

Northumberland National Park



Natural Environment Vision

2014 - 2035

Consultation Document

January 2014

Natural Environment Vision for the next 20 years – 2035

The Vision: What will the Northumberland National Park be like in 2035?

Northumberland National Park will continue to be a moorland dominated upland area managed in the main by human intervention including farmers and those living directly from the land. It will be made up of connected areas in which existing important habitats, such as hay meadows and grasslands, bogs, heather moorland, native broadleaved woodland and rivers and burns, are able to cope with environmental change. Typical species of these upland habitats will be present in healthy self-sustaining populations. In addition, species that could belong, but currently don't, may be accepted if they arrive naturally or are appropriately introduced. Some places will be less intensively managed than today and natural processes will help to develop them into different and new habitats. In other places opportunities for large-scale habitat creation or reversion will be embraced. Different areas of the National Park will retain their local distinctiveness with different habitats and species. The value of the natural environment of the Northumberland National Park for all the things it provides for society will be recognised and those services will be protected and enhanced for future generations.



Actions for the future of Northumberland National Park

1. Healthy Upland Habitats

There are already many very good quality habitats in the Northumberland National Park and the aim is to keep these in good condition into the future; this includes protected areas and other existing areas of good undesignated habitat. The following sections give an indication of the vision for different habitats across the National Park and the management needed to achieve this.

- **Open moorland habitats**

The vision is to retain a variety of moorland habitats where the extent of heather cover is maintained and increased in areas it has been lost through overgrazing, burning and forestry in the past and the quality of peatland sites is maintained and enhanced. These habitats will be managed by farming livestock and game management and will continue to cover the majority of the National Park. Landowners and managers will be encouraged to use sheep and cattle together with burning and cutting to maintain and enhance heathland on wet and dry soils. The aim is to create and maintain a mosaic on the moorlands with varied heath vegetation including species such as calluna, cross-leaved heath, bell heather, bilberry, cowberry and crowberry. Burning will be well managed avoiding habitats that are damaged or do not respond well to burning including steep slopes, bracken beds, peat soils, flushes and areas with sensitive species such as nesting birds, rare plants, bryophytes and lichens. This will help retain soils and carbon as well as the species typical of moorland. Small burn mosaics will be encouraged and some areas will not be burnt at all where heather will be allowed to grow long and senesce naturally. All the peatland habitats will have high water tables and be actively growing new peat. Sphagnum mosses will dominate with species such as sundews, bog rosemary, bog asphodel, cotton grasses and cranberry common on wet raised bogs and dwarf shrubs, bryophytes and cloudberry present on higher altitude blanket bog. Drainage ditches will be blocked to retain water and peat, self-seeded trees will be removed. No deep peat sites will be planted or newly drained. Plantations that are on blanket bog will be removed and restored to open moorland habitat. Deep peat habitats will be surrounded by a mosaic of wet and dry heath which will have expanded at the expense of acid grassland areas by grazing management and by interventions such as the addition of seed. Erosion due to recreational pressure will be minimised and proactively managed. Montane heath will be retained on Cheviot summit and may even extend due to reduction and/or cessation of grazing. Moorlands will include some broadleaved woodland and scrub in the form of hawthorn, gorse and juniper to add to the variation.



- **Native woodland**

Existing areas of native woodland will be protected and managed to improve condition, enable regeneration and prevent the spread of disease. Woodlands will be varied and will include dead wood, open space and varied ground flora. Areas of new native woodland will be planted particularly in areas that expand and join up existing fragments, but not at the expense of other important habitats or valuable farmland. The species planted will be those that occur now including oaks, birches, willows, rowan, alder, aspen, hazel, hawthorn and other shrubs. Disease may affect what species can be planted in the future and the development of resistant strains may mean that species that are restricted now (such as ash and elm) can be planted again. In the main, non-native species such as sycamore and beech will not be encouraged for nature conservation planting, but Scots pine will be accepted in low quantities - there may however, be areas that are dominated by this species in and around the Park. Connected and large areas of woodland will be prioritised, together with planting that protects water and soil resources. There will be more woodlands that are over 20 hectares in extent. New native woodland will be planted along the river valleys as well as ascending up hillsides in larger plantings with associated scrub. In many areas (particularly developing woodlands) animals will be excluded, but grazing animals in woodlands and scrub will be considered and used in suitable locations to benefit habitat diversity and to aid natural regeneration.



- **Grassland**

Enclosed land will continue to be managed for forage for stock with some of these areas being less intensively managed for hay with reduced inputs and longer periods without grazing than silage fields. Existing high quality meadows will be retained and their species diversity will be maintained and enhanced through suitable management for each site. Areas under this type of traditional management will increase providing more locations for flower species typical of the area including wood cranesbill, yellow rattle, Alchemillas, pignut, clovers, ox-eye daisy, knapweed and eyebright. Fields that are under good management but do not have a wide variety of species will have locally-sourced seed added to increase their floral diversity and nectar resource for insects. Sites will be prioritised that help create a network of grassland sites to maintain and enhance the value of the National Park for pollinators. The value of relatively flat open grasslands for waders will be recognised and maintained, including areas with managed rush and wetland habitats. Other areas that support species rich grassland such as verges, flushes, whin, calcareous and andesite grassland will be maintained by selective grazing management and cutting. These areas will continue to provide habitat for locally special and more common species such as maiden pink, mountain pansy, chives, hairy stonecrop, thyme, rockrose, scabious, betony, melancholy thistle and water avens. Old grassland sites with undisturbed soil will be protected to maintain their fungal interest including waxcaps.



- **Water and wetlands**

All the rivers and burns in the National Park will be clean and meet the targets for good environmental status. Some will be considered excellent and will represent the best in the country. Populations of species indicating good and excellent condition will be present including salmon, sea trout, freshwater pearl mussel, white clawed crayfish and water crowfoots. Siltation and pollution will not be major issues and high quality status will be maintained by ensuring land management including stock husbandry and forestry does not affect watercourses. In many places the natural bank and channel profile will be retained and rivers will allowed to move and change over time. Standing water bodies including the Roman Wall Loughs will have high water quality status and will not be adversely affected by surrounding land management; associated habitats of fen, wet grassland, reedbeds, wet woodland and watercourses will occur in the mosaic with open water. New areas of wetland such as scrapes and ponds will be created.



- **Cultivated land**

Cultivated land including arable crops and margins will be present in some areas in the National Park and managed to protect soils and provide habitat for farmland birds, plants and invertebrates. These habitats, mainly in the lower areas of the National Park, will form part of the connected landscape with hedgerows and stonewalls and will help link the Park to areas outside the boundary.



- **Plantation woodlands and forestry**

Non-native woodland will also be present in the National Park. There will be managed, productive forests and woodland in the National Park, providing woodland products such as timber and woodfuel or shelter for livestock. These areas will include mixed broadleaved and conifer woodlands as well as conifer plantations and will range from small woodlands managed for local use to larger commercial productive forest. These woodlands and forests will in the main have a mix of species to help combat the spread of disease and to provide wood for a variety of uses. New woodland and plantations will not be located in areas at the expense of existing good quality habitats and existing plantations will be remodelled to provide benefit for the natural environment as well as being productive.

2. A Wealth of Species

The vision for the future is to have species typical of the area across the whole of Northumberland National Park including species that should be here but have disappeared due to human or other influences. Populations of rare and important species as well as common ones are maintained and increased so they are self sustaining. Visitors to the Park and residents will regularly see and interact with these species. Whilst ecologically sound to create a vision for the natural environment based on habitat networks and connectivity, a more exciting and understandable way to approach the subject for many people will be to explore the presence and importance of individual species; the vision therefore includes some targets for iconic and common species:

- Curlew will be widespread and remain in all the current areas so visitors are able to see a curlew in the spring and summer across the National Park.
- Red squirrels are found across the National Park in broadleaved and conifer woodlands.
- A self- sustaining population of black grouse can be found across the Park linking with populations in the North Pennines and Scotland.
- Otters and migratory fish are found in all river catchments and freshwater pearl mussel and white clawed crayfish are present in current locations with expanded populations.
- Other more common species such as brown hares, bats, red grouse, roe deer, snipe, lapwing, dippers, wild goats, wood cranesbill, bog asphodel and orchids are present and regularly seen.
- Barn owls are breeding in all suitable places in the National Park.
- Birds of prey, including hen harrier, peregrine, and merlin are present in suitable habitat and are not persecuted.
- Invertebrates are plentiful including bumblebees, butterflies and beetles with upland species such as large heath butterfly, mountain bumblebee, moss carder bee and emperor moth common and widespread.

Legal predator control will be considered as a tool to maintain populations of important species. Opportunities to reintroduce species that have been missing from the National Park (or parts of it) for a long time such as beavers, pine martens, various butterfly species and plants will be explored. Supplementation of species that currently have low numbers or limited populations such as hen harrier, black grouse, dwarf birch, dwarf willow and whin grassland will also be considered. Some species - more mobile ones - may move here as climate changes and they will be welcomed. Climate change may alter species distribution over time, but retaining a network of suitable habitats inside and outside the National Park for these species to move and adapt in will be crucial as well as retaining specific habitats for some.

Action plans will be developed for some species that require specific work beyond habitat improvements.

3. A Connected Landscape

The vision is not to have islands of good quality habitat surrounded by poor habitat, but to create an extensive habitat network across the landscape of the National Park. This could be achieved by joining up the *same* habitat type by extending the boundaries of existing sites, or to link *different* semi-natural habitats to make the National Park more permeable. New habitats can be created where there are gaps in between good quality habitats, but should not be at the expense of already high quality habitats or those with potential to improve.

We will produce an opportunity map to help plan where habitat improvements can be made. This will include different habitats in different parts of the National Park retaining the character of each area. For example, a woodland expansion plan highlighting areas suitable for planting will be developed and is likely to show opportunities for expansion around existing woodlands particularly in the Grasslees valley with links to the North Tyne and Redesdale. Large new native plantings will be considered in the open areas of upper Coquetdale. New meadows will be targeted in the vicinity of existing meadows by the addition of native seed and/or plants to achieve a network so no good quality meadows and grassland sites are isolated allowing transfer of seed and a network for pollinators. River systems will be considered on a catchment basis with the Rede catchment a particular priority in addition to the designated river systems.

The National Park is not an island and just as high quality sites within the National Park should not be isolated, neither should the National Park itself; networks will be far less effective if they only occur inside the Park boundary. The National Park will be linked to the rest of Northumberland and to southern Scotland via river catchments and continuous habitat networks. The National Park will also be ecologically linked to other upland areas in northern England and Southern Scotland as a wider network of upland habitats is created over a larger scale.

4. Different Habitats and Different Management

Human management will continue to create and maintain some of the habitats in the National Park. The many habitats and species that already exist and are valued, are the product of thousands of years of human habitation and manipulation of the landscape and this is unlikely to change in the next 20 years. The vision for the future National Park will however, include using different management regimes to create new habitats in some places. Opportunities to remove stock from some areas allowing vegetation to develop without grazing will be taken up. Other possibilities for specific habitat creation schemes such as large-scale planting or wetland creation or grazing with free-ranging large herbivores will be investigated.

5. A National Park for the Nation's Benefit

The Northumberland National Park, together with other upland areas, provides many vital goods and services for society including clean water, carbon storage, resources such as food and timber, recreation, jobs, inspiration and spiritual refreshment. These services will be recognised and celebrated by people in and around the National Park and by the region and society as a whole. Work to retain and enhance these functions in the National Park and the wider environment will be valued and supported.

6. Checking Progress

It is important to know what habitats and species are present in which locations in the National Park and in what condition and numbers in order to monitor changes over time. There is currently a good understanding of where the main habitat types are and a reasonable estimation of their condition. It will be important to keep this information up to date, focussing particularly on areas where management has changed or there are restoration or creation projects. It is important to monitor change in rare and common species and a programme should be developed together with other agencies and organisations working on regional and national basis as well as locally. Long term data sets

help to gain an accurate picture of habitat or species change as they remove short-term variability from for example weather and natural population fluctuations. Every effort will be made to maintain existing datasets and set-up other long-term monitoring regimes

In order to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure that the most up to date data is available for decision making information should be stored in an accessible manner and location. Local Records Centres fulfil this requirement at present and will be supported in the future.

7. Delivering the Vision

The Statutory five year National Park Management Plan provides the detailed aims, objectives and targets that will ultimately deliver any vision. The Management Plan is a Plan for the Park, not the national park Authority, and is jointly agreed and owned by land managers, local communities, and other partners, as well as the National Park Authority. The Management Plan will be publically reviewed in 2014 and it is the intention that this natural environment vision, when finalised, will inform that process.