

# Could protected landscapes have a leading role to play in the sustainable management of natural resources?

Could there now be a case for re-evaluating the original purposes of protected areas such as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to reinforce their strategic role in the management of the UK's land and water resources?



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for local government**

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**The Rural Economy and Land Use Programme** is a UK-wide research programme carrying out interdisciplinary research on the multiple challenges facing rural areas. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council and the Natural Environment Research Council, with additional funding from the Scottish Government and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

**Protected landscapes – National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – occupy a central place in the delivery of rural land use policy. The Rural Economy and Land Use Programme’s research supports the case for legislative change to strengthen the strategic role of protected areas in natural resource management.**

## **What was the original purpose of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty?**

**The legislation which led to the designation of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England and Wales over 60 years ago defined the primary purpose as conservation and enhancement of natural beauty. Designation of National Parks also has a second purpose of promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of their special qualities by the public.**

National Parks were not designated in Scotland until the 1990s. Besides the functions assigned to English and Welsh National Parks they emphasise an additional commitment to sustainable development in rural areas, including promoting the sustainable use of natural resources. This Scottish model of integrating sustainable development objectives with natural heritage management may offer lessons for England and Wales.

## **What is the current situation?**

**The original statutory purposes have remained unaltered, but the Government has recently emphasised the important role of National Parks in relation to:**

- Climate change
- Renewable energy
- Sustainable agriculture
- Partnership working

## **Is the re-emphasis bringing about change?**

**There have been periodic reviews of national park policy:**

- The Commission for Rural Communities recommended that the duty to foster social and economic well-being of Park communities should be elevated to become an additional statutory purpose. The Government rejected this suggestion but agreed to consult on whether to amend the legislation to promote sustainable development in the Park areas.
- The Uplands Policy Review strongly endorsed an eco-systems services approach towards management of rural land and natural resources. It advocates:
  - Finding new ways to support hill farming through environmental schemes.
  - Taking action at landscape scale to achieve enhanced outcomes.
  - National Park Authorities (and by association the AONBs) undertaking ‘integrated upland land management’ in partnership with landowners and farmers and other public agencies.
- The Natural Environment White Paper ‘The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature’ has stressed that natural capital, such as Protected Areas, should be properly valued and promises an action plan to expand markets and schemes in which payments are made by beneficiaries to the providers of natural services.
- A network of Nature Improvement Areas, to be trialled in 12 pilots, will give further impetus to the landscape scale approach.
- Relu research projects confirm the strategic significance of protected areas for natural resource management within their wider regions and offer valuable guidance on how to achieve closer integration of rural land use policy and stimulate collaborative action by land managers at the local scale.

## What mechanisms do Protected Areas use for land use planning?

**Protected Area Management Plans are a statutory requirement and set out a vision for how the landscape should evolve, and for supporting the local economy and communities.**

These plans are critical because they:

- Attempt to take an integrated and strategic approach towards the planning and management of rural land and resources.
- Are underpinned by principles of sustainable development and provide a context for statutory development plans for each Park area.
- Recognise strongly the potential contribution to climate change mitigation.
- Provide an overarching context for more detailed area plans and landscape scale initiatives.
- Increasingly incorporate an eco-systems services approach, for example in the North Pennines, where the AONB emphasises its importance in supplying a full range of provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural services.
- Are expected to be founded on a robust evidence base and allied to 'State of the Park' monitoring reports
- Emphasise the Parks' strategic status as 'valued assets' within their wider regions

## What does Relu research say about the potential for collaborative action on land and resource management?

**Agri-environment agreements are generally negotiated for single farm holdings.**

However, this may not be the most cost effective or appropriate scale for the delivery of eco-system services, which demands co-ordinated action over a greater geographical area:

- Relu research has explored the benefits and practicalities of communities of farms or estates acting collaboratively to deliver, for example, the conservation of farmland birds, protection of water quality and natural management of flood waters, carbon storage in peatland, managing game etc, at a catchment or landscape scale.
- Partnership processes have often failed to deliver results on rural land use in the past. Relu projects have investigated:
  - The kind of incentives and new types of contractual arrangements that might be required.
  - The scope for calculation of payments linked to actual environmental outputs, and how rewards might then be distributed.
  - The psychology and dynamics of group activity.
  - The potential role of external facilitation and training.

- Collective activity has the potential to deliver more effective returns from agri-environment funding: a new 'Entry Level Stewardship Plus' scheme should be introduced to facilitate this transition.
- External organisations can play a key role in the formation and support of farmers' groups: Park Authorities and AONB partnerships are particularly well placed to help.



## What does Relu research say about monitoring of environmental outcomes?

**Any future system of payments for public goods, including the design of agri-environment schemes, will need to be based on better evidence:**

- Research on the uplands suggests that, for an individual farm, patterns of bird species richness are not closely associated with whether that holding is part of an agri-environment scheme.
- Across the upland landscape as a whole, however, the abundance of birds of conservation interest can be enhanced at a local level where more of the landscape is covered by agri-environment schemes.
- The Relu programme has generated scientific models and data that can inform and underpin the policy making and environmental monitoring process. Examples include:
  - The broad valuation of non-market public goods.
  - The prediction of farmers' likely responses to different agri-environment policy options.
  - Quantifying the effects on biodiversity, water quality and farm incomes of adopting a particular land management practice, such as the fencing of watercourses, in a prescribed locality.
  - An Ecosystem Health Report card for watercourses.
  - Assessment of the evidence base for conservation interventions, and how this matches the requirements of stakeholders.

## What does Relu research tell us about stakeholder engagement?

**The need for effective consultation is implicit in the preparation of landscape strategies and management plans including those for Protected Areas.**

However, there are often weaknesses in how this is carried out and Relu has experimented with alternatives:

- The conventional approach has followed a straightforward linear path characterised as 'Decide-Announce-Defend', involving the diagnosis of an issue or identification of forces for change, development of preferred options or responses by professional experts, exposure of this thinking to public debate, and an invitation to comment, followed by political endorsement and implementation.
- Alternative Relu approaches put the emphasis on 'learn' rather than 'tell' and on deliberation and co-creation of knowledge and planned actions.

**Relu projects make a range of recommendations for good practice in stakeholder engagement including:**

- The definition of an appropriate geographical territory (such as a landscape unit or catchment area).
- The engagement of key players at the outset, rather than after research, analysis and plans have been completed.
- Innovative techniques and methodologies to make complexity more comprehensible (GIS mapping, modelling, community-led production of data, stakeholder analysis).
- Use of independent, skilled mediators to promote common understanding and to defuse any conflicts.
- Regular reporting of progress and outcomes to sustain commitment.

## What does the research tell us about governance and partnership working?

**There is a strong message that management of land and water resources needs to be more closely integrated:**

- Relevant plans and programmes at regional and local level need to be better aligned, and institutional structures and working arrangements radically overhauled.
- Protected Areas seem to offer the best prospects for a more holistic approach, and for optimising, for wider benefit, the yield from ecosystem services over a defined territory.
- The Natural Environment White Paper, Uplands Policy Review and National Ecosystem Assessment specifically place the National Parks/AONBs at the forefront for recovery of England's biodiversity and for landscape-scale action and regional coordination to enhance delivery of ecosystem services.

- Protected Areas, the Environment Agency and Natural England need to devise a better way of integrating their respective management plans, river basin and catchment plans, and the forthcoming Nature Improvement Areas.
- Relu research offers much practical advice on the techniques and methodologies that might be adopted to facilitate this process.

## Should protected areas have a third statutory purpose?

**In view of the clear intention of the Government to place Park Authorities at the forefront of action on climate change, integrated land management and support for upland farming, this role could be reinforced through a third statutory purpose relating to the sound management of natural resources.**

### **This would:**

- Provide the Park Authorities with a strengthened and more focused remit which is entirely consistent with the existing twin purposes.
- Facilitate a more cohesive approach to rural land use planning and resource management, which Relu research regards as essential if complex issues relating to climate change, food security, renewable energy, water management and biodiversity are to be resolved.
- Provide greater impetus for the current management plans to become better integrated with the plans of other key agencies, notably Natural England and the Environment Agency.
- Place Park Authorities in a key position regarding revised delivery arrangements for the Rural Development Programme for England (particularly the proposed uplands theme) and in the further exploration of new mechanisms to facilitate payments for ecosystem services.
- Provide a springboard for more ambitious and radical arrangements for partnership working with land managers at the landscape and regional scale to deliver eco-system services.

## Further information

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**This Policy and Practice Note was written by Terry Carroll.**

**Relu projects providing evidence:**

***Realising the Links Between Quality Food Production and Biodiversity Protection* Principal Investigator Henry Buller**  
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***The Sustainability of Hill Farming* Principal Investigator Paul Armsworth** parmswor@utk.edu

***Sustainable Uplands: Learning to Manage Future Change* Principal Investigators Klaus Hubacek** hubacek@umd.edu  
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***Sustainable Uplands: Transforming Knowledge for Upland Change* Principal Investigator Mark Reed** m.reed@abdn.ac.uk

***Collaborative Deer Management* Principal Investigator Justin Irvine**  
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***Management Options for Biodiverse Farming* Principal Investigator William Sutherland** w.sutherland@zoo.cam.ac.uk

***Impacts of Increasing Land Use Under Energy Crops* Principal Investigator Angela Karp** angela.karp@bbsrc.ac.uk

***Testing a Community Approach to Catchment Management* Principal Investigator Claire Waterton** c.waterton@lancaster.ac.uk

***Sustainable Cultivation of Upland Environments* Principal Investigator David Harvey** david.harvey@ncl.ac.uk

***Collaborative Conservation in Agri-Environment Schemes* Principal Investigator Jeremy Franks** j.r.franks@ncl.ac.uk

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### Useful resources

**Further information about Relu projects and the full set of Relu Policy and Practice Notes are available on the website [www.relu.ac.uk](http://www.relu.ac.uk) Uplands Policy Review, Defra March 2011**

**The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature, Defra June 2011**

**High Ground, High Potential, a future for England's upland communities Commission for Rural Communities June 2010**

**Implementing the Water Framework Directive, Relu Briefing Series No 11, June 2010** <http://www.relu.ac.uk/news/briefings/BRIF11/BRIF11.pdf>

**Options for landscape scale collaboration under the UK's Environmental Stewardship Scheme J.R. Franks, S.B Emery, M.J Whittingham and A.J McKenzie CRE Research Report, April 2011**

<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cre/publish/researchreports/options%20for%20landscape.pdf>

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