



Department  
for Environment,  
Food & Rural Affairs

Policy paper

# 30by30 on land in England: confirmed criteria and next steps

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**Applies to England**

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# Introduction

The UK has committed to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 (30by30), to support the [global 30by30 target \(https://www.cbd.int/gbf\)](https://www.cbd.int/gbf) agreed at the UN Biodiversity Summit (COP15) in 2022. Our commitment to this international target is enshrined within the 2023 [Environmental Improvement Plan \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-improvement-plan\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-improvement-plan), and we are currently undertaking a review of this plan to make sure it is fit for purpose to deliver on our ambitious targets for nature.

Our 30by30 commitment presents an important opportunity to demonstrate the UK's international leadership on nature conservation. Reaching this target will be supported by our continued commitment to deliver on our legally binding targets within the Environment Act 2021.

This document confirms our vision for delivering on the UK's 30by30 target on land in England and the criteria for land and inland water areas which can count towards this target. This information will be used as the basis for piloting of the 30by30 assessment and reporting process, commencing in late 2024, and will be followed by the publication of full 30by30 guidance in 2025.

Delivering the UK's 30by30 target on land in England requires urgent and significant action to drive nature's recovery. This will require a strategic approach, to address the scale of action needed, and ensure a diverse and well-connected network of 30by30 areas. This approach also supports our wider objectives for nature's recovery, food security, and beyond. Over the coming months, we will be developing an ambitious delivery strategy for 30by30, to ensure we make good on this commitment. This should confirm the key levers that will help us to achieve this target and set out our pathway to 2030. We hope to finalise and publish this strategy next year. 30by30 will also be incorporated into a future Land Use Framework, and the review of the Environmental Improvement Plan, as we look to deliver this target alongside our wider objectives.

This document sets out our approach to delivering 30by30 on land and inland water in England. At sea, we have 181 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), including 3 Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs), across 35,000 square miles or 40% of English waters. At the UK level, MPAs cover 38% of our seas, exceeding the marine coverage aspect of the 30by30 target. Our priority now is to ensure these areas are properly protected. 60% of the 181 English MPAs are already protected from damaging fishing activity through byelaws, including a new byelaw that restricts bottom-towed gear in an additional 13 MPAs. The implementation of necessary management measures within MPAs will contribute towards our 30by30 target at sea and our broader goal of achieving Good Environmental Status across our seas.

Biodiversity policy is devolved in the UK, and therefore Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will set out their approaches to delivering this target separately.

## Our vision for 30by30 on land in England

Our 30by30 commitment, to effectively conserve and manage 30% of our land and seas by 2030, sits at the heart of our aim to ensure nature's recovery. Achieving this target is also critical to supporting our wider priorities, including cleaner rivers, lakes and seas, boosting food security, and protecting communities from the dangers of flooding. Without nature there is no economy, no food, no health and no society. As the impacts of climate change grow, 30by30 will also support the nature-based solutions that will help us achieve our net zero target, such as peatland restoration, and will help to ensure that our natural environment is resilient and able to adapt.

Delivering the UK's 30by30 target on land in England means ensuring that our most important and wildlife-rich habitats are benefiting from effective, long-term conservation and management for nature. This includes existing habitats as well as those being created or restored as part of a long-term project. While some areas are not suitable for 30by30, our approach recognises that nature-friendly farming may be able to play a role in supporting 30by30.

Achieving this target will require a collaborative approach, and all sectors have a role to play. Progress towards this international commitment will be supported by current and future work across government, including the commitment for 9 new National River Walks and 3 new National Forests, and delivery of our statutory targets under the Environment Act 2021. 30by30 should bring this work together and encourage further action to ensure that more nature recovery actions have a lasting legacy. This will be supported by work to review the Environmental Improvement Plan and make sure it is fit for purpose to deliver our ambitious targets for nature, including 30by30.

Areas contributing towards 30by30 (30by30 areas) will include land within and beyond Protected Areas. These areas should be well-connected with each other and with the wider landscape, and should represent the range of wildlife-rich habitats and important species found in England. They will form the core of the Nature Recovery Network, our growing national network of wildlife-rich places, stretching from our cities to countryside, mountains to coast. This should include significant areas of our Protected Landscapes (National Parks, National Landscapes and the Broads), which contain around half of England's priority habitats. We can, and must, go further

within Protected Landscapes than other areas to meet our national environmental targets, including 30by30. Achieving this vision alongside our goals for food security, clean energy, housing, and beyond, will require us to take a strategic approach at the national level, which also considers local priorities. This will be informed by a future Land Use Framework, as well as Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

New contributions towards 30by30 will be made on a voluntary basis, so encouraging and supporting buy-in from landowners and land-managers will be crucial to achieving this target. We will do this by integrating and streamlining 30by30 into existing mechanisms, such as Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes and Biodiversity Net Gain. We will also explore possible new mechanisms and incentives that could support landowners and land-managers to deliver effective long-term conservation and participate in 30by30. This will include optimising ELMs so they produce the right outcomes for all farmers while delivering food security and nature recovery in a just and equitable way.

Delivering on our 30by30 commitment presents an important opportunity to demonstrate the UK's international leadership on nature conservation. We will continue to collaborate across the four countries of the UK to ensure consistency between our approaches and support delivery of the UK's contribution towards the global 30by30 target.

## Why we need 30by30 criteria

The criteria aim to set a clear, consistent standard for land contributing towards 30by30, both within and beyond Protected Areas. 30by30 areas will need to meet these criteria, whether they are within or outside of a Protected Area.

For the purposes of 30by30 on land in England, Protected Areas include the following designations:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- National Nature Reserves
- Ramsar sites
- Special Areas of Conservation
- Special Protection Areas
- National Landscapes
- National Parks
- the Broads

In line with the global 30by30 target and international guidance, the criteria ensure that land contributing towards the UK's 30by30 target in England is effectively conserved and managed for nature, making progress towards in-situ conservation outcomes, and that this will be sustained over the long-term.

## In-situ conservation outcomes

In-situ conservation is defined by the [Convention on Biological Diversity \(https://www.cbd.int/convention/articles/default.shtml?a=cbd-02\)](https://www.cbd.int/convention/articles/default.shtml?a=cbd-02) as: 'the conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings and, in the case of domesticated or cultivated species, in the surroundings where they have developed their distinctive properties'.

30by30 areas should be making progress towards in-situ conservation outcomes - that is, the effective management, creation, or restoration of natural or semi-natural habitats, and species in their natural settings. In the context of England, this can best be achieved and demonstrated through the management, restoration or creation of wildlife-rich habitat. The list of wildlife-rich habitats is included within [guidance accompanying the Environment Act Habitat Target \(https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6427187599900672\)](https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6427187599900672) (table 2).

This approach will ensure that 30by30 areas are supporting the conservation of the following important biodiversity values, which international guidance suggests should be central to 30by30:

1. rare, threatened or endangered species and ecosystems
2. natural ecosystems that are under-represented in protected area networks
3. high level of ecological integrity or intactness
4. significant populations/extent of endemic or range-restricted species or ecosystems
5. important species aggregations, such as spawning, breeding or feeding areas
6. importance for ecological connectivity, as part of a network of sites in a larger area

Source: '[Site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures \(OECMs\)](https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/51296)', (<https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/51296>) IUCN, 2023

We expect 30by30 areas to be able to demonstrate overall progress towards in-situ conservation outcomes, with confidence that these will be achieved. These outcomes may be taking place alongside and supporting the delivery of wider objectives such as food production.

## Applying the 30by30 criteria

Together, the 3 criteria provide a comprehensive assessment to ensure that areas are effectively conserved and managed. An area must therefore meet all 3 criteria to be able to contribute towards 30by30.

The whole area being assessed should meet the criteria. However, exceptions can be made for very small parts of an area which may not meet the criteria, as long as these do not include any of the following excluded land uses or activities:

- built-up areas
- intensive farming or aquaculture
- intensive commercial forestry plantations
- active mining or oil or gas extraction
- major infrastructure, including motorways, A-roads or active railway lines or tracks

This does not include the verges or margins which may be bordering these areas.

An area contributing to 30by30 could be:

- an entire landholding or estate
- a section or part of a wider landholding or estate
- a cluster of individual, connected areas across multiple landholdings or estates, which are working together to deliver in-situ conservation and so could be considered as a single area

What matters is that the area meets the 3 criteria outlined below.

## Confirmed criteria for 30by30 on land in England

We have developed 3 criteria that land needs to meet to contribute towards 30by30 in England. These focus on 3 themes:

1. Purpose
2. Protection
3. Management

We have gathered views from a wide range of sectors and stakeholders, including through a dedicated stakeholder working group, to help us finalise these criteria.

The confirmed criteria are outlined in full below. Land will need to meet these criteria to contribute towards the UK's 30by30 target in England. Each of the criteria are summarised by a key metric question, which will be used to assess whether the criteria are met.

We are currently developing additional guidance on how each of these criteria can be met, along with the mechanism for assessing and reporting additional land towards the target.

## Criterion 1: Purpose

30by30 areas should be able to demonstrate that their purposes or management objectives will ensure the delivery of in-situ conservation outcomes. The area's purposes should include in-situ conservation, but this may not be its primary or sole purpose. Any wider purposes must be appropriately managed so as not to prevent or significantly limit the delivery of in-situ conservation outcomes.

Protected Sites and nature reserves are designated for the purpose of in-situ conservation, although they may have additional purposes. [Protected Sites on land \(https://oifdata.defra.gov.uk/themes/wildlife/D2/\)](https://oifdata.defra.gov.uk/themes/wildlife/D2/) include the following designations:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
- National Nature Reserves (NNRs)
- Ramsar sites

Other areas may be delivering towards in-situ conservation outcomes, even if this is not the primary or sole purpose of the area. While some areas are unsuitable for 30by30, contributions to the target could include areas within



or near our towns and cities, or within a larger area or farm primarily managed for food production.

Key metric:

Will the purposes or management objectives for this area ensure the delivery of in-situ conservation outcomes?

## Criterion 2: Protection

30by30 areas should be able to demonstrate that in-situ conservation will be sustained over the long term (at least 20 years), and that the area will be protected against loss or damage to important biodiversity values, through legal or other effective means. This includes protected area designations, conservation covenants, long-term ownership and relevant long-term management obligations.

This criterion confirms the long-term status of areas contributing towards 30by30. It recognises the role that long term management objectives and commitments can play in securing long-term conservation. Assessment against the management criterion below will ensure that management is being planned, implemented, and reviewed effectively, to deliver towards in-situ conservation outcomes.

Key metric:

Is the conservation of this area secured for at least 20 years, through legal or other effective means?

## Criterion 3: Management

30by30 areas should be effectively managed and able to demonstrate overall progress towards in-situ conservation outcomes.

Management should provide confidence that governance or ownership of the area has the mandate and capacity to achieve and sustain such outcomes. Management mechanisms should identify, implement and

prioritise the delivery of in-situ conservation. Monitoring should be in place to identify baselines and assess progress.

#### Key metrics:

- Does the area's governance or ownership have the ability to implement reasonable management actions to achieve in-situ conservation outcomes?
- Is there a management plan or similar that is designed to deliver in-situ conservation outcomes?
- Are management measures being implemented, with appropriate monitoring, evaluation and learning in place to assess progress and inform future management?
- Is the area achieving, or making progress towards, in-situ conservation outcomes, with reasonable confidence that these outcomes will be achieved?

## Areas that currently count towards 30by30

We have undertaken an initial review of existing government analysis on the area of England's land recognised as already counting towards 30by30.

To be consistent with the criteria outlined above, SSSIs should only count towards the target when they are in favourable or unfavourable recovering condition. On this basis, the indicative figure for areas currently counting towards 30by30 has been revised (see Table 1).

These figures are indicative and intended to provide a general sense of the scale of action required to meet the UK's 30by30 commitment. This should not be considered a full and comprehensive analysis of the area of land likely to already be meeting the 30by30 criteria in England. Such analysis will be enabled through the development of the 30by30 assessment and reporting process and a 30by30 delivery strategy. Given differences between the below methodology and official SSSI reporting which may result in minor discrepancies, these figures should only be considered in a 30by30 context, and not considered for the evaluation of wider government targets or objectives.

### Table 1. Indicative assessment of land currently counting towards 30by30

Area	Approx % of England (to Mean Low Water)
Total areas that currently count (indicative)	7.1%
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in favourable or unfavourable recovering condition (note 1)	6.4%
Additional areas beyond SSSIs (public woodland under favourable management for biodiversity, and National Nature Reserves) (note 2)	0.7%

Note 1. Source: [Sites of Special Scientific Interest Units \(England\)](https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/03fd7a2f8e4e4346bf41ce7879153949_0/explorer), ([https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/03fd7a2f8e4e4346bf41ce7879153949\\_0/explorer](https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/03fd7a2f8e4e4346bf41ce7879153949_0/explorer)) Natural England Open Data Publication (2024), extent to Office of National Statistics (ONS) Mean Low Water boundary (2022).

Note 2. Sources:

- Public woodland – analysis derived from [National Forest Inventory England](https://data-forestry.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/a73551a581074e5fa192418c65b43d55_0/explore?location=52.609467%2C-2.445794%2C7.12), ([https://data-forestry.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/a73551a581074e5fa192418c65b43d55\\_0/explore?location=52.609467%2C-2.445794%2C7.12](https://data-forestry.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/a73551a581074e5fa192418c65b43d55_0/explore?location=52.609467%2C-2.445794%2C7.12)) Forestry Commission (2021), and [Sustainably Managed Woodland England](https://data-forestry.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/e1c1d7ead37d4feea303c1bf6f5a0369_0/about), ([https://data-forestry.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/e1c1d7ead37d4feea303c1bf6f5a0369\\_0/about](https://data-forestry.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/e1c1d7ead37d4feea303c1bf6f5a0369_0/about)) Forestry Commission (2023)
- [National Nature Reserves \(England\)](https://www.data.gov.uk/dataset/726484b0-d14e-44a3-9621-29e79fc47bfc/national-nature-reserves-england), (<https://www.data.gov.uk/dataset/726484b0-d14e-44a3-9621-29e79fc47bfc/national-nature-reserves-england>) Natural England (2023), extent beyond existing SSSIs

## Next steps: establishing the 30by30 assessment and reporting process

We are currently developing the process to enable additional land to contribute towards 30by30 in England.

There will be 2 routes within this process. The first, self-assessment, will enable land to be brought forward by landowners and land-managers, to be approved by Natural England. The second route, internal assessment, will

draw on data already held within Defra Group (including core Defra and its delivery bodies) to identify and assess potential 30by30 areas, minimising the burden on landowners and land-managers while still ensuring the necessary consents.

From autumn 2024, we will be working with a small number of partners to begin piloting and developing both routes of the 30by30 assessment and reporting process. Piloting will focus on 2 core objectives:

- to develop robust guidance to ensure that the criteria are applied clearly and consistently across different habitats, organisations and sectors
- to ensure that the systems and processes underpinning 30by30 assessment and reporting are functional and can be easily used by all partners for the assessment, recording, reporting and review of 30by30 areas

In developing and piloting the 30by30 assessment and reporting process, we will take into account the following factors:

- recognising available resource and capacity to support the process, within Defra Group and beyond, and the need to minimise additional data collection, assessment and reporting wherever possible
- the importance of ensuring a robust process that ensures the criteria are consistently applied
- accommodating for the necessary future scale of 30by30, and the number of individual areas which will need to contribute in order to meet the target
- developing a system which is consistent with reporting requirements for the global 30by30 target under the Convention on Biological Diversity, including the recognition and reporting of Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs)
- that further contributions towards the target will be made on a voluntary basis

## Protected Landscapes and 30by30

Home to nationally significant habitats, wildlife and heritage, our Protected Landscapes (National Parks, National Landscapes, and the Broads) are special places, covering nearly a quarter of England and containing around half of England's priority habitats and SSSIs, 60% of deep peat, and nearly 88% of heather and acid grassland habitats. However, these iconic landscapes continue to suffer the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Our Protected Landscapes will provide the backbone to 30by30 in England, contributing towards the target where they are effectively managed and delivering in-situ conservation. We recognise that we can, and must, go further within Protected Landscapes than other areas to meet our national environmental targets, including 30by30. This will be driven by the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, as well as further action to ensure that these special places are wilder and greener. Through their management plans, existing structures and strong partnerships, Protected Landscapes organisations can also play a convening role to champion, identify and support areas that meet, or have potential to meet, the 30by30 criteria.

It is important that Protected Landscapes deliver a significant contribution towards 30by30 in England. This is key to delivering landscape-scale nature conservation and realising our vision of a well-connected and ecologically representative 30by30 network. At the same time, we recognise that these are unique landscapes operating in different contexts, and therefore their specific contributions to 30by30 will vary.

Although much land within Protected Landscapes should meet the first of the 3 30by30 criteria (purpose), these areas will only contribute towards 30by30 where they also meet the protection and management criteria. Only areas within Protected Landscapes which are assessed as meeting all 3 of the 30by30 criteria will be able to contribute towards the target.

## 30by30 areas and OECMs

Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) are internationally defined by the [Convention on Biological Diversity](https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-08-en.pdf) (<https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-08-en.pdf>) as ‘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’.

In line with international reporting requirements, each 30by30 area in England will need to contribute towards the global target as either a Protected Area or an OECM. This means that any 30by30 area which is not within a designated Protected Area, will need to be recognised as an OECM for international reporting purposes. We are currently developing a mechanism to formally recognise OECMs in England.

OECM status does not impose any additional management obligations onto an area or landowner, but simply recognises where sufficient protections

and management are already in place.



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