mullaghcarn ASSI² or the Life-Raft project to protect native species on Rathlin Island³.

There is a clear need for transformation across government, business and society - we need to recognise, safeguard, mainstream and restore nature and biodiversity, our natural life-support system. Success will not come from working in isolation; collaboration will be key.

This strategy contains five strategic objectives and clear actions and targets to help deliver them. It collates actions and targets already agreed or in development in other strategies and identifies additional actions to further promote nature restoration.

I am pleased to publish this strategy to drive decisive action to address the drivers of biodiversity loss and enable the restorative work required to secure a nature positive future.



Andrew Muir, MLA

Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

¹ [Antrim Plateau - Curlew LIFE](#) and [Lough Erne Lowlands - Curlew LIFE](#)

² [Our precious peatlands | Ulster Wildlife](#)

³ [Rathlin Life Raft Project](#)



Executive Summary

Nature is in decline across the world. Extinction and threatened extinction rates are higher than ever before. Biodiversity is in crisis, and with it the essential services and benefits it provides. In Northern Ireland, around 40% of the flora and fauna within our most protected sites falls short of the defined standard for ‘favourable condition’, while only one of 49 priority habitat types in Northern Ireland was considered to be at favourable conservation status⁴.

Northern Ireland, as part of the UK, has committed to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) which was agreed by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at the Conference of the Parties (COP)15 in December 2022. The GBF sets out, in 23 targets and 4 goals⁵, the urgent actions required to “bend the curve” of biodiversity loss by 2030 and move towards the 2050 vision. That is, by 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.

DAERA has a duty to publish one or more strategies to further the conservation of biodiversity in Northern Ireland. This Nature Recovery Strategy fulfils this legislative requirement and sets out how we intend to meet international and national ambitions in Northern Ireland. The lifespan of this strategy is to 2032.

4. [Article 17 Habitats Directive Report 2019 \(Habitats\)](#) | [Advisor to Government on Nature Conservation](#) | JNCC

5 Web link to [GBF Targets](#), Web link to [GBF Goals](#)

Mission & Vision

2032 Mission: **To take urgent action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss to put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and planet by conserving, restoring and sustainably using biodiversity.*

2050 Vision: **Biodiversity across Northern Ireland is substantially restored and regenerated. Our rich and diverse natural environment is thriving, resilient, and adapting to climate change as well as contributing to climate change mitigation and resilience to its impacts. Everyone understands the benefits and importance of biodiversity and is playing their role in the stewardship of nature in Northern Ireland for future generations.*

**The mission and vision for this strategy reflect those set in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Global Biodiversity.*

Bigger, Better Managed and More Connected Nature

To deliver this Mission and Vision, this strategy sets out five strategic objectives:

- 1. Well Protected Nature and Accelerated Restoration**
- 2. Reduction of the Pressures on Biodiversity**
- 3. Sustainable Use of Biodiversity Through Nature-Friendly Policies and Practice**
- 4. Nature Valued and Mainstreamed Across All of Government and Society**
- 5. Building Strong, Integrated Evidence and Knowledge to Enable Action and Reporting for Nature.**

Biodiversity actions contained in other policies and strategies, particularly in the Environmental Improvement Plan, have been brought together in this strategy, with the target completion dates replicating those set out in the existing strategies and policies. New actions have also been included which will further help to deliver the five strategic objectives.

Introduction



Introduction

What is nature and why is it important?

Nature combines the living components (biodiversity) of our natural world with non-living (geodiversity). It includes all species of plants, animals, fungi and micro-organisms, and the habitats in which they live. The interactions and dynamic processes between non-living components such as rock types, landforms and weather with species result in the formation of ecosystems which make up the communities of life in a specific area.

Our economy, health and wellbeing depend on healthy, resilient ecosystems. These provide us with our food, clean water and air, as well as the raw materials and energy for our industries. Healthy ecosystems can also deliver protection against hazards such as floods. These benefits to our wellbeing and to the environment are known as ecosystem services.

What happens when nature declines?

Nature and ecosystems are sensitive to changes and disturbances in the local environment, which can be caused by pollution or habitat loss. As a result, precious habitats and species are being lost and ecosystems are unable to provide the goods and services we need. This has economic implications globally and locally.

The Dasgupta Review of the Economics of Biodiversity (2021)⁶ asserted that nature is a blind spot in economics and called for nature to be treated as an asset to be valued, protected, and restored—not exploited. The review provided a comprehensive framework for integrating biodiversity into economics, policy, and everyday decision-making. It put biodiversity at its core and in doing so, it shows us how, by bringing economics and ecology together, we can help save the natural environment.

The importance of biodiversity in Northern Ireland

For its size, Northern Ireland is one of the most geologically diverse areas of the planet⁷. This has resulted in a rich and internationally important biodiversity of some 20,000 species across our land, soils, air and waters. Northern Ireland is home to species found nowhere else in the UK, including the Irish damselfly and sub-species such as the Irish Hare. A significant component of our biodiversity lies within the marine environment which extends over 6,800km², 650km of coastline and includes our sea loughs and estuaries.

The natural environment has sustained human life in Northern Ireland for centuries. It supports our tourist industry, our agri-food industry and fishing and seafood industries. The loss of biodiversity across Northern Ireland affects our livelihoods, our wellbeing, and the ability of nature to provide us with the very basics of our existence - clean water, food and air.

⁶ [Final Report - The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review](#)

⁷ [NI Geodiversity Charter 2025 can be found at GeodiversityCharter2021.pdf](#)

Challenges for Northern Ireland's Natural Environment

Across the world over one million species are threatened with extinction, and the populations of many vertebrate animals have declined by two-thirds since 1970. In the UK over 40% of species are in decline. Over the past 50 years more than 40 million birds have been lost from our skies, and a quarter of UK mammals are threatened with extinction.⁸ There are similar drivers affecting biodiversity globally, as reflected in the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Global Assessment Report⁹ on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

Pressures and threats to Northern Ireland's biodiversity (Annex A) include, but are not limited to, invasive species, climate change, inappropriate development, land and sea use change, increased intensive farming practices and pollution.

These pressures result in a decline in the extent and quality of habitats and a reduction in the diversity and abundance of species.

The Office for Environmental Protection published an Evidence Review on the drivers and pressures affecting nature in Northern Ireland, in October 2024¹⁰, which highlighted the drivers and pressures of biodiversity loss.

The State of Nature in Northern Ireland

DAERA, NIEA and other partners are involved in monitoring and surveillance of a wide range of habitats, species and pressures across Northern Ireland's natural environment which is important for reporting on the state of biodiversity here. Around 40% of the flora and fauna within our most protected sites falls short of the defined standard for 'favourable condition', while only one of 49¹¹ priority habitat types in Northern Ireland is considered to be at favourable conservation status.

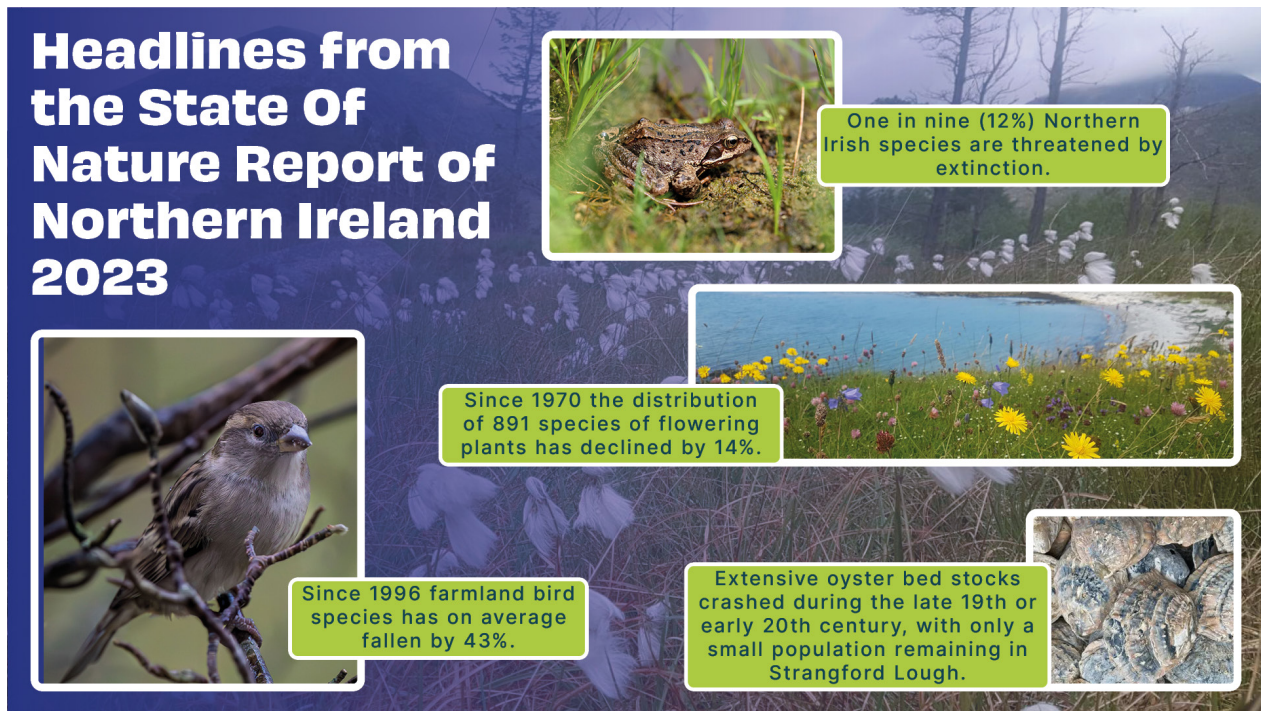
8 Brotherton P., Anderson, H., Galbraith, C., Isaac, D., Lawton, J., Lewis, M., Mainwaring-Evans, T., McGuckin, S., Ormerod, S., Osowska, F., Sizeland, P., Stuart, E., Walmsley, C., Waters, R. & Wilkinson, S. (2021) [Nature Positive 2030 – Evidence Report](#). JNCC, Peterborough. ISBN: 978-1- 86107-635-9 [Nature Positive 2030 Evidence Report \(jncc.gov.uk\)](#)

9 <https://www.ipbes.net/global-assessment>

10 [OEP report on the drivers and pressures affecting nature in Northern Ireland](#) | Office for Environmental Protection

11 [Article 17 Habitats Directive Report 2019 \(Habitats\)](#) | Advisor to Government on Nature Conservation | JNCC

Figure 1. NORTHERN IRELAND ASPECTS OF THE UK'S STATE OF NATURE REPORT 2023



In Northern Ireland 36% of all features within protected areas are in unfavourable condition¹², and the State of Nature Report for NI¹³ records that 12% of species assessed in Northern Ireland are threatened with extinction (Figure 1).

Long-term deterioration of pollinators, insects and birds of the wider countryside, and increased pressure from invasive species are reported along with the deteriorating status of threatened habitats and species, and deteriorating abundance of UK Priority species.

In addition, the condition of Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) is showing short term deterioration and expenditure on UK biodiversity is also showing a short-term decline.

This trend is further highlighted in statutory reporting. In January 2026, DAERA published Northern Ireland's first Habitats Regulations Report¹⁴ (formerly the Article 12 and Article 17 Reports under the Wild Birds and Habitats Directives respectively), which set out the latest assessments of the conservation status of Northern Ireland's priority habitats and species, and progress on implementing the Habitats Regulations. This was later followed by the publication of the 7th National Report¹⁵ under CBD, setting out progress in meeting the KM-GBF targets, which shows some progress, but generally not at a sufficient rate.

¹² [NI Environmental Statistics Report - 2024](#)

¹³ [Northern Ireland - State of Nature](#)

¹⁴ [Habitats Regulations](#)

¹⁵ [Seventh National Report to the UN CBD: UK](#)

In Northern Ireland, data is collated to inform broad trends in positive or negative changes to UK biodiversity using the UK Biodiversity Indicators. These are dependent on a wide variety of data provided by government, research bodies, and the voluntary sector. In the most recent UK Biodiversity Indicators report¹⁶ there are 68 individual measures that make up 39 indicators. Of those 68 measures, some are unsuitable for a formal assessment of change (for instance they may have insufficient data or are in development). In this 2025 report 42 measures were suitable for assessment. The data trends are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

In the long term:	In the short term:
19 measures (28%) show an improvement	15 measures (22%) show an improvement
5 measures (7%) show little or no overall change	14 measures (21%) show little or no overall change
18 measures (26%) show a deterioration	13 measures (19%) show a deterioration

While a number of biodiversity metrics are published annually, via DAERA's Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report¹⁷, Northern Ireland does not currently produce comprehensive biodiversity indicators. There is a commitment in the Environmental Improvement Plan to publish a suite of annual biodiversity indicators to report on progress against biodiversity targets, and to meet the Environment Act, Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, Climate Change Act and Northern Ireland's Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP) and draft Green Growth Strategy reporting requirements.

We need to act now

Habitats and species are the vital building blocks that make up our ecosystems – the sustainable natural systems that can provide us with reliable supplies of clean water, purify our air, regulate our climate, and secure our food supplies. In order to protect our vital natural resources, urgent and transformational action to reverse biodiversity loss is now essential.

This strategy outlines the changes needed to protect, restore, and enhance our natural environment, to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and deliver a nature positive future for Northern Ireland.

¹⁶ [UK Biodiversity Indicators](#)

¹⁷ [Northern Ireland environmental statistics report | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

Northern Ireland Policy Context



Northern Ireland Policy Context

What are our overarching commitments for biodiversity?

The Leaders' Pledge for Nature, launched at the United Nations General Assembly in 2020, saw Heads of State from around the world, including the UK, make hugely significant commitments for nature. They promised to tackle the interdependent crises of biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation and climate change, kicking off the UN's Decade of Ecosystem Restoration. It also included a commitment "to develop and fully implement an ambitious and transformational post-2020 global biodiversity framework" which culminated with the signing of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity at COP15 in December 2022, to which the UK is a signatory.

There is a long history of directives, and international environmental conventions for nature conservation to which the UK has been a signatory, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, Bern Convention, Bonn Convention, Ramsar Convention, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and Oslo and Paris Conventions (OSPAR), as well as the EU Habitats and Wild Birds Directives, which have provided the framework for Northern Ireland's biodiversity policy, regulations and programmes.

What are Northern Ireland's existing duties for nature conservation?

There is a statutory requirement under the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 for the development and regular review of one or more strategies to promote the conservation of biodiversity. This Nature Recovery Strategy fulfils this legislative requirement.

The same Act also sets out the Biodiversity Duty which applies to Government Departments and Public Bodies, stating that it is 'a duty of every public body, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions.' In doing so, the responsibility for biodiversity conservation applies and is shared across Government and further work is required to ensure that this is fully adopted and embedded. The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) also places duties on DAERA to carry out monitoring, surveillance and reporting of the conservation status of our important biodiversity.

Furthermore, the Environment Act 2021 contains provisions for Northern Ireland requiring that an Environmental Improvement Plan is prepared and this plan was approved by the Executive and published in September 2024. NI Departments and UK Government Ministers are also required to have due regard to the statement on Environmental Principles when making policy for Northern Ireland and the Environmental Principles Policy Statement¹⁸ for Northern Ireland was approved by the Executive in November 2025 and came into force on 2 September 2026. These principles will be particularly important for ensuring that the natural environment is considered in policy-making.

¹⁸ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/news/minister-welcomes-publication-environmental-principles-policy-statement>

The importance of safeguarding and restoring Northern Ireland's nature and wildlife has been long recognised, reflected in the suite of nature conservation legislation in place, such as:

- Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002
- Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended)
- Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011
- Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013
- Marine Strategy Regulations 2010
- Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985
- Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985

These instruments provide for the protection and conservation of priority habitats, species and ecosystems, and place duties on DAERA, other Government Departments and public bodies, and other stakeholders to further their conservation and restoration. They also place duties on DAERA to carry out monitoring, surveillance and reporting of the conservation status of our important biodiversity.

An example of how these duties carry through to the work of other departments is the protection provided through The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017. The aim of these regulations is to implement the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive to provide a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation of projects with a view to reducing their impact on the environment.

Historically, the policy framework has placed a significant reliance on the role of designating sites to protect a representative sample of the best of our biodiversity and to contribute to the development of an ecological network. However, this has not been sufficient to halt the decline in biodiversity. The increase in pressures on nature has resulted in significant biodiversity loss in the wider countryside - hence the need for new policy measures and greater urgency.

There are many policies and strategies in development or already in place across Northern Ireland that have relevant actions or targets for biodiversity. These are summarised in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. NORTHERN IRELAND GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR BIODIVERSITY

Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP)

Northern Ireland's first EIP sets out the six Strategic Environmental Outcomes, with associated targets, which encompass all of the main environmental challenges we will face in the coming decades and is the basis for a coherent and effective set of interventions that can deliver real improvements in the quality of all aspects of the environment.

Programme for Government 2024 – 2027

The PFG demonstrates the NI Executive's commitment to environmental sustainability and health and wellbeing through the below mission and priorities:

- Mission 2 - Planet: Harnessing the potential of a green growth economy, while ensuring we provide an equitable transition to a sustainable and affordable society as we take responsibility for decarbonising our economy and society.
- Priority 1 - Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy
- Priority 8 – Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment (under which the commitment to this nature recovery strategy and delivering the GBF 30by30 target is reinforced).

The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 and the Draft Climate Action Plan

The Climate Change Act, which recognises the important and interdependent relationship between nature and climate, sets a legally binding objective for Northern Ireland to reach net zero emissions by 2050. It introduces a system of five-year carbon budgets, supported by Climate Action Plans (CAPs) that must set out the policies and proposals needed to meet each carbon period. The Act also requires CAPs to include targets for biodiversity, soil and air quality targets.

Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programmes

The Climate Change Act 2008 places a statutory duty on Northern Ireland Executive Departments to lay programmes before the Northern Ireland Assembly, which set out their objectives, policies, proposals and timelines for introducing those policies and proposals in response to the most recent UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA).

Figure 2. NORTHERN IRELAND GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR BIODIVERSITY (CONT.)

Lough Neagh Report & Action Plan

The report focuses on measures to tackle the Blue Green Algae problem in Lough Neagh. The action plan contains 37 actions to mitigate the issues in the ecosystem and wider catchments. Many of these actions are aimed at reducing pollution from excess nutrients.

River Basin Management Plan

The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 require the production and implementation of a River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) in six yearly cycles. RBMPs set out measures that will be taken to protect, improve and restore water quality.

Peatland Strategy

The strategy has been developed to reflect and respond to the twin challenges of biodiversity loss and carbon emission reductions. It will play a significant role in Northern Ireland meeting international Biodiversity commitments to protect 30% of Land and Sea by 2030.

The Northern Ireland Plant Health Risk Register

Managed by DAERA, lists over 900 species of pests and pathogens to prioritise actions against those which threaten our crops, trees, gardens and countryside.

Ammonia Strategy

Agriculture makes a significant contribution to the Northern Ireland economy; however, it also produces 97% of current ammonia emissions. Therefore, action on ammonia is required urgently to support our local farm businesses and rural communities and help them to thrive and be sustainable, while at the same time protecting our environment. A new Ammonia Strategy will help us plan the way forward to reduce ammonia emissions from agriculture.

Figure 2. NORTHERN IRELAND GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR BIODIVERSITY (CONT.)

Sustainable Agriculture Programme (SAP)

The SAP aims to transition to a more sustainable farming sector by seeking to implement policies and strategies that benefit our climate and environment while supporting our economically and socially significant agri-food sector. **The Farming with Nature (FwN)** scheme aims to contribute to reversing the trend in nature decline through providing farm businesses with financial support to carry out actions that aim to enhance and restore nature on farmland across Northern Ireland.

Nutrients Action Programme

The aim of the Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) is to improve water quality and the wider environment by reducing and preventing pollution caused or induced by nutrients from agricultural sources. A key objective is to promote efficient management of livestock manures, manufactured fertilisers and other nutrient-containing materials spread onto land to reduce environmental impacts.

Draft Marine Plan

The draft Marine Plan, and the Marine Plan once adopted, will provide the framework for decision-making that affects or might affect the marine area to facilitate the sustainable management of the marine resource. It applies to authorisation and enforcement decisions and any other decision which relates to a function capable of affecting the marine area. The draft Marine Plan facilitates healthy, resilient and adaptable ecosystems and an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas. Through its marine planning policies, it provides for the protection of Marine Protected Areas and biodiversity.

Marine Protected Areas Strategy for the Inshore Region 2025-2030

The MPA Strategy outlines our approach to protecting, managing, and restoring our marine area until 2030, in alignment with international commitments, through a number of objectives and associated actions. This represents a shift from creating an ecologically coherent network of sites to ensuring effective management of these, in collaboration with stakeholders, to benefit both designated sites and the wider marine environment. Where necessary, additional sites will be designated to address network gaps and enhance ecological coherence.

Figure 2. NORTHERN IRELAND GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR BIODIVERSITY (CONT.)

Blue Carbon Action Plan 2025-2030

Blue carbon habitats act as a nature-based solution to climate change as well as providing habitats to support biodiversity, and ecosystem services (such as protection against coastal erosion). As a result, the Blue Carbon Action Plan has been co-developed with stakeholders to enable management, protection and restoration of these habitats, while contributing to a number of international targets in relation to climate change and biodiversity recovery.

Wildfires in Northern Ireland Strategic Framework 2025 – 2030

This Strategic Framework outlines a unified approach to tackling the problem of wildfires and was developed in partnership with NIEA, Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service and other wildfire stakeholders.

Soil Nutrient Health Scheme

This scheme provides farmers with comprehensive, field-by-field data on soil nutrient levels, organic matter, carbon stock estimates, and nutrient run-off risk maps.

Figure 3. OTHER POLICIES & PROGRAMMES WITH BIODIVERSITY COMMITMENTS



The Convention on Biological Diversity and Global Biodiversity Framework



The Convention on Biological Diversity and Global Biodiversity Framework

The 30by30 Target

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is an International Agreement between most of the world's governments that sets out the commitments for maintaining the world's ecological resources whilst continuing our economic development.

The CBD has developed a global biodiversity framework to guide actions worldwide to preserve and protect nature and its essential services to people. This framework comprises 4 goals for 2050 and 23 targets for 2030. The full list of the CBD targets can be viewed online by following the web links at Annex B¹⁹.

The full “30by30” target is:

“Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.”

This is commonly referred to as the “**30by30**” target which, along with the 30% restoration target, is intended to be a key objective in this Nature Recovery Strategy and the thrust of many allied targets including restoration obligations. This objective, along with the UK's further commitment to ‘halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030’ is the basis of the “Nature Positive 2030” report²⁰; a joint report from the UK nature conservation agencies, including Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Natural England, NatureScot, Natural Resources Wales and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (government advisors on nature conservation).

¹⁹ [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework \(cbd.int\)](https://www.cbd.int/framework)

²⁰ [Nature Positive 2030 Evidence Report \(jncc.gov.uk\)](https://jncc.gov.uk/nature-positive-2030-evidence-report)

What does the 30by30 target mean for Northern Ireland?

The 30by30 target is very ambitious. While DAERA has begun work to establish baseline positions for this target, these are still to be further explored and agreed. Currently in Northern Ireland, approximately 9.9% of our terrestrial land area and approximately 38% of our coastal waters are designated as protected sites such as Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ). However, some of these protected areas may not be in a good enough condition or have suitable management in place to contribute towards the 30by30 target immediately but may require successful restoration or measures to address pressures out with the site boundary first.

Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECM) will also contribute to delivery of the 30by30 target. Unlike traditional protected areas, these do not require legal designation, or for biodiversity conservation to be the primary management objective. These provide an opportunity to recognise de facto effective long-term conservation that is taking place outside currently designated protected areas, under a range of governance and management regimes, implemented by a diverse set of actors.

NIEA has been developing a draft Delivery Framework and Road Map for 30by30 on land. DAERA plans to establish a stakeholder forum or 'engine room' to shape delivery mechanisms, overcome barriers, and clarify definitions and priorities to support the accelerated progress that needs to be made. This will include the agricultural and environmental sectors and public bodies. Once published, the Framework will form the basis of a more structured stakeholder journey of refining, informing, enabling and adapting 30by30 approaches and delivery for the protection and management of nature.

Halting and reversing biodiversity loss, and enhancing nature's contribution to people – a priority for Northern Ireland

For Northern Ireland to achieve a nature positive future by 2030, the current decline of biodiversity must be halted and reversed. Ecosystems must be restored; the number of species threatened with extinction must be reduced and species abundance must increase, with bigger, better managed and more connected areas for nature to recover and flourish. Previous nature goals promoted the importance of minimising harm and halting biodiversity loss. However, we must act now to actually deliver real and measurable improvements in the state of nature and ecological resilience. We must actively promote and support **nature-based solutions** to tackle society's challenges (Figure 4), taking action to reverse biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, and increase the extent and condition of nature in key areas to provide natural, more resilient solutions, at a country and global level, by 2030.

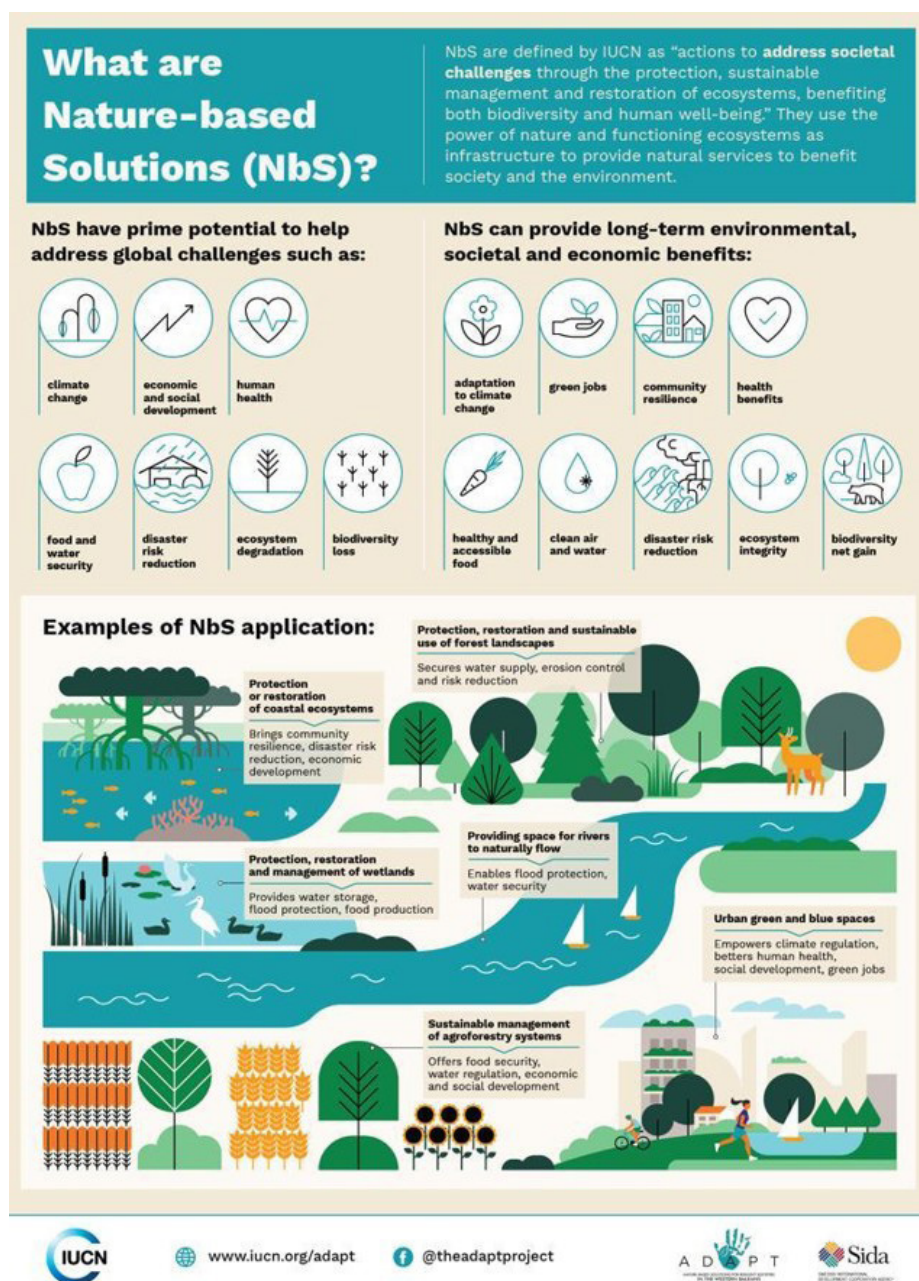
Nature and Climate

The importance of nature in delivering climate action is recognised by the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 which sets an obligation for policymakers to consider the use of nature-based solutions when identifying policies and proposals for achieving 5 yearly carbon budgets.

The interdependent relationship between functioning ecosystems and lower net greenhouse gas emissions is complemented by the requirement to set targets for biodiversity, soil and air quality within the Climate Action Plan (CAP), which must also take account of a range of matters including the just transition principle .

Currently the first draft CAP (2023-2027) includes policies and proposals relating to peatland restoration and increasing woodland cover. These are contained within the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) chapter of the draft CAP. These interventions bring clear benefits to increasing biodiversity in Northern Ireland and also assist the pathway to net zero with quantifiable carbon reductions and removals. Further evaluation of other ecosystems that can assist carbon reductions will follow for subsequent Climate Action Plans.

Figure 4. NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS AND ROLE OF RESTORED NATURE AND ECOSYSTEMS



Strategic Objectives



Strategic Objectives

The UK is committed to meeting the 4 goals and 23 targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework, and Northern Ireland will contribute to this, as set out in the UK National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)²¹.

This strategy collates actions or targets, to be delivered by DAERA, that aim to halt and reverse biodiversity loss under five Strategic Objectives. The actions show how Northern Ireland is contributing towards meeting the international goals and targets, as agreed in the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Strategic Objective 1: Well Protected Nature and Accelerated Restoration

Nature protection and conservation have traditionally relied on measures such as designation of representative protected sites, the management of habitats to support species of conservation concern, and controls over development and land-use change through the planning system and EIA regulations.

Whilst it is still appropriate to maintain these approaches, it is clear that existing statutory obligations to protect nature must be implemented in full and more must be done to restore ecosystems at pace in key nature areas, if we are to halt and begin to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030. Protected areas need to be the beating heart of healthy, functioning nature networks on land and at sea, and should be effectively managed and expanded to support species recovery and enhance ecological resilience. Species abundance will be an important consideration in both protected areas and the wider countryside. A Land Use Framework will consider the multiple competing demands and inform decisions on land use and land management to meet society's needs and safeguard our essential natural capital on land. To ensure we have the necessary skills, expertise and capacity to deliver the scale of conservation and restoration work required in the future it is important to provide a pathway for young people to enter conservation careers.

DAERA has acknowledged in its response to the Office for Environmental Protection's (OEP) review of the implementation of laws for terrestrial and freshwater protected sites in Northern Ireland, that the governance, framework and strategies for protected sites designation, monitoring, protection measures, management, and the provision of data and advice need to be strengthened, with clear plans for delivery of targets, improved implementation, and regular evaluation and review. High level targets and actions for nature are already embedded in the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP), and elsewhere, and have been set out under each objective, while further commitments in response to the OEP's recommendations are included as new actions below.

DAERA has in place The Conservation Management Plan (CMP) programme which has been devised to set out site-specific conservation measures for our Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), in the first instance, representing 4% of NI land area, and subsequently for SPAs (Special Protection Areas), then ASSIs (Areas of Special Scientific Interest).

²¹ [UK National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan](#)

The CMPs define the majority of those necessary conservation measures within the SAC required to move the site features towards favourable condition (SAC management unit level) and therefore provide a framework for conservation action and delivery going forward. The CMPs have focused on land management issues impacting the site [with the majority of these inside the site boundaries], as agreed with key stakeholders and landholders within each of the management units.

CMPs are available as interactive StoryMaps on the DAERA website: [Conservation Management Plans \(CMPs\)](#)

Existing targets and actions within other relevant strategies or policies include (with their previously committed dates):

- By 2026: Develop and implement nature recovery plans and programmes, including nature-based solutions, for protected areas, priority habitats and species, nature recovery networks and other effective conservation measures (OECMs). (EIP)
- By 2030: At least 30% of land and freshwater protected, connected and managed for nature. (EIP)
- By 2030: 95% of the features underlying the designation of ASSIs to be in, or approaching, favourable conservation condition. (EIP)
- By 2030: Phase out the use of peat in horticulture to ensure better management of peatlands. (Peatland Strategy)
- By 2032: Peatland restoration is significantly upscaled towards meeting 63% of peatlands in Northern Ireland being restored by 2040. (Peatland Strategy)
- By 2030: Create or commence restoration of 20,000 ha of wildlife rich habitat outside the protected site network (to support nature recovery networks and nature-based solutions) (EIP)

Additional Nature Recovery Strategy actions for Strategic Objective 1 (date referred to is the year end date):

By 2027: Develop and implement a Protected Sites Strategy and Delivery Plan for the stewardship of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites (designation, protection, management and restoration).

By 2027: Publish a suite of evidence packages to support nature recovery and improve public access to environmental information relevant to the protected sites network.

By 2027: Explore options for supporting the establishment of a conservation traineeship scheme.

By 2028: Develop a Land Use Framework to provide a strategic understanding of current and future land use and to shape better land use decision making to optimise the use of land to deliver multiple societal goals.

By 2028: Commence delivery of a species recovery programme to demonstrate collaborative action to save species across Northern Ireland.

By 2030: Roll out initiatives associated with the All-Island Pollinator Plan, including promoting sustainable biodiversity-friendly actions for farmland and communities.

By 2030: Implement the actions in the Northern Ireland Marine Protected Area Strategy.

By 2030: Deliver the actions in the Elasmobranch Conservation Strategy and Seabird Conservation Strategy to improve and restore populations of priority and threatened species in the Northern Ireland inshore region.

By 2032: Implement the Tree Planting Action Plan

Small actions you can take that can make a big difference for nature protection and conservation



The swift is one of our most remarkable migratory birds. It spends almost its entire life airborne and feeds exclusively on flying insects. Historically, swifts nested beneath roof eaves and within gaps in older buildings. Modern construction techniques often remove the small openings, cavities and roof spaces that swifts rely on for nesting opportunities.

Pipistrelle bats face similar challenges. These protected species commonly occupy narrow crevices around roof ridges and gable ends. Modern roofing systems often remove these access points altogether.

Products such as swift nesting bricks and bat ridge roosts provide permanent, maintenance-free habitat integrated directly into buildings.



These measures are inexpensive, straightforward for contractors to install, and capable of delivering significant long-term biodiversity benefits. These solutions can be retrofitted on older properties or fitted at the time of construction for new builds.

Strategic Objective 2: Reduction of the Pressures on Biodiversity

Accelerated effort to conserve and restore biodiversity will not be effective unless the external pressures that are negatively affecting biodiversity are also minimised. Invasive species, pollution, and the effects of climate change must be effectively controlled to allow nature to begin to thrive. Aligning action for climate change with action for biodiversity ensures that there are no unintended negative consequences for biodiversity when developing carbon mitigation measures and that opportunities for mutual benefit are realised.

Pollution, in particular, nutrient pollution is recognised as one of the primary drivers of biodiversity loss, globally and here in Northern Ireland²², reflected in the important KM-GBF Target 7 (Reduce Pollution to Levels That Are Not Harmful to Biodiversity – reduce by 50% by 2030). In Northern Ireland, this particularly relates to nutrient pollution, via nutrient run-off from sewage works or farmland, affecting marine, freshwater and freshwater-dependent ecosystems, and air pollution in the form of nitrogen deposition, primarily from the storage and management of animal slurries, affecting nutrient-sensitive habitats and species across the terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments.

Some actions are already underway to tackle pressures on water quality, for example, the UK published its first Pesticides National Action Plan in March 2025, setting a domestic target to reduce potential environmental harm from pesticides by at least 10% by 2030. The Water Framework Directive already sets a statutory requirement to attain 100% of waterbodies at Good Ecological Status (surface water) and Good Chemical Status (groundwater).

It is important that these types of pollution are tackled to improve water quality and reduce pressures on nature, supporting the delivery of Strategic Objective 1.

Existing targets and actions within other relevant strategies or policies include (with their previously committed dates):

- By 2025: Complete the development of the third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP3) setting out actions for climate change adaptation. (Published March 2026) (EIP)
- By 2025: Develop an Ammonia Strategy to deliver reductions in ammonia emissions from agriculture. (Now to be delivered in 2027) (EIP)
- By 2027: Introduce a Deposit Return Scheme for Drink Containers. (EIP)
- By 2028: reduce the amount of phosphorus applied in chemical fertilisers by 50% on 2023 levels, through improved nutrient management on farms and recycling of organic nutrients. (EIP)
- Implementation of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, including development and implementation of 5 yearly climate action plans in order to achieve the statutory 5 yearly carbon budgets which will be set under the Act and the 2030, 2040 and 2050 emissions reduction targets within the Act. (EIP)

²² [OEP report on the drivers and pressures affecting nature in Northern Ireland](#)

Additional Nature Recovery Strategy actions for Strategic Objective 2 (date referred to is the year end date):

By 2026: Publish a Plastic Pollution Plan

By 2027: Publish Northern Ireland's first Clean Air Strategy to deliver improvements in air quality.

By 2028: Develop a new Invasive Species Strategy.

By 2028: Develop an All-Island Invasive Species Management Plan and associated measures through a Shared Island Invasive Species and Biosecurity Initiative, a partnership between NIEA, the National Biodiversity Data Centre and NPWS.

By 2030: NIEA and DAERA to take steps to reduce coverage of those invasive species considered to be 'Widely Spread' by 50% from the 2015 baseline.

Strategic Objective 3: Sustainable Use of Biodiversity through Nature-friendly Policies and Practice

Nature makes an invaluable contribution to people and society through the essential provision of food and natural resources from land and water, through agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and forestry. It is vital that the associated production systems are genuinely sustainable and regenerative to avoid depleting biodiversity and our natural capital through embedding nature-friendly practices to safeguard and enhance nature, and those very resources upon which society and the economy rely.

Agri-environment support measures such as Farming with Nature aim to support actions that increase habitat and improve biodiversity and incentivise nature-friendly farming practices. Future expansion of the current transition scheme, a scheme focussed on protected sites, on priority habitats and species, as well as landscape projects delivering improved environmental outcomes through landscape scale collaboration will deliver positive environmental outcomes across all land types in Northern Ireland.

Achieving land use and aquatic industries that are environmentally sustainable in terms of its impact on, and guardianship of, air and water quality, soil health, and biodiversity, is essential for reversing trends in nature decline.

Green and blue infrastructure, such as parks, rivers, green roofs etc., in both urban and rural spaces can contribute to better air quality, create a cooling effect and shading, manage flooding, create new habitats and nature networks and provide important opportunities for people to connect with nature with additional benefits to physical and mental health and wellbeing. It is imperative that we improve these networks and connections. Nature based solutions like these are present in planning policy, water management strategies, and urban development frameworks to deliver these important benefits.

The UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) underpins forestry policy and sustainable forestry management within which conservation of biodiversity is an essential part.

Existing targets and actions within other relevant strategies or policies include (with their previously committed dates):

- By 2030: Increase NI woodland cover to at least 9% (124,000 hectares). (EIP)

Additional Nature Recovery Strategy actions for Strategic Objective 3 (date referred to is the year end date):

By 2027: Launch further strands of the Farming with Nature Package to deliver positive environmental outcomes across all land types in Northern Ireland.

By 2028: Explore and review options around the adoption of a biodiversity net gain approach within the planning system.

By 2030: Implement Fisheries Management Plans to ensure that negative impacts of fishing on ecosystems are minimised and stocks are not overexploited.

Strategic Objective 4: Nature Valued and Mainstreamed Across All of Government and Society

If we are to achieve real change in the outcomes for biodiversity, the true value of biodiversity and any potential impact must be considered in the development of policies at all levels of government.

Reviewing existing legislative provisions and developing legally binding targets on nature restoration can work towards halting the loss of biodiversity. **Every public body, in exercising their functions, has a duty to conserve biodiversity** – more information can be found by following the link: [Biodiversity Duty Guidelines for Public Bodies](#)

The Northern Ireland (NI) Environmental Principles Policy Statement (EPPS) will ensure that environmental considerations are central to policy development and delivery in all Government departments. Policymakers must have 'due regard' to the principles of the statement; this is a significant legal duty applied across Departments. It will guide policymakers to consistently consider environmental impacts, prevent damage, and find innovative opportunities to enhance the environment, thereby ensuring environmental considerations are central to policy development and delivery. Publishing an EPPS fulfils Northern Ireland's statutory duty under the UK Environment Act 2021, which replaced previous EU guidelines.

In addition, all of society has a key role to support nature protection and recovery and it is important to make it easier for everyone, from businesses to individuals, to play their part. For example, businesses should be encouraged to undertake a Business and Biodiversity Charter Mark. The Business and Biodiversity Charter by Business in the Community NI (BITC NI) in partnership with Ulster Wildlife provides a tiered framework for NI organisations to manage nature, align with TNFD (Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures) recommendations, and gain external validation.

Behavioural change in patterns of consumption across all of society is required and promoting sustainable consumption of the earth's resources can help transition to a circular economy, where the value of products and materials is maintained for as long as possible. This will provide many tangible benefits to society, such as clean water, food security, recreation, and climate regulation. Ensuring government funding or subsidies, often intended as incentives to support desired policy outcomes, do not have unintended consequences that harm nature is vitally important.

While government funding for nature restoration needs to increase, it is also important to explore other innovative forms of nature finance. For example, private sector funding is currently an untapped source of funding and should be pursued with government providing a key enabling role. Transboundary collaboration is essential with Peace Plus and the Shared Island Initiative recently providing vital funding for strategic nature restoration projects.

Working to establish successor programmes to these vital funding sources will be important.

Existing targets and actions within other relevant strategies or policies include (with their previously committed dates):

- By 2027: Scope and develop a robust Natural Capital and ecosystem assessment framework for NI for government departments and public bodies, etc. (EIP)
- By 2027: Enhance our natural capital reporting, data and habitat mapping systems to make natural capital and ecosystem datasets more readily available and integrate into natural capital accounting and reporting systems (natural capital and ecosystems assessment platform). (EIP)
- Develop funding mechanisms to support stakeholder action to meet the 'nature positive' by 2030 objective including partnership and Green Finance solutions for nature recovery and nature-based solutions. (EIP)

Additional Nature Recovery Strategy actions for Strategic Objective 4 (date referred to is the year end date):

By 2027: Commission the development and roll-out of a Communications Plan to support the necessary behaviour change and mainstream biodiversity across society.

By 2027: Consult upon a mandatory requirement to report on the implementation of the Biodiversity Duty.

By 2027: Launch the successor to the Environment Fund to distribute funding to nature recovery and connecting people to nature projects from 2028.

By 2028: Consult upon setting targets in law for Nature Restoration.

By 2028: Consult upon setting targets in law for the Protected Sites Programme and related civil sanctions.

By 2028: Develop a Biodiversity Finance Plan to provide a strategic overview of government and private finance nature-related spending and to increase the amount of money available for nature restoration.

By 2028: Undertake a review of existing legislative provisions to ensure they are effective for protecting nature and supporting recovery.

By 2029: Develop a framework to implement BSI Nature Standards in Northern Ireland that will enable the development of high integrity environmental markets and partnerships to secure private sector financing for nature restoration.

By 2030: Subject to consultation outcomes, seek Executive support to introduce legislation to implement mandatory reporting on Biodiversity Duty.

By 2030: Subject to consultation outcomes, seek Executive support for legislation setting statutory targets for the Protected Sites Programme and related civil sanctions.

By 2030: Subject to consultation outcomes, seek Executive support for setting targets in law for Nature Restoration.

Strategic Objective 5: Building Strong, Integrated Evidence and Knowledge to Enable Action and Reporting for Nature.

The best available data, information and knowledge must be accessible to decision-makers and stakeholders to ensure the most effective and integrated management of biodiversity. The use of publicly available spatial data will support focused interventions, where nature is particularly under pressure, for example in water catchments or protected habitats. Collaboration with our counterparts in the UK and Republic of Ireland, in line with the DAERA Science Strategy Framework, can enhance our evidence base for action on biodiversity and will underpin and strengthen future decisions relating to biodiversity.

This includes promotion of research and innovation to increase knowledge and effective monitoring and reporting of as much information as possible to further understanding of the nature and biodiversity that surrounds us. Communities should feel encouraged to engage with their local biodiversity and understand its value. We will also continue to collaborate with our counterparts in Ireland and the All-Island Climate and Biodiversity Network to advance climate and biodiversity research.

Existing targets and actions within other relevant strategies or policies include (with their previously committed dates):

- *Publish the first Living Map of Northern Ireland by 2024 (habitat/land cover model).* (EIP)
(Now Complete)
- By 2027: Review our terrestrial biodiversity monitoring and evidence needs and devise and implement a comprehensive mapping, monitoring and evidence programme and platform to support conservation action, and biodiversity reporting and natural capital accounting. (EIP)
- Publish a suite of annual biodiversity indicators to report on progress against biodiversity targets, and to meet Environment Act, Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, Climate Change Act and NICCAP, and draft Green Growth Strategy reporting requirements. (EIP)
- Enhance our evidence on the extent, condition, functioning and connectivity of NI ecosystems, using a range of earth observation, survey methodologies and land cover assessments. (EIP)

Additional Nature Recovery Strategy actions for Strategic Objective 5 (date referred to is the year end date):

In 2026: Publish the report for the latest Northern Ireland Countryside Survey (2022-2025).

By 2027: Commission high-quality research on biodiversity to assist in nature recovery.

By 2027: Consult upon taking forward a statutory requirement to monitor and publicly report on the condition of protected sites and to increase the amount of money available for nature restoration.

By 2028: Subject to consultation outcomes, seek Executive support for taking forward a statutory requirement to monitor and publicly report on the condition of protected sites and to increase the amount of money available for nature restoration.

By 2029: Provide £8m funding to the Climate + Water + Biodiversity Co-centre to deliver high-quality research on climate, biodiversity and water recognising the intrinsic link between all three.

Resourcing, Monitoring, Reporting and Governance



Resourcing, Monitoring, Reporting and Governance

This strategy has brought together the relevant actions or targets from existing strategies and policies that intend to deliver outcomes that support the objectives of the Global Biodiversity Framework. Where this is the case, resource to deliver those outcomes should have been secured by the relevant department, and any future resource needs will be subject to resource planning by the relevant teams. Reporting on the existing targets will remain under the reporting requirements for their source strategies or policies.

Given the conclusions of the [Scale of Need Report 2024](#) that “*significant investment is required to fund the necessary land management actions to meet the legally binding nature and climate targets set by the four UK governments*” it is imperative to secure greater long-term funding for nature restoration. Therefore, this strategy highlights the need to make greater use of private finance streams and to ensure climate change funding can provide the best value for money by also delivering against biodiversity objectives.

The lifespan of this proposed strategy is to 2032. The strategy actions however will extend beyond 2032 and will continue be reviewed and amended, if necessary, in line with future versions of this or other policies, designated by the Department as strategies for the conservation of biodiversity. This promotes the United Nation’s view that climate change and biodiversity loss (as well as pollution) are part of an interlinked planetary crisis the world is facing today that must be tackled together in order to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The implementation of the Nature Recovery Strategy will require significant resources and careful governance and project management. DAERA has established governance arrangements to provide oversight of all nature recovery programmes including statutory protected area programmes and policy development and delivery. A Nature Recovery Forum will support these governance arrangements.

The Forum will bring together relevant internal and external stakeholders to support the delivery of nature recovery objectives and will be a good cross-societal mechanism to support nature recovery work in the short, medium and long term.

Annexes



Annex A – Pressures and Impacts on Biodiversity

Invasive Species

An invasive non-native species is an organism that has been introduced to a habitat outside of its normal range and can have a negative impact on native species and even ecosystems through the spread of disease, resource competition, or by direct predation, parasitism or hybridisation. Some species have the ability to spread fast, causing damage to the environment, our health, and the way we live. Invasive non-native species have an estimated annual cost of £150 million to the economy in Northern Ireland and are widely regarded as one of the biggest threats to biodiversity worldwide.

Climate Change

The changing climate impacts all of earth's ecosystems and biodiversity, human society and our built environment. A major impact of climate change on biodiversity is increased temperature as well as increased frequency and intensity of fires, storms and floods, or periods of drought. These extreme weather events, rising temperatures and changes to rainfall patterns are putting pressure on species and habitats already threatened by other human activities.

Biodiversity loss and the degradation of natural systems is one of the causes of climate change. Globally, land-use change, especially deforestation, has been responsible for 19% of the CO₂ emissions caused by people over the past 40 years²³.

As impacts from climate change increase in their frequency and severity, species that are unable to adapt are likely to decline or even risk becoming extinct, and this further undermines the resilience of ecosystems and perpetuates a downward spiral of environmental decline. Conversely, by creating and restoring biodiverse habitats on land and in our seas, we can lock up carbon and have a positive impact on both climate and biodiversity.

Inappropriate Development

Resilient ecosystems can provide us with protection against hazards such as floods and other adverse weather conditions. Human induced changes and disturbances to our ecosystems, such as removal of vegetation or excessive hard surfacing affects their ability to perform their functions to support species, and deliver ecosystem services such as flood control, temperature regulation and water purification.

Increased population, changes in household size, urban and rural development and regeneration programmes, effects of climate change and our lifestyles are putting increasing pressure on our ecosystems, water resources and drainage systems. It is therefore important to consider both where development takes place, and the impact that development is likely to have on the nearby habitats and ecosystems.

²³ [Global Carbon Budget 2020](#)

Land and Sea-Use Change

How land and sea are used and managed affects everyone's prosperity and quality of life. The productive capacity of land and sea underpins the whole economy through provision of food, timber and other goods, and through their use for housing, business, transport, energy and tourism. Land and sea also play a critical role in providing services that are vital for the physical wellbeing of the population, such as clean air and water, healthy soils, and our mental wellbeing by providing recreation spaces and access to nature. However, many land uses conflict with each other: more land for one use, means less land for another. Demands on land for built development and agricultural production for example are often the drivers behind declines in biodiversity and habitats. Also, historically areas of forest were established on land now recognised as priority open-ground habitats, including bogs and heathlands. More recently, forest establishment practices, guided by Environmental Impact Assessments and adherence to the UK Forest Standard, promote biodiversity improvement and negate adverse impacts on priority habitats.

Increased Intensive Farming Practices

Around 77% of the Northern Ireland landscape is agricultural farmland, and this means that our biodiversity is particularly vulnerable to changes in agricultural management. Agricultural intensification has been identified as the most significant factor driving the decline in species' populations across the UK²⁴. A large-scale change from mixed farming to a predominantly pastoral system over recent decades has led to the loss of semi-natural habitats, overwintering stubbles and hedgerows. More than 40% of Northern Ireland's land area is now made up of improved grassland²⁵. These changes have put pressure on our natural environment and biodiversity and have led to pollution issues.

But there can be successes such as through the breeding wader recovery project in the Antrim Hills and Lough Erne²⁶ and the peatland restoration project at Mullaghcarn ASSI.

²⁴ [Agricultural Management and Climatic Change Are the Major Drivers of Biodiversity Change in the UK](#)

²⁵ [NICS Survey 2007 - Broad Habitat Change 1998-2007](#)

²⁶ [Antrim Plateau - Curlew LIFE](#) and [Lough Erne Lowlands - Curlew LIFE](#)

Pollution

Whilst only representing 6% of the total land area of the UK, Northern Ireland produces 12% of the UK ammonia emissions and has the greatest percentage of nitrogen-sensitive habitats exceeding critical ammonia levels. These ammonia levels are largely attributed to agriculture²⁷. The Air Pollutant Inventories for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland 2005-2022 show that in 2022 agriculture produced 97% of total NI ammonia emissions²⁸.

Fewer than one-third of monitored river water bodies in Northern Ireland were classified as 'high' or 'good' ecological status in 2024²⁹, with 30% of substantiated water pollution incidents being traced to a farm source³⁰. In 2023, Other (31 per cent), accounted for the largest proportion of substantiated incidents investigated by NIEA, followed by Farm (30 per cent), Industry (13 per cent), Domestic (13 per cent), Northern Ireland Water Ltd (10 per cent) and Transport (2 per cent).

Many organic pollutants, including sewage effluent and farm and food-processing wastes, consume oxygen, suffocating fish, and other aquatic life. Excess nutrients in our water can cause growth of large mats of algae, some of which can be toxic. Chemical contaminants including heavy metals, pesticides and some industrial chemicals can threaten wildlife and human health. Sediment run-off from the land can make water muddy, block sunlight and, as a result, kill wildlife.

Globally, over 300 million tonnes of plastics are produced each year. A large proportion of this ultimately ends up discarded as waste. In 2015, this amounted to 275 million tonnes of discarded plastics. Marine plastic waste can have many detrimental effects including harm to biodiversity, economic costs to the fishing industry and reduction of use of coastal areas for tourism and recreation.

Whilst some good progress has been made in NI through initiatives such as the introduction of the Carrier Bag Levy in 2013, resulting in an 81% reduction in numbers of single use carrier bags dispensed since the 2012 base year³¹, and a huge increase in household recycling rates with Northern Ireland surpassing the ambitious target to recycle 50% of household waste by 2020, there is much more still to do.

²⁷ [Trends Report 2019](#)

²⁸ [Air Pollutant Inventories for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland: 2005-2022](#)

²⁹ [Water Classification Statistics Report 2024](#)

³⁰ [DAERA Statistical Review 2023](#)

³¹ [Carrier Bag Levy - Annual Statistics](#)

Annex B – Convention on Biological Diversity: 2050 Goals and 2030 Targets

Convention on Biological Diversity: 4 Goals to 2050

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework has four long-term goals for 2050 related to the 2050 Vision for biodiversity.

[Web link to GBF Goals](#)

Convention on Biological Diversity: 23 Targets to 2030

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework has 23 action-oriented global targets for urgent action over the decade to 2030. The actions set out in each target need to be initiated immediately and completed by 2030. Together, the results will enable achievement towards the outcome-oriented goals for 2050. Actions to reach these targets should be implemented consistently and in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Protocols, and other relevant international obligations, taking into account national circumstances, priorities and socioeconomic conditions.

[Web link to GBF Targets](#)

Annex C – The “30by30” target

“Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities including over their traditional territories.”

Achieving 30by30

Areas contributing to 30by30 must be **geographically defined**, and:

- Have a clear purpose of conserving biodiversity. (Although this may not be their primary purpose.)
- Have long-term protection and/or management in place that works against adverse pressures on the area’s biodiversity objectives or actively results in improved outcomes for biodiversity.
- Deliver the appropriate and necessary biodiversity outcomes. These will be measurable, monitored and can be used to assess the ongoing improvement in these areas.

Contributing areas will be defined as either traditional Protected Areas, or Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECM).

Defining an OECM

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has defined ‘other effective area-based conservation measures’, in these terms:

“A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values”. (CBD Decision 14/8)

In November 2018, Parties to the CBD adopted this definition of OECMs, as well as guiding principles, common characteristics and criteria for their identification.

While protected areas must have a primary conservation objective, this is not necessary for OECMs. OECMs may be managed for many different objectives but they must deliver effective conservation. They may be managed with conservation as a primary or secondary objective or long-term conservation may simply be the ancillary result of management activities.

Recognition of OECMs

Recognition of OECMs offers a significant opportunity to recognise de facto effective long-term conservation that is taking place outside currently designated protected areas, under a range of governance and management regimes, implemented by a diverse set of actors. Some of these actors include indigenous peoples and local communities, the private sector and government agencies. OECMs can contribute to ecologically representative and well-connected conservation systems, integrated within wider landscapes and seascapes, and in doing so, generate a range of positive conservation outcomes, such as:

- Conserving important ecosystems, habitats and wildlife corridors;
- Supporting the recovery of threatened species;
- Maintaining ecosystem functions and securing ecosystem services;
- Enhancing resilience against threats; and
- Retaining and connecting remnants of fragmented ecosystems within developed landscapes.

The Guidelines

The guidelines will assist Parties in both interpreting the definition of a body of good practice by recognising and reporting OECMs and making this learning operational. It is designed for application at various scales, ranging from understanding whether an individual area is an OECM, to reporting OECM statistics at the national and global level as a means to assess progress on achieving conservation targets.

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