



Regional Habitats Targets Review Workshop **October 22nd 2008 at Birmingham & Midland Institute (BMI)** **Summary Report**

The purpose of this workshop was to introduce a project being carried out by Treweek Environmental Consultants on behalf of the Regional Assembly to undertake a review of the regional targets for all priority BAP habitats for inclusion within the revision to the RSS. The workshop also provided an opportunity for participants to hear about progress, to ask questions and to offer suggestions concerning the approach.

The Agenda is provided as Appendix A and a list of participants can be found at Appendix B. A summary of Bill Butcher's presentation summarizing progress is included as Appendix C and a copy can be found on [WEB LINK]. Notes from breakout discussion groups are included below, following a brief description of the background to the project and of possible approaches to development of targets which are climate change-proof.

Background to the project (Presented by Jeff Edwards)

Jeff Edwards introduced the project and explained its background and objectives. The current regional targets are outlined in Annex B of the West Midlands RSS and are also reproduced within the Regional Biodiversity Strategy. A key output from the project will be proposed new figures for each habitat. The project aims to:

- use best available data including as much local data as possible which is being collated through funding from WMBP,
- calculate the extent of new habitat required to develop resilient landscapes to assist with climate change adaptation to 2050 and calculate the revised targets for the RSS to 2026.

The project is:

- identifying habitat networks within and outside the regional opportunity areas (as defined in the Landscapes for Living Regional Opportunities Map) i.e. areas of existing priority habitat,
- investigating potential areas for habitat restoration/creation within and outside the regional opportunity areas,
- calculating the extent of new habitat required for each priority BAP habitat e.g. by expanding existing habitat within and adjoining networks.

Whilst the focus for landscape scale restoration will focus in the Regional Opportunity areas the project is also taking account of dispersed habitats that can not be protected/ enhanced within these areas.

The main purpose of the maps used to develop the regional target figures for 2026 is to act as an evidence base for the target figures. They are not intended by themselves to direct where habitat should be delivered - the networks analysis and the habitat potential maps will require ground truthing with local knowledge and on-the-ground surveys. In addition our ability to create new habitats will be dependent upon a wide range of factors, not least resources available and the landowner's willingness to allow such work to take place. However the project will show, at a strategic level, the extent of new habitat the region might require to meet its commitment to secure resilient landscapes for climate change adaptation (see summary of presentation by Nigel Jones below).

The network maps and the habitat potential maps will be available for use in the development of local opportunity maps and the habitat target figures will also be broken down according to local opportunity zones and LBAP boundaries for future discussion.

Habitat targeting and climate change (Nigel Jones, Natural England)

Nigel Jones gave a presentation on possible approaches to habitat targeting with respect to climate change. He demonstrated that, using a Habitat Network approach, it is feasible to map those areas where the development of resilient habitats could be most effective. The principles of climate change proofing for habitats are based on:

- creating a range of microclimates within various habitat types;
- expanding areas of habitat, so that as large a variety of microclimates as possible are encapsulated within and between patches of habitat;
- reducing the distances across which species must move through “hostile” landscape conditions in order to reach other suitable habitat patches.

Within the West Midlands region there are probably a limited number of areas where it is realistic to build networks of resilient habitats. This is because across much of the region habitats are very fragmented and often distances between areas of habitat are too great for many species to move from patch to patch. It is anticipated that many species will need to move away from the area of habitat that they currently live in, as conditions in the spaces they currently occupy change; becoming drier and warmer in summer, and wetter and warmer in winter. A case study of the silver spotted skipper was cited (reference). There should be an approach of providing alternative habitat patches, that provide subtly different microclimatic conditions, in areas as close as possible to existing habitat patches.

Habitat targeting to help species to adapt to climate change will not require joining up habitats across region-wide areas, or across large gaps, as this will almost certainly be impractical to achieve. The focus is likely to be on building resilient landscapes in those areas that currently hold the most extensive habitat networks. In many cases these areas are likely to coincide with areas such as Biodiversity Enhancement Areas.

Notes from Breakout Group Discussions

Group 1– Data & Local Targets

1. *How important is biological data?*

- Is there an iterative process for updating the regional dataset?
 - Yes. Process to be decided by WMBP Data Group, probably using LRCs as custodians.
 - Annual monitoring requirement of RSS gives impetus to this.
- How confident can users be of consistency?
 - National inventories are consistent (with issues)
- How can the map reflect geographical inconsistencies in data quality across the region?
 - The attribute data can shed light on quality
 - A “gap map” for practitioners, including LBAPs, would be invaluable – but how to resource this?
- Risk that small local dots get left out – need to promote the local.
- End users need a guide to interpretation and intended use
- Need to remember that local planners are not ecologists.
- Concern that local planners will see data as exclusive – the white space problem. Ponds, hedgerows, species importance needs to be emphasised in “white space”.
- Good interpretation guides and site checking for case work important
- “Landbanking” could be important – political questions around landbanking need to be explored through RSS etc.

2. Ideas for prioritising improvement in data

- Grassland surveys for the known unknowns
- Flora records & other land-use datasets can help target
- Previously developed land is a priority – may have developed into valuable habitats
- Sampling approaches to widespread habitats such as hedgerows can be effective – unrealistic to expect comprehensive survey

3. Does this dataset have implications for LBAP targets?

- Yes, very probably but will need to suck it and see
- LBAPs will be resistant to the top down approach, but it might be seen to help meet in the middle, especially as the project has used local data.
- Data quality is gradually improving – this is one step; it’s important to understand the limitations of each step.

There is tension between aspirational and deliverable targets:

- Some confusion at LBAP level about pressure from national level for targets to be smart. Getting the baseline can be hard enough.
- Is it worth considering 2 targets – aspirational and deliverable?
- Is a resilient landscape the minimum target or the aspiration?
- Underpinned through land management practices & economics. This understanding has to be factored in somehow.

Shouldn’t forget the potential strength of embedding targets in the RSS and them being picked up by LDFs, underpinning the LBAPs.

Monitoring against targets

- Local performance indicator NI197 Biodiversity Outcome might help, but not sure yet.
- Issues of data ownership, and role of LRCs need to be resolved.

4. Advice for TEC as contractors to Habitat Targets Review Project

- Be honest about data
- Signpost local data and LBAP input

Group 2: Local Opportunity Mapping

<p>GROUP 2 TO DISCUSS:</p> <p>Will the base line data be of use?</p> <p>Will the network analysis help?</p> <p>Will the habitat potential map help asses priorities</p>
<p>Baseline Data – How useful?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to assess • Depends on quality of data • Report needs to identify data caveats • Will we get information about background data? • Some issues of confidentiality • Need clarity on best available data • Hedgerows/verges/wood pasture • Accuracy of ground cover map • Need to try and align data collection at the region • Get data needs and resources registered with the region
<p>Will The network Analysis Help?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on limited number of species

- May not take finer features of ponds/hedgerows into account
- A lot of other factors affect decision other than network analysis – land owners attitude, land values etc.
- Impact of dropping river levels?
- Impact of climate change given that restoration is a long term process
- How resilient are the predictions about potential
- What is the cut off point on network/permeability map – gradations

Will The Habitat Potential Map Help Assess Priorities?

- Links to catchments area work :
 - Wetland vision
 - Forest of Feckenham opportunity work
 - Cannock Chase to Sutton Park
- Should there be criteria to prioritise
- Which habitat is chosen where more than one has potential – guiding principles (near universibility of wood land potential)

Group 3: Climate Change

There are a number of different timeframes for targets which will need to be reconciled

- LBAP 2015, RSS 2026, LfL 50-year targets
- Climate Change Bill 5-yearly, 2020, 2050

UKCIP08

- Delayed till Spring 2009
- Will provide more detailed, regional datasets

In the meantime we should do our best to work with existing information.

Ecosystems approach

- Present value of environment 91,000 jobs and £1.43 billion – what will these figures be after effects of climate change (and if we achieve the habitat targets)?
- Important in the context of up-coming SIRS as relating environmental issues to the economy will be key
- Carbon sinks and flooding will become more important aspects of the value of habitats as we try to meet our carbon commitments

Habitat potential map

- Could this be run under different climate change predictions? This would provide a strong visual representation of the impacts of climate change. Difficult to do until UKCIP released.

Transitional habitats targets

- Important for climate change as flexible micro-climates are more adaptable to change

Build capacity within landscape:

West Midlands needs to be placed within regional context – e.g. north-south corridors, relationship with biodiversity (and development) in neighbouring regions

Potential to use a hierarchy of approach – protect, restore, create and possibly offset.

Climate change will increase isolation. Might be appropriate to create undisturbed space that can then react to changes in climate (although little natural/semi-natural space left).

Precautionary principle needs to be applied:

- need to manage other threats (housing, transport, population growth, pollution) to ensure habitats are strong enough to adapt to climate change. RSS has a part to play.

- Might be necessary to increase targets e.g. 1% above what would otherwise be set to allow for greater capacity to adapt to climate change.
- Habitat networks map may offer an opportunity to show how resilient habitat networks could be developed as part of a precautionary approach.

Relative risks need to be assessed:

- Potential to rank BAP habitats with respect to broad climate change vulnerability, but difficult to make real progress without going to species-level.
- The potential for species to travel is critical - all gradients (wet-dry, slopes, aspect, altitudes, shade) need to be represented so movement is possible. Fragmented landscapes will also decrease the potential for species to move.
- Might be pragmatic to identify habitats that are in the southern extremities and therefore vulnerable – e.g. Upper Peak Land <http://www.peakdistrict.org/index/looking-after/mff.htm> (Moors for the Future)

Trend data important

- Is the situation anyway presently improving, decreasing or stable?
- Targets with progress 😞 😊

There was broad consensus that it would be acceptable to develop targets which were aspirational and close to 'potential'. Targets should be "Aspirational – Good enough – Realistic"

Delivering targets via housing money/ other developer contributions

- Sustainable urban communities
- Eco towns
- Section 106
- Green Infrastructure
- Community infrastructure levy

Defra is carrying out research on carbon offsets and on biodiversity offsets which are seen as a potential mechanism for increasing investment in conservation outside of European or UK priority sites.

Link to NI 197 projects

How to deal with uncertainty?

Targets are likely to be reviewed in 3-4 years as part of SIRS

England Biodiversity Group (David Kelpie)

<http://www.ukbap.org.uk/EBG/default.asp>

Water quality and supply (River Severn study by the Environment Agency, 15% decrease in summer flow)

Viability

- Wyre Forest – current problems, losing species
- ? with climate change

Appendix A: Agenda

- 10:00 Welcome and introduction to workshop - Jo Trewick (Trewick Environmental Consultants)
- 10:10 Background and overview of project - Jeff Edwards (Regional Biodiversity Coordinator)
- 10:30 Progress to date and questions - Bill Butcher (Trewick Environmental Consultants)
- 10.50 Questions/Discussion
- 11:15 Coffee
- 11:30 Outline of some key issues for discussion - Jo Trewick
- How important is the background biological data for this study?
 - What are the implications for any future revision to LBAP targets?
 - How can we use the results of this study in our local opportunity maps?
 - How do we best consider adaptation for climate change within this study?
- 11:45 Break out into 3 groups for discussion
- Group 1 - Data and Local Target led by Bill Butcher
 - Group 2 – Local Opportunity Mapping led by Jeff Edwards
 - Group 3 - Climate Change led by Jo Trewick
- 12:30 Feedback from Break out groups and closing discussion – Jo Trewick
- 13.00 LUNCH

Appendix B: Participants

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