ITEM 13

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

3 November 2020

EXMOOR NATURE RECOVERY VISION

Report of the Head of Conservation and Access & the Wildlife Conservation Officer

Purpose of the report: To present the Exmoor Nature Recovery Vision to Members for adoption by the Authority.

RECOMMENDATION: The Authority is recommended to:

(1) ADOPT the Vision document which outlines how Exmoor can respond to the current joint nature and climate emergencies.

(2) AGREE to delegate responsibility to make any changes to the draft Vision to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, taking on board Member comments.

Authority Priority: Rich in Wildlife; Working Landscapes; The Exmoor Experience; Work with communities, businesses and partners to deliver the National Park Partnership Plan and statutory purposes.

Legal and Equality Implications: ***Section 65(4) Environment Act 1995*** – provides powers to the National Park Authority to *"do anything which in the opinion of the Authority, is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to-*

(a) the accomplishment of the purposes mentioned in s. 65 (1) [National Park purposes]

(b) the carrying out of any functions conferred on it by virtue of any other enactment."

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, *where: "Every public body must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity."*

The Environment Bill (2019) is establishing legally binding targets for the protection of biodiversity, water, air and waste, which will require mechanisms for target setting, evidence gathering and monitoring of achievements including the production of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

The equality impact of the recommendation(s) of this report has been assessed as follows: There are no foreseen adverse impact on any protected group(s). Engagement through any outreach work within the vision is designed to have a positive impact on protected groups.

Consideration has been given to the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and an assessment of the implications of the recommendation(s) of this report is as follows: There are no implications for the Human Rights Act.

Financial and Risk Implications: There are no financial or risk implications to the National Park Authority resulting from the adoption of the Exmoor nature recovery vision. The delivery of the vision will be achieved by working in partnership with stakeholders to deliver positive change for nature that may be supported through externally funded Environmental Land Management Schemes or other sources of funding. The vision will help guide funding applications which the NPA may apply for to help take forward nature recovery projects both on land it owns and to support the delivery on land in private ownership.

Climate Response: This paper is a key next step following the Authority's declaration of a climate emergency. The recommended vision outlines a future Exmoor that will contribute to tackling the climate change through achieving a healthy, natural environment across Exmoor.

---

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 '***Working Together for a Nature-rich National Park'*** is a vision for nature recovery on Exmoor (see Appendix 1).

1.2 This vision sets out key elements required to deliver nature recovery, carbon capture and flood resilience within the National Park and its wider setting. It supports positive change across wider landscapes and across boundaries, with benefits to land, air, and the freshwater and marine environments

1.3 Delivery of the vision will require a step-change in our approach to nature conservation. It will require testing out of ideas, different delivery models and a range of funding options working with all landowners, local communities and partner organisations to deliver transformative change.

1.4 This visioning work will underpin the requirement on local authorities to deliver Local Nature Recovery Strategies set out in the current Environment Bill (if adopted). It is also responding to the recommendations in the Glover Review particularly around how National Parks should form the backbone of Nature Recovery Networks, joining things up within and beyond their boundaries.

2. THE VISION

2.1 '***Working Together for a Nature-rich National Park'*** has been developed by the Nature Conservation Advisory Panel which is one of the Partnership Plan groups, comprises 25 members and has a wide representation from statutory and voluntary nature conservation organisations and representatives from farming, woodland and riparian interests. There has been wide consultation on the document with the other Partnership Plan groups, through a Members' Forum and with the Exmoor Hill Farming Network. The document includes a Vision Statement (see Page 1 of Appendix 1) which summarises our aspiration for how nature recovery should be delivered on Exmoor.

2.2 ***Our Vision statement:***

> Exmoor's farmers, land managers, conservationists, communities and public bodies will work together to deliver '*a Nature-rich Exmoor National Park'* which is great for wildlife and great for people:

- Exmoor's rich mosaic of wildlife habitats are enhanced, extended and integrated into a network of nature-rich hubs, with blurred edges between them, and corridors linking them together.
- Wildlife is abundant and thriving and can easily move across the landscape and adapt to a changing climate.
- Exmoor's farmed landscape remains productive with farmers ensuring nature thrives whilst still producing food and other public goods.
- People living in and visiting the National Park are connected to nature. They understand and are inspired by Exmoor's special wildlife and are actively engaged in its conservation.

2.3 We have used specially commissioned illustrations to clearly show the elements of change within the vision (see page 3 of Appendix 1) and how these will fit within the Exmoor landscape and to facilitate discussion. The first illustration shows a 'nature in decline' landscape where management practices shown will lead to a further decrease in nature whilst the 'nature recovery' landscape shows a landscape where nature can thrive and increase and natural processes can be allowed to run their course.

2.4 The illustrations are not intended to show the state of nature now, compared to a future state of nature, as this will vary across the National Park with some areas already nature-rich. Instead, they show what elements of land management might contribute to a decline in biodiversity, and what would achieve a nature rich environment. The purpose of the illustrations is to provide a prompt for discussions with land managers, communities and partners to help show what action can be taken to support nature recovery and make a positive contribution to biodiversity. Farming and food production are very much part of this vision, but it is one where farmers are producing nature as well as food, and other public goods such as clean air and water, reducing flood risk, or storing carbon in soils.

3. WHY WE NEED A VISION

3.1 One of the two statutory purposes of National Parks is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area

3.2 Exmoor National Park Authority has declared a climate emergency. This vision shows how Exmoor can play its part in tackling the joint nature and climate emergency that we now face, caused by human activity.

3.3 We cannot have a healthy climate without thriving nature, from trees and peat sequestering carbon to pollinating insects regenerating our plants including food crops. 56% of native British species have declined over the last 50 years. 31% have strongly declined – meaning either that they've halved over the period monitored or are likely to halve in the next 25 years.

3.4 Exmoor was designated a National Park in 1954, for its outstanding landscape beauty and wildlife. At the time there was great concern at the loss of such wild places within the UK and recognition of their importance for future generations. Since then the UK has seen a catastrophic decline in its natural resources driven by human activities, for example, 98% of all wildflower meadows in the 1950's have been lost.

3.5 Progress for nature recovery is still far too slow in the UK and in many cases is still going in the wrong direction. In 2010 the Government's land-mark report *Making Space for Nature* unequivocally set out nature's decline in the UK and the four principles of bigger, better more and joined that we urgently needed to apply. In 2019 UK government's self-assessment said it has not met two-thirds of targets (14 out of 20) agreed at the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Nagoya, Japan, also in 2010. We are now at a tipping point where both policy and practice has to rapidly reverse this decline if we are to combat climate change and have any hope of passing a legacy of nature to future generations.

3.6 Although there are still large areas of habitats on Exmoor, even where land is designated, 85% of this land is currently not in favourable condition and in the wider countryside nature is still declining. Some species are in danger of localised or wider extinctions.

3.7 Driven by the joint climate and nature emergency, the Agriculture Bill sets out the principles of 'public money for public goods' as the basis for future farm support, delivered through the emerging Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS). '*Working Together for a Nature-rich National Park'* will give Exmoor's landowners the vision on which to hang their ELMS applications and the best chance of remaining strong, viable businesses supporting the social fabric and economy of Exmoor.

4. TARGETS SET IN THE NATURE RECOVERY VISION

4.1 We have set ambitious targets in the vision which are grouped into two timeframes in order to drive timely delivery and then maintain momentum.

4.1.1 By 2030 we will work together to as a minimum:

(i) **Bring 95% of existing wildlife areas into 'favourable condition', providing the core of our 'nature-rich hubs' (**38% of the National Park)

(ii) **Create or restore an additional 4,500 ha of priority habitat as 'nature corridors and buffers',** especially to expand and link the nature-rich hubs and to create a web of connectivity (6.5% of the National Park)

(iii) **Establish 11,500 ha of 'nature-friendly farming areas',** where land is managed working with nature rather than against it to run a profitable business (17% of the National Park).

(iv) **Create 7,000 ha of 'nature recovery opportunity areas'** where nature and natural processes are allowed to take their course. In these wilder areas land will be allowed to recover, healthy soils and clean water will be restored, and wildlife will recolonise (10% of the National Park).

4.1.2 There is a single overarching target proposed for 2050:

By 2050, Exmoor National Park will be a climate resilient, nature-rich core area supporting nature recovery in the wider countryside. At least 75% (or 51,750ha) of the area of the National Park will be in nature-rich condition, with the remaining areas providing networks and corridors for wildlife to move through and beyond its boundaries.

5. DELIVERING THE VISION

5.1 This is a vision, not a delivery plan. Every parcel of land on Exmoor is starting from a different place and will benefit from different actions. Land managers may need to adjust management techniques as part of an iterative process to achieve the desired outcomes. Initiatives at a community-led scale may be a very effective way to deliver for nature recovery while at the same time enabling people to re-connect more with nature. The delivery of the vision for nature recovery should be cross-cutting across communities and parishes and make a difference for nature on farmland, community spaces, gardens, road verges, churchyards, schools and other open spaces.

5.2 By setting out a clear vision of the future we hope to unite all parties to work together, ensuring nature thrives across the whole of Exmoor and our land locks away carbon. Without a vision we cannot know whether the actions we take today are the best ones to take.

5.3 Potential delivery mechanisms include the following:

5.3.1 Shaping and focusing the future direction of ELMS including Defra's Tests and Trials to ensure nature recovery is at its core and supporting the principle of public payments for public goods.

5.3.2 Working with partners, landowners and local communities to investigate funding opportunities, put together bids and deliver projects to deliver landscape-scale nature recovery initiatives.

5.3.3 Demonstration projects on ENPA owned land, working with our tenants, showing exemplary management on the land that the Authority owns

5.4 The vision encompasses and supports the recommendations of the Somerset and Devon Pollinator Action Plans.

6. NEXT STEPS

6.1 Following adoption, the text of the Vision document will be finalised, incorporating any agreed amendments, and a designed version produced. A plain English summary leaflet is also planned. A formal launch of the document will take place in the Spring 2021 with partners.

Rob Wilson-North
Head of Conservation and Access

Ali Hawkins
Wildlife Conservation Officer

19 October 2020

Background papers on which this report, or an important part of it are based, constitute the list of background papers required by Section 100 D (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 to be open to members of the public comprise:

Appendix 1 - ***Working Together for a Nature-rich National Park – the Vision for Nature Recovery on Exmoor***
Appendix 2 **- *Somerset Pollinator Action Plan***
Appendix 3 **- *Devon Pollinator Action Plan***

DRAFT

'Working Together for a Nature-rich National Park',

the Vision for Nature Recovery on Exmoor

(Foreword by Robin Milton and Sarah Bryan to be added)

This is a call to action for everyone who loves Exmoor's special wildlife. Exmoor's landscapes have been created through the interaction of people and nature over centuries which has created a diverse mix of habitats and species and the natural beauty that so many people treasure. But Exmoor has not been immune to the wider declines in wildlife seen over the last few decades. We all need to act now to turn this tide, and to provide the tools and resources for farmers, conservationists, and communities to help nature return to all parts of the National Park. Together, we can make a difference, and deliver an even more nature-rich National Park.

Our Vision Statement

Exmoor's farmers, land managers, conservationists, communities and public bodies will work together to deliver '*a Nature-rich Exmoor National Park*' which is great for wildlife and great for people:

- **Exmoor's rich mosaic of wildlife habitats are enhanced, extended and integrated into a network of nature-rich hubs, with blurred edges between them, and corridors linking them together.**
- **Wildlife is abundant and thriving and can easily move across the landscape and adapt to a changing climate.**
- **Exmoor's farmed landscape remains productive with farmers ensuring nature thrives whilst still producing food and other public goods.**
- **People living in and visiting the National Park are connected to nature. They understand and are inspired by Exmoor's special wildlife and are actively engaged in its conservation.**

By 2050, Exmoor National Park will be a climate resilient, nature-rich core area supporting nature recovery in the wider countryside. At least 75% (or 51,750 ha) of the area of the National Park will be in nature-rich condition, with the remaining areas providing networks and corridors for wildlife to move through and beyond its boundaries.

Achieving the Vision

In order to achieve this Vision, we have set some targets to deliver over the next 10 years.

By 2030 we will work together to as a minimum:

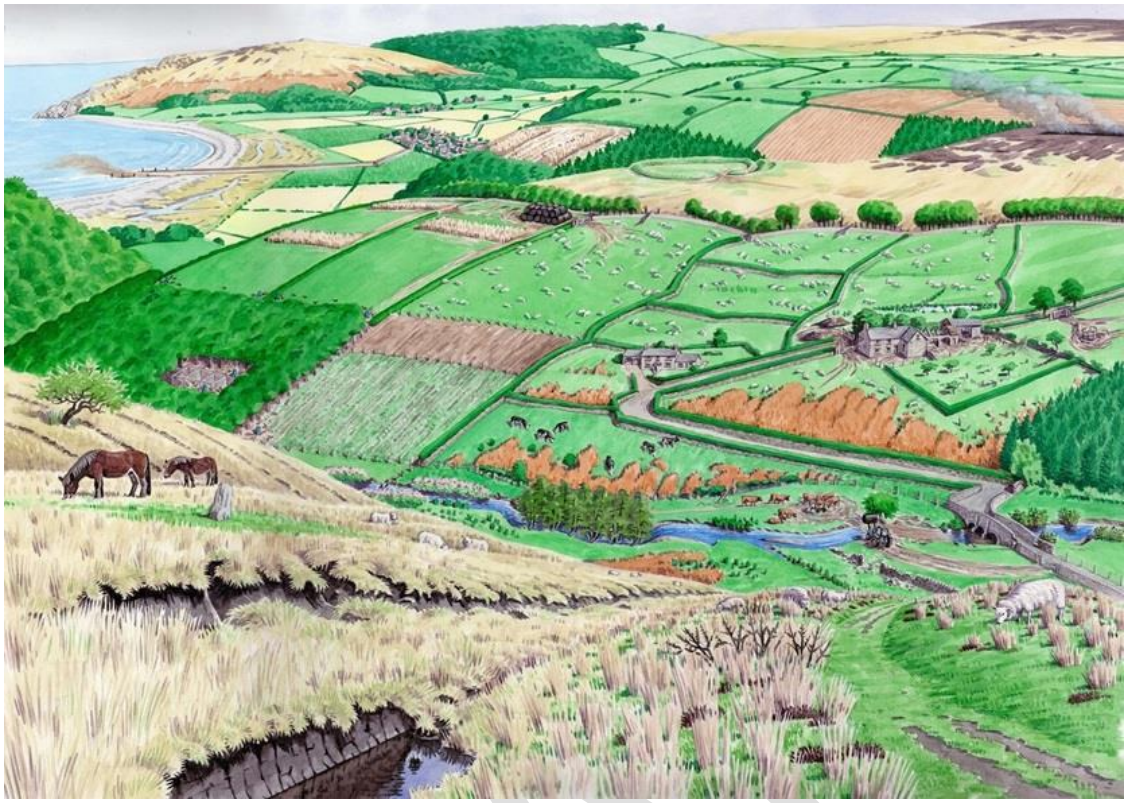
1. **Bring 95% of existing wildlife areas into 'favourable condition', providing the core of our 'nature-rich hubs'** (38% of the National Park)
2. **Create or restore an additional 4,500 ha of priority habitat as 'nature corridors and buffers',** especially to expand and link the nature-rich hubs and to create a web of connectivity (6.5% of the National Park)
3. **Establish 11,500 ha of 'nature-friendly farming areas',** where land is managed working with nature rather than against it to run a profitable business (17% of the National Park).
4. **Create 7,000 ha of 'nature recovery opportunity areas'** where nature and natural processes are allowed to take their course. In these wilder areas land will be allowed to recover, healthy soils and clean water will be restored, and wildlife will recolonise (10% of the National Park).

What does nature recovery look like on Exmoor?

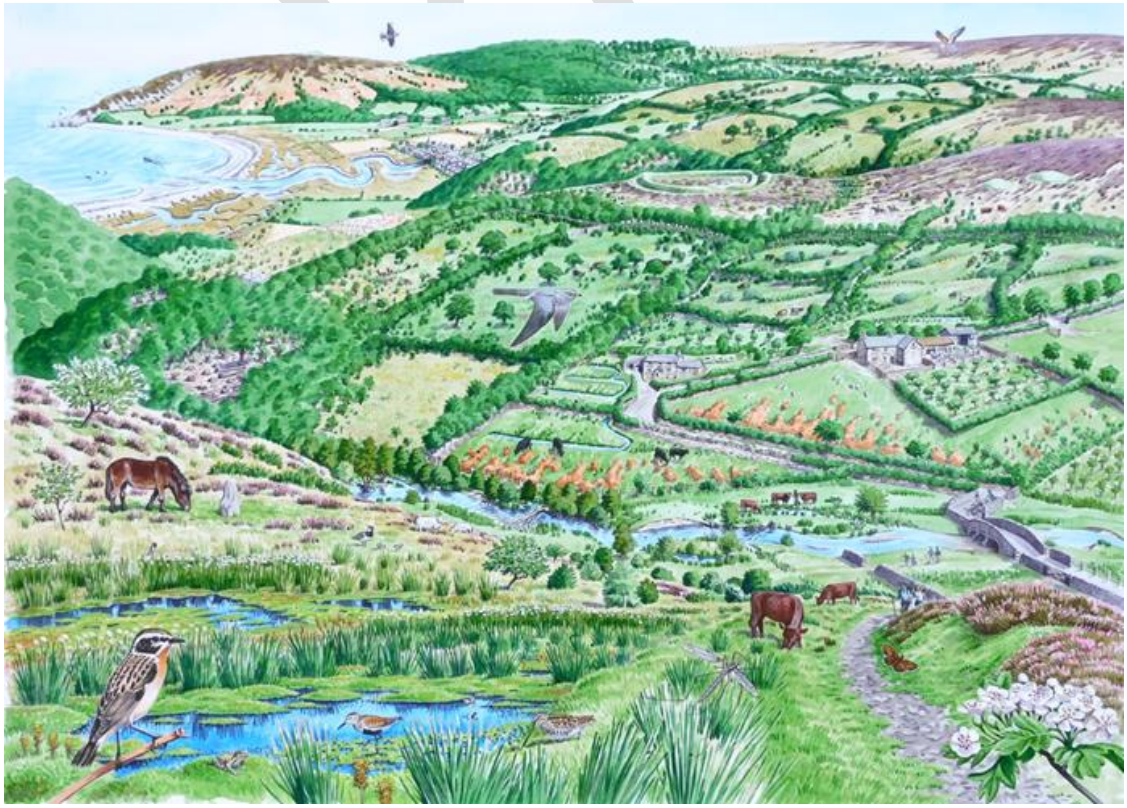
We have created illustrations which have been specially commissioned to show the potential for nature recovery on Exmoor and how this fits within the Exmoor landscape. They are illustrative only to facilitate discussion and to give an idea of the transformative step-change that is needed to bring about nature recovery at a landscape scale. The first illustration shows a 'nature in decline' landscape where management practices shown will lead to a further decrease in nature whilst the 'nature recovery' landscape shows a landscape where nature can thrive and increase and natural processes can be allowed to run their course.

The illustrations are not intended to show the state of nature now, compared to a future state of nature, as this will vary across the National Park with some areas already nature-rich. Instead, they show what elements of land management might contribute to a decline in biodiversity, and what would achieve a nature rich environment. The purpose of the illustrations is to provide a prompt for discussions with land managers, communities and partners to help show what action can be taken to support nature recovery and make a positive contribution to biodiversity. Farming and food production are very much part of this vision, but it is one where farmers are producing nature as well as food, and other public goods such as clean air and water, reducing flood risk, or storing carbon in soils.

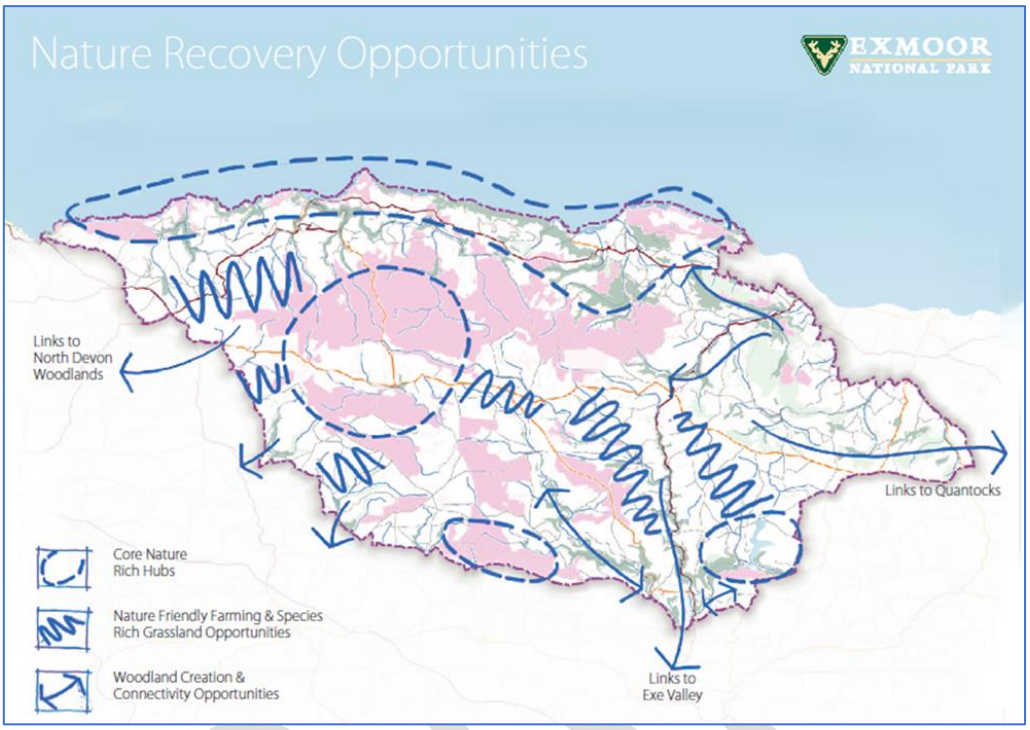
‘Nature in decline’ landscape



Nature Recovery landscape



To deliver the Vision, we aim to create large-scale nature-rich hub areas such as those shown indicatively on the map below with adjacent areas of well linked nature corridors and connectivity, nature-friendly farming areas, and nature recovery opportunity areas. ***(Please note this is a draft map only)***



Purpose of the Vision

This is a partnership vision which has been prepared by the Nature Conservation Advisory Panel, which leads on taking forward the wildlife aspects of the Exmoor Partnership Plan, to look at how Exmoor can respond to the current nature and climate emergencies.

What is it?

- It's our partnership response to how we see Exmoor being able to contribute to solving the ecological emergency and is inextricably linked to addressing the climate crisis.
- It's an ambitious framework to bring about nature recovery, carbon capture and climate resilience within the National Park and its wider setting, testing out ideas, different delivery models and a range of funding options, both on land we have direct influence over and working with willing landowners to deliver transformative change.
- It identifies how the National Park can use its influence to make changes beyond its borders and make positive change across wider landscapes, with benefits to land, air, and freshwater and marine environments.

- It reflects the Glover Review and demonstrates how Exmoor can help deliver 'National landscapes as the backbone of Nature Recovery Networks'.
- It delivers the Lawton principles of 'more, bigger, better and joined up'.
- It helps to achieve the 25 Year Environment Plan priorities, including recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes, using and managing land sustainably and connecting people with the environment.
- It outlines how land managers on Exmoor can directly contribute towards developing a Nature Recovery Network through Environmental Land Management Schemes targeted at delivering for nature or through other innovative opportunities. It suggests ways that everyone living on Exmoor can make a difference to nature recovery, for example, through community-led, parish initiatives.

Who is it for?

- It's for the whole National Park, not just the National Park Authority.
- It's for our partners and stakeholders. The vision can only be achieved if we work together to deliver it. This involves a wide range of partners who all have an important role to play.
- It's for Exmoor's landowners and managers, to provide them with a clear framework as to how we can deliver nature recovery whilst symbiotically continuing to manage land in a way which allows people to enjoy a sustainable way of life and businesses to thrive.
- It's for the people who live and work here. Everyone can make a contribution to nature recovery even on a small scale such as wildlife friendly gardening, through engaging in locally led initiatives to enhance nature and ensuring wildlife is not adversely affected by developments.
- It's for the wider public – engaging with nature provides huge health and wellbeing benefits.
- It's for Exmoor's neighbours, enabling a joined-up approach that works well beyond the National Park boundaries, providing benefits for the wider landscapes and communities of Devon and Somerset.

Introduction

Nature in the UK is declining at a catastrophic rate and this decline is sadly happening even in protected areas such as National Parks[1]. To reverse this decline and enable nature's recovery, we need to create more opportunities for nature to thrive across the National Park and out into adjoining areas including other protected areas such as AONBs and the wider landscape in other local authority areas. This requires a step-change in our approach, which means a complete transformation of the level of nature restoration that occurs. This requires a landscape-scale approach that creates diverse, interconnected habitats, working with natural processes wherever possible. As part of *Working Together for a Nature-rich National Park*, we will create new priority habitats, make our existing wildlife sites bigger and better, and join up these nature-rich areas. **By 2050, we want to see 75% or 51,750ha of the area of the National Park in nature-rich condition.**

Exmoor is one of the UK's 15 National Parks, protected for the nation as one of the jewels in the crown of our beautiful countryside, a breathing space for all to connect with nature and each other, learn about the past and find inspiration for a sustainable future. **National Parks should form the backbone of nature recovery**. They are the core of existing high value nature, and yet they have not been immune from the declines in wildlife suffered across the country and have not fared well. Exmoor's mosaic of habitats including heath, blanket bog, ancient woodlands, species-rich grassland, rivers and streams and high quality marine habitats are often fragmented, disconnected and surrounded by intensively managed agricultural land of lesser value to wildlife. However, the diversity of nature in a relatively small place provides a strong core from which to build, expand and connect, delivering nature recovery, climate resilience and wider environmental benefits such as cleaner water and healthier soils.

The state of nature in the UK and Exmoor

According to the State of Nature 2019, 56% of native British species have declined over the last 50 years. Of this figure, 31% have strongly declined – meaning either that they've halved over the period monitored or are likely to halve in the next 25 years[2]. Most of the large areas of habitats on Exmoor are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and current figures from Natural England show that 85% of this land is currently not in favourable condition, and in the wider countryside nature is still declining. This leaves wildlife reliant on these threatened habitats and with few alternatives in the wider countryside some species are in danger of localised or wider extinctions.

[1] *Council for National Parks, (2018) Raising the bar: improving nature in our National Parks.*

[2] *Hayhow DB, Eaton MA, Stanbury AJ, Burns F, Kirby WB, Bailey N, Beckmann B, Bedford J, Boersch-Supan PH, Coomber F, Dennis EB, Dolman SJ, Dunn E, Hall J, Harrower C, Hatfield JH, Hawley J, Haysom K, Hughes J, Johns DG, Mathews F, McQuatters-Gollop A, Noble DG, Outhwaite CL, Pearce-Higgins JW, Pescott OL, Powney GD and Symes N (2019) The State of Nature 2019. The State of Nature Partnership.*

Nationally, the main causes of decline have been attributed to land use change especially agricultural intensification, pollution, habitat fragmentation, climate change and the effect of invasive species (as well as plant and animal disease)[3].

On Exmoor, for example, moorland management problems have changed in recent years, from widespread overgrazing when there were production subsidies to the challenges of undergrazing and illegal burning. Fluctuating livestock prices have been a factor as well: if prices are low it is not worth the added workload of keeping stock on the moor, but if they are high it is not worth the risk. Livestock diseases such as bovine tuberculosis have also influenced the use of moorland, especially when it is common land. Commons tend to pose particular problems concerning rights and responsibilities.

In addition, there has been a marked reduction in the traditional management of woodlands and hedgerows for various reasons, including the high cost of skilled labour.

After the Second World War (WW11), farmers were encouraged by grants and subsidies to reclaim land and maximise production. More recently, they have been given various incentives to farm according to environmental prescriptions, but typically these have changed every few years according to different objectives. Mosaics of different habitats have been penalised under recent agricultural support schemes, whereas distinct areas of land-use that are easy to classify have been encouraged. Most agri-environment schemes have not been tailored sufficiently to areas such as Exmoor, and they haven't encouraged long-term planning towards clear objectives. Biodiversity and sustainable land management have often suffered as a result. The National Park has seen further changes in land-use with the increase in commercial shoots, new agricultural buildings and land used for equestrian purposes.

The National Park covers just under 69,300ha and an estimated 38% of it is recognised as UK priority habitat. Exmoor holds a range of habitats such as heath, blanket bog and western oak woods, which are internationally rare, with 19,300 ha of the National Park, including 131 kilometres of rivers and streams, specially designated by UK and European law to protect its distinctive wildlife. About 12,600 ha of that area has been selected by Government under the European Habitats Directive as a Special Area of Conservation. However, some of these sites are not in good condition. For instance, 85% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) on Exmoor are in 'unfavourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' condition compared to an average across England of 61%.

More than 97% of the UK's wildflower meadows have been lost since WWII[2]. On Exmoor we estimate that we have less than 2500 ha of unimproved grassland left. This has seen the decline of species such as the hornet robber-fly and butterflies like the marbled white.

Pearl-bordered[4] and marsh fritillary[5] butterflies are now extinct within the National Park. The red squirrel was once a common sight in our woodlands just a couple of generations

[3] *Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, May 2019*
[4] Butterfly Conservation, Butterflies of the New Millennium database.
[5] Plackett, J (2016). The Two Moors Threatened Butterfly Project Final Report. Butterfly Conservation report S16-13.

ago… the hard winter of 1947 saw the last red squirrel disappear as grey squirrels began to increase rapidly in numbers[6].

Exmoor is still an important stronghold for birds like whinchat and cuckoo which are declining nationally, with cuckoos having been almost lost from lowland Devon in recent decades[7]. However, birds such as the curlew are now at the edge of extinction on Exmoor[8] and other species such as yellowhammer, willow tit and greenfinch have seen a big drop in numbers across the National Park[9].

Salmon numbers have plummeted due to the loss of spawning habitat, barriers to fish passage, the impact of invasive species plus issues affecting them further downstream and further out to sea.[10]

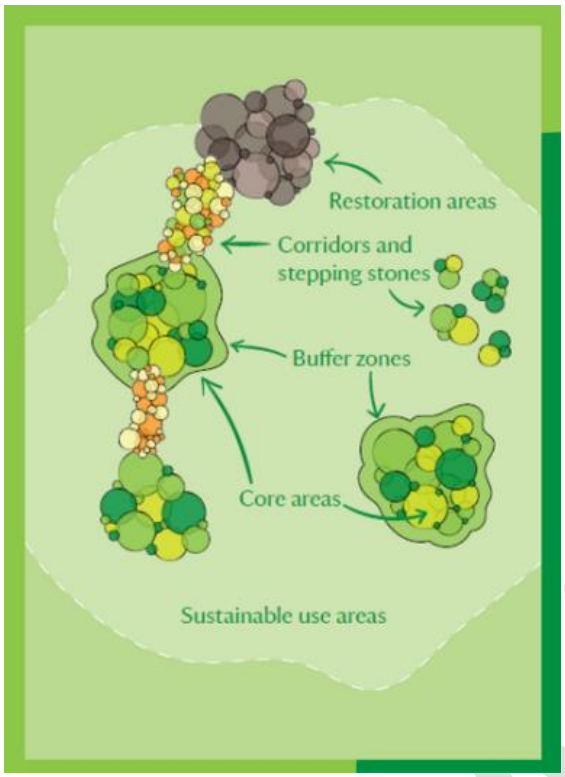
As a consequence of climate change we are likely to experience hotter, drier summers, and warmer, wetter winters. An increase in the incidence of extreme weather events such as severe flooding and drought is also likely to occur, and sea levels will rise. Drier summers may cause mires to dry out leading to the erosion and shrinkage of peat stores which will have knock-on impacts on wildlife and carbon storage. There will also be a decline in soil health and the loss of critical habitats and species including as a result of a rise in pests and diseases. There is a need for mitigation through carbon sequestration and adaption through increasing ecosystem resilience, habitat creation and restoring natural landscape functions.

What do we need to do to achieve a Nature-rich National Park?

We need a step-change in our approach to wildlife conservation, from trying to hang on to what we have to one of large-scale habitat restoration and recreation, underpinned by the re-establishment of ecological processes and ecosystem services at a landscape scale for the benefits of both people and wildlife.

In order for wildlife to thrive we need to establish a coherent and resilient ecological network. This means a suite of high quality wildlife sites, with connections between them so that species can move or adapt. We need to create more space for nature and natural processes, make our existing network of wildlife sites bigger and better and ensure that they are all joined up[11]. We have a suite of priority habitats and natural spaces, some of which are designated, that can act as a starting point. We urgently need to expand this network learning from best practice, to deliver change at a landscape scale.

[6] Exmoor Natural History Society, species checklists.
[7] Beavan SD & Lock JM (eds) 2016. Devon Bird Atlas 2007-2013. Devon Birds, Cornworthy, Devon.
[8] Sim IMW, Stanbury AJ, Tomankova I and Douglas DJT. 2016. Changes in moorland and heathland bird abundance in south-west England in relation to environmental change. Bird Study 63:4, 543-553.
[9] Exmoor Natural History Society dataset.
[10] Exe Salmon Action Plan, http://aquaticcommons.org/11124/1/Exe_SAP_final.pdf
[11] Lawton, J.H., Brotherton, P.N.M., Brown, V.K., Elphick, C., Fitter, A.H., Forshaw, J., Haddow, R.W., Hilborner, S., Leafe, R.N., Mace, G.M., Southgate, M.P., Sutherland, W.J., Tew, T.E., Varley, J. & Wynne, G.R. (2010) Making Space for Nature: a review of England's wildlife sites and ecological networks. Report to Defra.



More – create new wildlife sites to make more space for nature

Bigger – increase the size of existing sites

Better – protect what we have got and improve the quality of wildlife sites by better habitat management

Joined – create wildlife corridors or stepping stones to connect and buffer wildlife sites and more nature-friendly farming in the wider environment.

The Exmoor National Park Partnership Plan has an ambition for wildlife which is '*Exmoor is richer in wildlife. Habitats are in good condition, expanded, connected and support a greater abundance of species'*[12].

Exmoor supports an important wealth of species including around 200 Exmoor Priority Species[13]. It is vital we make a network of habitats that is as resilient as possible to safeguard or recover these species. As a result of climate change we may have to accept some change in species composition with the possible loss of some species but potential gain of others. Making these sites more robust for nature will also have huge benefits for climate mitigation in terms of carbon storage, preventing the loss of peatland and soil carbon, while also delivering wider environmental benefits such as flood risk management and clean water.

We need to ensure that Exmoor's wildlife is in good condition, well connected and resilient so that we can pass on the richness and diversity of habitats and species to future generations. We need to ensure that nature recovery is led by natural processes and is inextricably linked to delivering positive change that will help with the climate emergency.

Following the 'Lawton' principles of 'more, bigger, better and joined up' we have a vision for achieving nature recovery on Exmoor:

[12] Exmoor National Park Authority (2018) Exmoor National Park Partnership Plan 2018- 2023 (2018)
[13] Exmoor National Park Authority (2014) Exmoor Wildlife Research and Monitoring Framework

Exmoor's farmers, land managers, conservationists, communities and public bodies will work together so that by 2030 we have helped to deliver '*a Nature-rich Exmoor National Park*' which is great for wildlife and great for people:

- **Exmoor's rich mosaic of wildlife habitats are enhanced, extended and integrated into a network of nature-rich hubs, with blurred edges between them, and corridors linking them together.**
- **Wildlife is abundant and thriving and can easily move across the landscape and adapt to a changing climate.**
- **Exmoor's farmed landscape remains productive with farmers ensuring nature thrives whilst still producing food and other public goods.**
- **People living in and visiting the National Park are connected to nature. They understand and are inspired by Exmoor's special wildlife and are actively engaged in its conservation.**

The challenge is to find a way for farmers and landowners across Exmoor to have a sustainable future whilst delivering for nature recovery and climate change. Locally led community and parish initiatives can also make a huge difference to nature recovery.

How will we achieve this?

On Exmoor, we will start with those in our communities who are keen and willing to lead the way, setting examples and best practice for others to follow. Large landowners such as the National Park Authority and National Trust own around 12,000 ha (17.5%) of land in the National Park, but even if this land were in in good condition for nature, this only represents a small area of the National Park. We have identified a number of other landowners with adjoining land who have similar objectives and aspirations, and we have built strong relationships with the farming community through the Exmoor Hill Farming Network. New Environmental Land Management Schemes need to offer a clear future for delivering for nature recovery whilst enabling farmers and landowners to thrive. Together we have a real chance to deliver transformative, landscape scale nature recovery, bringing conservationists and other specialists, landowners and local community together to deliver real change.

We will connect with people: involving communities, schools, volunteers in defining what they want nature recovery to look like and helping to deliver the solutions. We will use our nature recovery illustration as a tool to engage with people about what nature recovery is and looks like. Creating nature rich places that inspire, connect and encourage people to get involved. We will work closely to identify opportunities to deliver more for nature through community and parish-led initiatives and encouraging everyone to make a difference even at a small scale.

We will trial new solutions: Exmoor's remoteness, land ownership and strong partnership of conservation organisations and landowners provides opportunities to **trial and test nature recovery**, to increase the resilience and recovery of our wealth of species including species reintroductions, to explore ways to enable SSSIs to function as robust and adaptable ecosystems which can withstand climate change, or test out novel habitat enhancement techniques and build on our successful track record of delivery. Exmoor is one of the lesser-visited National Parks and does not suffer from the scale of visitor pressure that other National Parks are experiencing.

We will continue to promote the use of traditional breeds of livestock to help deliver the vision and use them to carry out vital conservation management recognising that breeds such as the Exmoor pony, Devon red cattle and Exmoor horn sheep have excellent qualities of hardiness and resilience.

We realise that we cannot continue to segregate the themes biodiversity, landscape and cultural heritage if we are to address the ecological and climate emergencies. They are all underpinned by natural process and adaptive land management and it is only by working together, across these topics, that nature recovery and climate action will be achieved recognising natural beauty and cultural heritage are integral elements of National Park purposes.

We will not work in isolation to deliver nature recovery but closely with other initiatives outside the National Park, linking closely to deliver the ambitions of the Local Nature Partnerships and their development of Nature Recovery Networks. We will also work with other partners such as the AONBs and catchments partnerships so that the benefits will be felt further down in the catchments.

We will deliver an ambitious programme to bring about nature recovery, carbon capture and flood resilience within the National Park, testing out ideas, different delivery models and a range of funding options, both on land we have direct influence over and working with willing landowners to deliver transformative change and benefits to land, air, and freshwater and marine environments.

What delivery mechanisms will we use?

A key to this delivery will be working through the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), where farmers and landowners will be financially supported to produce benefits for nature, climate and other ecosystem services. We have an excellent gateway through the Exmoor Hill Farm Network to provide information, support and training to those who want to pursue new opportunities for nature-led initiatives.

Currently farmers and land managers find themselves at a crossroads with support in the form of Basic Payment Scheme payments coming to an end and new ELMS being developed with input from Defra's Tests and Trials. It is vital that through support from ELMs and through seeking other alternative sources of income through diversification, that land

management businesses which are contributing to nature recovery on Exmoor remain economically viable.

Working Together for a Nature-rich National Park will seek opportunities through national initiatives such as the government's *Nature for Climate Fund*, the Environment Agency's Natural Flood Management programmes and national initiatives such as the National Parks' *Net Zero for Nature* initiative. It will seek to become recognised as an exemplary and innovative Nature Recovery Area.

We will look for opportunities through the planning process to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain[14] both from within the National Park, although recognising that our level of development is very small, and from adjacent areas where development pressures may be higher such as parts of West Somerset and North Devon. Biodiversity Net Gain is an approach to development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before.

We will seek new funding opportunities where we can work collaboratively to deliver for wildlife, climate and people. The National Park offers huge opportunities to not only deliver for nature but for health and wellbeing and it has an excellent track record of delivering at a local level by working with local communities and parishes. Through *Working Together for a Nature-rich National Park,* there will be more opportunities for people to reconnect with nature, inspiring everyone to enjoy, understand and cherish Exmoor.

How will we measure success?

We have set SMART[15] targets for the next 10 years in order to set us on a clear trajectory of recovery for nature. The targets for creation of new areas for nature are based on the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030[16] which suggests that we need to transform at least 30% of Europe's lands and seas into nature-rich areas, enabling us to build on the existing nature-rich hubs. To support this, the Wildlife Trusts are calling for at least 30% of our land and sea to be connected and protected for nature's recovery by 2030. Making more space for nature to become abundant once again will give our struggling wildlife the chance to recover and also restore beautiful wild places - places that store carbon and help to tackle the climate crisis. Given that Exmoor is one of the UK's protected areas, our targets are deliberately ambitious to achieve at least 30% of *additional* areas for nature which will add to the 38% of existing nature-rich areas.

Beyond that 10 years we need to continue that trajectory but we are not setting these as specific habitat objectives but rather a wider aspiration for natural process-led delivery.

[14] Defra (2019) Biodiversity Net gain Summary of responses and government response
[15] SMART stands for 'specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely'.
[16] COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (2020) EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 Bringing nature back into our lives COM/2020/380 final

Working with landowners and managers to recover nature and natural processes, by 2030 we will as a minimum:

1. **Bring 95% of existing wildlife areas into 'favourable condition', providing the core of our 'nature-rich hubs'.** Where this is not possible, we will examine the reasons for failure and develop plans to either reach favourable condition in the following 5 years or revisit the designation criteria to ensure they are valid for the future (for example, if designated for features that are no longer supported, either look at reintroductions or work with Natural England to amend the designation to suit new conditions and target species or features). This includes 19,300 ha of SSSIs and SACs and 7230 ha of Local Wildlife Sites which together represents 38% of the National Park.

   This will require a dynamic approach which is outcome-led and may require bringing conservation objectives up to date. We need to ensure that these areas are managed in a way which allows adaptation to climate change and builds in resilience whilst safeguarding our special species.

2. **Create or restore an additional 4,500 ha of priority habitat as 'nature corridors and highways',** especially to expand, link and buffer existing sites and to create a web of connectivity which equates to 6.5% of current National Park area.

   - 1,500 ha of species-rich grassland
   - 50% of woodlands are managed for nature with all deadwood retained and in the remaining 50% of woodlands at least 50% deadwood is retained
   - 2080 ha of new woodland or wood pasture – to achieve 17% woodland cover across the National Park
   - 500 ha of new/restored wetlands/mires
   - 100 km of new hedgerows planted
   - 100 km of wooded corridor/shelter belt >20M wide
   - Deliver benefits for the marine environment and on the coast such as Porlock Marsh by reducing diffuse pollution
   - Deliver actions that restore or facilitate natural processes within at least 3 river catchments, including the rivers Exe (including Barle), Horner and Hawkcombe Water and Lyn

3. **Establish 11,500 ha of 'nature-friendly farming areas',** where land is managed working with nature rather than against it to run a profitable business (17% of the National Park). Currently 56% of the National Park is farmland (38,600ha) but only an estimated 2500ha of this is unimproved species-rich grassland with many areas supporting few benefits for wildlife.

   There is a huge opportunity here to get more of this land into a condition where it is delivering more for nature and climate whilst still being agriculturally productive. Based around a low input, regenerative system, this could include

allowing areas to be 'roughened up', better hedgerow management, avoiding any artificial inputs such as pesticides and fertilisers, minimal cultivations, creating margins for pollinators, allowing scrub and trees to establish and protecting riparian corridors.

This may involve looking at new opportunities for developing silvipastural and wood pasture systems and seeking to create a range of habitats supported in a connected network, working with natural processes and linking to the Nature Recovery Network.

New Environmental Land Management schemes must provide a key mechanism for this, paying landowners and managers to deliver nature and other public goods. Other opportunities should also be sought to deliver innovative delivery options. The expectation is for a clear and long-term change, not just funding small short-term tweaks.

This will assist in the delivery of the Devon and Somerset Local Nature Partnership's Nature Recovery Networks and Pollinator Actions Plans[17] and directly contribute to initiatives like Buglife's *B-Lines*. B-Lines are a series of 'insect pathways' running through our countryside and towns, along which a series of wildflower-rich habitat stepping stones are restored and created. This will provide large areas of new habitat benefiting not only bees and butterflies, but also a host of other wildlife by providing better connectivity to nature-rich hubs.

4. **Create 7,000 ha of 'nature recovery opportunity areas'** where nature and natural processes are allowed to take their course**.** In these wilder areas land will be allowed to recover, healthy soils and clean water will be restored and wildlife will recolonise (10% of the National Park).

   Flower-rich pastures, wetlands, scrub and woodland will be given space to regenerate. Rivers and their catchments will be managed sensitively, allowing time and space for natural processes and associated wildlife to establish. Large grazing animals will ensure these landscapes are in a dynamic state, which is diverse and constantly changing – the same results that roving herds of aurochs would have had in times gone by. In addition, these landscapes will be producing other high quality products which are the National Park's life support systems – clean air, fresh water, and productive and healthy soils.

   Natural processes may include natural succession, natural grazing, predation, natural movement of species and habitats, natural evolution of watercourses, and nature-driven fluctuations, all working together with wider environmental influences, such as underlying hydrology, geology and soil. Ensuring there is space, time and a sound understanding of the natural environment is essential if we want to see the benefits this approach brings. There will be space to take a

[17] Devon County Council (2017) Devon County Council Pollinators' Action Plan, Somerset County Council (2018) Somerset County Council Pollinator Action Plan.

harvest of key products such as timber and also high quality meat from livestock which will be a secondary by-product and not driving the system. Species such as pine martin, red squirrel and beaver may recolonise these landscapes. A current example includes work on the National Trust's West Exmoor's Estate.

By 2050 *'Working Together for a Nature-rich National Park'* aims to have at least 75% (or 51,750ha) of the area of the National Park in nature-rich condition, with the remaining areas providing networks and corridors for wildlife to move through and beyond its boundaries. Exmoor National Park will be a climate resilient, nature-rich core area supporting nature recovery in the wider countryside.

How will this help deliver the Government's agenda?

National Parks can help the Government fulfil its ambition for the UK to have the best natural environment in the world, and for us to leave the planet in a better condition for future generations. In doing this this, *Working Together for a Nature-rich National Park* will:

- Deliver the Lawton principles of more, bigger, better and joined up
- Achieve 25 Year Environment Plan priorities, including recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes, using and managing land sustainably and connecting people with the environment
- Take forward Glover proposals, particularly 'landscapes alive for nature and beauty':
    - National landscapes as the backbone of Nature Recovery Networks
    - Strengthened management plan to lead nature recovery and respond to climate change
    - A central place for ELMS
- Directly contribute to finding solutions to the climate and ecological emergency
- Deliver Biodiversity Net Gain and biodiversity offsetting
- Deliver key targets in the proposed Environment Bill
- Ensure that natural processes are at the core of nature recovery
- Have huge benefits for the health and wellbeing agenda

Find out more: Website – Wildlife illustrations with toolkit with examples

Weblink to ENPA page.

Contact details.

Nature recovery illustrations were painted by wildlife artist Richard Allen

Case studies of good projects happening already *(these will be scattered throughout the document in boxes with photos – others will be included in final document including some farmer/landowner case studies)*

Exmoor Mires Partnership

The Exmoor Mires Partnership is a carefully planned restoration programme targeted at over 3000 ha of moorland. Part of South West Water's Upstream Thinking Catchment Management Programme, which enables issues at source in the catchment to be addressed rather than investing in storage and treatment works further down the river.

The Exmoor Mires Partnership is working with landowners and moorland users to re-assess the way bogs are regarded and managed. With the support of this partnership, hundreds of kilometres of old ditches and abandoned peat cuttings are being blocked up, gradually restoring their ecological and hydrological functions. The end result will be wetter, healthier peatlands, which supply a wide range of ecosystem services.

All the Moor Butterflies

The All the Moor Butterflies Project (2017-2020) improved the fortunes of some of Exmoor's rarest butterfly species, whilst also offering opportunities for new and existing audiences to get involved with their conservation.

The project worked with 146 landowners across 201 sites on Exmoor, Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor. Project staff carried out 841 site visits, giving advice to landowners and farmers to help them care for the rare butterflies and moths on their land. The project focused on two key areas on Exmoor: Heddon Valley, home of the high brown fritillary butterfly, and the Holnicote Estate; one of only four strongholds for the heath fritillary in the country.

Plantlife's Building Resilience in South West Woodlands Project

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has awarded Plantlife £433,700 to deliver emergency management that will safeguard some of our most rare and threatened lichen communities in the Atlantic woodlands of Devon, Somerset and Cornwall. Plantlife will work closely with project partners, woodland owners, farmers and local communities to explore ways in which we can make them more resilient to change, better understood and fully celebrated as part of the region's natural heritage.

Exmoor Non-Native Invasive Species Project

The Exmoor Non-Native Invasive Species Project is helping to control the spread of invasive non-native species on Exmoor through trialling innovative approaches and working with local communities and volunteers to tackle species such as Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, montbretia, skunk cabbage and signal crayfish. The Project is a partnership of Exmoor National Park Authority, National Trust, Environment Agency, Natural England and Nicky Green Associates and is funded through a Water Environment Grant through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and Defra. The total annual cost of invasive non-native species to the British economy is estimated at approximately £1.7 billion and is one of the five major threats to the state of nature.

The Headwaters of the Exe Project

The Headwaters of the Exe is working with farmers and land managers to ensure good water quality in the upper catchment of the River Exe. It forms part of South West Water's Upstream Thinking programme, with funding from South West Water and the Exmoor National Park Authority. The project is currently being delivered by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest working closely with Exmoor National Park Authority and the Exmoor Hill Farming Network.

Riverlands

Riverlands is a partnership project between the National Trust and Environment Agency that seeks to reverse the decline in river catchment health and associated biodiversity. The aim is to revive five of the UK's most precious rivers, including the Porlock Vale Streams on the Holnicote Estate creating rivers and catchments that are clean, healthy and rich in wildlife and inspiring people to connect with nature.

Working in collaboration with others, the driving principle of the project is working with natural processes to improve ecosystem function, build catchment resilience for challenges such as climate change and deliver outcomes that benefit both people and nature.

Beaver re-introduction

Through the Riverlands project the National Trust is trialling two enclosed releases of beavers on the Holnicote Estate. Beavers are native to the UK and would have once been an important part of the ecosystem, before they were hunted to extinction in the UK during the 16th Century. They are nature's water engineers and create remarkable, complex wetland habitats that benefit a wide range of wildlife and could form an important role in reversing declines in nature. There is also increasing evidence that beavers can play a role in helping manage flood risk, helping with drought resilience and improving water quality.

Exmoor's Ambition Test and Trial Project

The Exmoor's Ambition Test and Trial to help Defra design the new Environmental Land Management Scheme has been underway since Autumn of 2019. The aim of the trial is to devise and test a Natural and Cultural Capital Register to reflect the range of benefits to the public that are produced on Exmoor's land holdings. The Project will also be working with farmers to find out what changes they might be willing to make to help with nature recovery, combatting climate change and other targets from the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, and also how they could work together to bring about change on a landscape scale. Crucially, it will look at what payment levels would be appropriate to reward farmers for the pubic goods that are essential to deliver this Nature Recovery Vision.