

Nature 2030: A Manifesto for People and Nature

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Wildlife and Countryside Link's 'minifestos' are policy briefings which provide detail about how the five policy asks made by the Nature 2030 campaign could be applied to benefit different aspects of nature. This manifesto covers people and nature.

This manifesto also sets out a proposal for a new Access to Nature Bill, with an overarching legally-binding target for access to nature and new measures to expand, improve, and support public access to nature in the long-term.

Introduction

Nature's future is inextricably linked with our own. We enjoy the wellbeing benefits of the beauty of birdsong and the health benefits of nearby nature to walk, play, and socialize. We rely on a healthy natural environment for clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and healthy soil for our food and medicines. Thriving biodiversity, a stable climate, and the ecosystem services they provide underpin the sustainability and quality of human society. Unfortunately, biodiversity in England is in relentless decline, with 16% of species now at risk of extinction.¹

Nature also needs us. People who are connected to nature take action to protect and restore it.² However, currently 38% of people in England do not have access to green and blue spaces within 15 minutes' walk of their home.³ The UK ranks lowest of 14 European countries for nature connectedness.⁴ We must all be empowered to take action for nature, to create the green and beautiful future we want.

We must act now to halt the relentless decline of biodiversity. The UK Government is subject to a legal duty to stop the decline of species abundance by the end of 2030. Therefore, the next Parliament is responsible for turning the tide for nature.

¹ <https://stateofnature.org.uk/>

² <https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/pan3.10117>

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1168372/environmental-improvement-plan-2023.pdf

⁴ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13280-022-01744-w>

Nature 2030 is a challenge to all political parties ahead of the next general election to take action for nature, proposing five ambitious policies to get Government back on track to meet the 2030 nature targets and restore biodiversity.⁵

For people's access to and engagement with nature, this means:

- A Major Increase in Support for Nature-Friendly Farming: Doubling the support for farmers to make sure they can deliver nature restoration, public access, and nature-friendly farming.
- A Nature Recovery Obligation: Ensuring that businesses have nature and climate plans in place and setting new duties to drive private investment in the recovery of species and habitats and the creation of a healthy natural environment for the benefit of all..
- A 30 by 30 Rapid Delivery Project: Restoring more protected sites and landscapes by 2030 and creating a Public Nature Estate across England to create more nature, better nature, and more access to and engagement with nature for people.
- A National Nature Service: Delivering widescale habitat restoration and creating green jobs in urban, rural and coastal habitats and communities through a National Nature Service.
- A Right to a Healthy Environment: Establishing a new human right to clean air, clean water, and access to nature, by putting nature and access to nature at the heart of decision-making.

This is the UK's opportunity to create a better state of nature.

By taking action for nature and people together, we can create greener and healthier communities, restore our relationship with the natural world, and create a more inclusive and powerful movement of people championing and benefitting from nature.

⁵ <https://www.wcl.org.uk/nature2030.asp>

Major increase in support for nature-friendly farming

The policy in brief

We are calling for a doubling of the annual budget for nature-friendly farming and land management to at least £6 billion a year. In England, this should fund a major increase in ambition in the Farming Transition, including stronger incentives for ambitious agroecological actions on farms and a consistent budget for large-scale nature recovery projects.

Supporting people's access to and engagement with nature

A major increase in support for nature-friendly farming would provide farmers and land managers with the increased financial support they need and raised standards to deliver more for nature and helping to improve access to nature.

With significantly more support and advice, farmers and land managers can take more ambitious action to restore habitats and recover species such as farmland birds, supporting a wider healthy natural environment. £0.5 billion of the annual budget should be ringfenced to support farmers and land managers to increase public access to the countryside.

By embedding ambitious public access options within Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes, enabled by a significant increase in ELM funding, farmers and land managers must be incentivised to improve and create more public access to nature and to the countryside. The means of doing this include improving existing public rights of way through additional waymarking or replacing stiles with gates or gaps to increase usability for disabled people and other users, and making new permanent links between existing public rights of way and creating many miles of new paths.

ELM is underpinned by the concept of public payments for public goods and the Agriculture Act 2020, which lays the foundation for ELM, states clearly that financial assistance could be provided to support public access to the countryside.⁶ It is disappointing to see the Government retreat from its initial commitments to incorporate access in ELM schemes.

A pay rise for nature will also support farmers and land managers through making more advice available to farmers. Farmers frequently want to do the right thing for nature and access but can struggle to access expert, free advice. The significant uplift in the farming budget should pay for new resources to guide farmers through their options to deliver public goods.

⁶ https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Public_access_is_a_public_good-ELM_Link_briefing_Nov21.pdf

A Nature Recovery Obligation

The policy in brief

Major economic sectors, including finance, infrastructure, development, and water, should all contribute to the recovery of nature.

These sectors should be subject to a Nature Recovery Obligation. This regulatory requirement should require private sector funding for nature recovery, sharing the effort required to meet key Environment Act and Climate Change Act targets. This should include:

1. Mandatory corporate disclosure of value-chain impacts and dependencies on nature, including supply, investments, customer use and direct operations.
2. A duty to publish 1.5°C-aligned climate and nature recovery transition plans.
3. Regulatory requirements for companies to fund nature's recovery, based on a sector's impact on nature.

Supporting people's access to and engagement with nature

The Nature Recovery Obligation would establish regulatory requirements for companies to limit their impact on nature and to address the pollution they cause.

Many industries contribute to the decline of nature, undermining a healthy natural environment upon which wildlife and people's health depends. All too often, the damage and costs resulting from the profit-driven activities of companies are externalised, borne by society rather than the polluters themselves. This environmental degradation occurs disproportionately in or around low-income areas and where a higher percentage of ethnically diverse people live within the UK.⁷

A Nature Recovery Obligation would ensure that businesses have robust plans and duties in place which assess their impact on nature, climate, and communities, prevent environmental harms, and drive investment in nature's recovery. Companies would first have to identify their impact on nature, and then to act to avoid and reduce it. After avoiding and reducing harm, the Nature Recovery Obligation would require companies to fund nature's recovery through levy payments. The size of the levy payment would be calculated annually on the basis of the company's environmental footprint, providing an incentive to act quickly to avoid and reduce harms.

⁷ <https://unearthed.greenpeace.org/2020/07/31/waste-incinerators-deprivation-map-recycling/>

This model would also drive significant private investment in nature, as the funding from these levy payments would be paid into a central pot used for projects to restore the natural environment, helping to address the £50 billion plus nature recovery funding gap.⁸ This could include a range of projects that could have significant direct benefits for people’s health and wellbeing through nature recovery projects located and designed with public access in mind, and could have important indirect benefits for people through general restoration of the natural environment and support for healthy ecosystem services such as clean air and clean water.

⁸ <https://www.greenfinanceinstitute.co.uk/news-and-insights/finance-gap-for-uk-nature-report/>

A 30 by 30 Rapid Delivery Project

The policy in brief

The next Government should prioritise a new “30 by 30 Rapid Delivery Project” to fulfil its commitment under the Global Biodiversity Framework to protect and effectively manage 30% of the land and sea for nature by 2030 and to secure an environmental legacy for the future. The project would consist of four pillars:

1. **Completing and improving the protected site network:** New incentives and obligations for landowners to manage important nature sites (SSSIs and other protected sites) in the public interest should be implemented, so England’s most important nature sites are thriving by 2030. These measures would be complemented by a programme to designate and protect more places and species, expanding and better connecting the protected sites network.
2. **Landscapes for the future:** Updated purposes, powers and funding for protected landscapes (National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) to do more for nature, so that they become beacons of biodiversity restoration.
3. **A Public Nature Estate obligation:** New duties and purposes for public bodies (such as the Forestry Commission and Government Departments like the Ministry of Defence) to ensure they care for the land they own and manage for nature’s recovery and climate change mitigation.
4. **An expanded Public Nature Estate:** An expansion of public and community land ownership, where such purchases, followed by sustained management for nature, could deliver significant ecological improvements.

Supporting people’s access to and engagement with nature

A thriving and connected ecological network of 30% of land and sea in England is the minimum needed to underpin functioning ecosystems. However, currently the Government has only protected and effectively managed 3.11% of England’s land and at maximum 8% of English seas. Urgent action is needed to achieve 30 by 30 and ensure a healthy natural environment for wildlife and people to thrive.

The 30 by 30 Rapid Delivery Project will drive a suite of ambitious actions for protected sites, protected landscapes, Government estates, and create a new Public Nature Estate, underpinning a healthy natural environment for people to benefit from and more flourishing natural spaces for people to access and enjoy.

New incentives and obligations for landowners to manage important nature sites in the public interest and a programme to expand the protected sites network would help halt the decline of biodiversity and support a wider healthy natural environment for wildlife and people to enjoy. Effectively protected sites for nature are havens for wildlife, helping nature to thrive beyond their borders and benefitting people nearby. Well-implemented site protection rules can highlight environmental damage in a local area, such as an overload of nutrient pollution, and help mitigate and avoid further damage, protecting protected sites and wider habitats for the benefit of species and people.

The purposes of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) must be updated to promote nature recovery and to connect and engage more people from all backgrounds with these protected landscapes. People from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds account for about 1% of visitors to National Parks despite making up more than 10% of the general population.⁹ Protected landscapes must be supported develop and implement strengthened Management Plans, with new requirements to contribute to national environmental targets, and their statutory purposes, with stronger duties to ‘seek to further’ these purposes. With additional funding to complement these stronger powers, protected landscapes can fulfil their vast potential for nature recovery and to connect people with thriving nature and landscapes.

A Public Nature Estate obligation would ensure that public bodies, such as the Forestry Commission and the Ministry of Defence, who collectively own 8% of England,¹⁰ better protect public land and to manage the land they own for nature, climate and people. The obligation would require public bodies to create, fund and implement long-term management plans for nature’s recovery, climate change mitigation, and people’s access to and engagement with nature. This could significantly open up the amount of nature available to people in England to responsibly access and enjoy.

The Public Nature Estate should be expanded further through more public and community land ownership. Communities could be backed by a fund to purchase land to add to the Public Nature Estate managed for nature and people – this could enable communities to preserve cherished natural spaces and to open up access and create more opportunities to connect with nature, from rural meadows to suburban woodland, to stretches of riverbank in urban areas.

⁹ https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/National-Parks-for-all-to-enjoy_July-2017.pdf

¹⁰ <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/108111/pdf/>

A National Nature Service

The policy in brief

A National Nature Service (NNS) should be established to deliver practical experience and hands-on training in green skills and qualifications for thousands of people. It would combine on-the-job skills training with a programme of capital investment in habitat restoration around the country.

The NNS would fill the green skills gap¹¹, create and support thousands of employment opportunities, and provide a skilled workforce to deliver nature restoration at the scale and pace needed to halt the decline of wildlife by 2030.

Supporting people's access to and engagement with nature

The Government has committed to creating 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat beyond protected areas in England as part of its efforts to halt the decline of nature by 2030. However, there is not currently sufficient funding to support the promised habitat restoration nor people with the right skills to restore and create suitable habitats.

An ambitious programme of capital investment, the National Nature Service, would provide green employment opportunities, skills-based training for good green jobs, and large-scale habitat restoration in England, widening access to nature.

This would have vast benefits for nature and people. National Trust research demonstrated that £5.5 billion of investment in greener cities could support 40,000 jobs in construction and 6,000 permanent jobs.¹²

Training through the National Nature Service would help equip the workforce of the future with the green skills that will be needed. Currently, the UK is trailing several major economies when it comes to green skills and globally, demand for green skills is growing far faster than supply.¹³ Supporting more people to work in green jobs and in nature recovery and

¹¹ https://green-alliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Closing_the_UKs_green_skills_gap.pdf

¹² <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/our-cause/communities/new-research-reveals-need-for-urban-green-space>

¹³ <https://economicgraph.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/economicgraph/en-us/global-green-skills-report/green-skills-report-2023.pdf>

agroecological projects will also lead to more people being connected to nature, caring for it, and, especially equipped with green skills, to take pro-environmental action.¹⁴

Beyond the creation of green jobs, the creation and improvement of natural spaces would yield high returns of investment due to the benefits of nature close to home on people's physical and mental health: every £1 spent on greener urban parks could result in £200 in savings for the NHS.¹⁵

¹⁴ <https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/pan3.10117>

¹⁵ <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/our-cause/communities/new-research-reveals-need-for-urban-green-space>

A Right to a Healthy Environment

The policy in brief

The loss of green space and the pollution of the air and water threatens everyone's health. It is cutting lives short, especially in the most socio-economically disadvantaged communities.

A new Environmental Rights Bill would create a human right to a clean and healthy environment for all. Combined with greater investment in environmental improvement, it would address deepening health inequalities and empower people to hold public bodies to account on pollution, climate change and the nature crisis.

Supporting people's access to and engagement with nature

There is robust scientific evidence for the physical and mental health benefits of a healthy natural environment, including clean air, clean water, and access to nature-rich green and blue spaces. Not only do people who live in areas with higher amounts of green space live longer,¹⁶ people who are more connected to nature have higher life satisfaction.¹⁷

People value nature and want more access to nature. 73% of UK adults surveyed said that connecting with nature is important to manage their mental health¹⁸ and 80% of people surveyed in England wanted the Government to increase the number of accessible nature-rich areas.¹⁹

There are also enormous economic benefits to a healthy natural environment: giving everyone in England good access to greenspace, never mind improving air quality, would reduce NHS pressures to such an extent as to save £3 billion in health spending every year (updated for inflation).²⁰

¹⁶ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26540085/>

¹⁷ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25249992/>

¹⁸ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHF-Mental-Health-and-Nature-Policy-Briefing-MHAW-2021.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/about-the-rspb/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/nature-and-a-green-recovery-from-covid-19/>

²⁰

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/improving_access_to_greenspace_2020_review.pdf

Despite high levels of public demand and benefits, millions of people in England do not have access to a healthy natural environment. 38% of people in England do not have access to greenspace within a 15 minute walk of home.²¹ The disparities in nature-access disproportionately impact people on lower incomes and people from ethnic minority backgrounds. People on low incomes are nearly twice as likely to live in a neighbourhood without nature-rich spaces as those earning above the average income.²² 40% of people from ethnic minority backgrounds live in the most greenspace-deprived areas in England, as compared to 14% of white people.²³

The creation of a new human right to a healthy natural environment through an Environmental Rights Bill would require public authorities to act compatibly with this right and give communities new tools to protect their access to healthy nature.

A right to a healthy natural environment would significantly increase the weight given to the environment in decision-making both in central and local government. This would help drive policy-making and decision-making within Central Government and local government to rectify the poor quality of the natural environment, including by improving air quality, tackling water pollution, and restoring habitats and species.

It would also help drive action to improve and create new nature-rich and accessible green and blue spaces for people to access, enjoy, and benefit from, correcting entrenched inequalities in access to nature. This could include increasing the provision of nature-rich spaces (from creating new greenspace in new developments, to daylighting rivers in city centres to allow public access to the banks), improving the biodiversity and quality of parks (from wildflower meadow planting, to achieving Green Flag status), and improving the accessibility of green and blue spaces (from putting in a footpath leading to woodland, to more awareness and information about local access opportunities and routes suitable for different levels of ability).

The Environmental Rights Bill would also enshrine the rights of people to environmental information, to participate in decision-making, and to access justice (including the ability to take legal action on environmental grounds without risking huge personal costs). These rights will help people and communities to hold public bodies who fail to act compatibly with the new right to account. A public body which failed to have due regard to the right to access a

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-improvement-plan>

²² <https://www.groundwork.org.uk/news-report-finds-severe-inequalities-in-access-to-parks-and-greenspaces-in-communities-across-the-uk/>

²³ <https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/englands-green-space-gap>

healthy environment would be highly exposed to legal action from members of the public and campaigners, further incentivising decision-maker compliance with the right.

Cross-Government 'shared investment' funds to support community-based health services should be introduced, alongside the Environmental Rights Bill. Shared investment from across Government departments concerned with housing, employment, community cohesion, transport and culture. Investment could be directed through existing bodies such as the National Academy of Social Prescribing. These funds could help increase access to nature and unlock the health benefits that come from it. This fund could also be called a 'Natural Health Fund.'

Knitting it all together: A new Access to Nature Bill

To drive truly ambitious, holistic action, these Nature 2030 actions must be aligned and built around a comprehensive long-term target for people's access to nature in England. The current Government commitment to provide access to high quality green and blue spaces for all people within a 15 minute walk of home should be put on a statutory footing.

We are calling on the next Government to introduce legislation to create more opportunities for everyone to access nature close to where they live.

A legally-binding target for access would drive action and investment for nature and people, including through the five Nature 2030 policies set out above. As well as thriving and effectively managed nature, we also need the legally protected physical means to access green and blue spaces so that all people can responsibly access, benefit from, and enjoy nature. We recognise that in some cases people's access to sensitive natural environments must be carefully managed or restricted to ensure that vulnerable habitats and species and wild places can thrive.

New legislation, an Access to Nature Bill, is needed to:

- Set a new legally-binding access to nature target for all people to have access to a high quality green or blue space within a 15 minute walk of home.
- Extend public access rights to waterways, woodland, riversides, and grasslands.
- Create a more equal and inclusive freedom to enjoy land and water for other user groups, such as cyclists, horse riders, cavers, swimmers, paddlers, and disabled people.
- Remove the 2026 cut-off date for registering historic rights of way.
- Require the Government to publish a clear strategy for improving access to nature.
- Establish an Access to Nature Investment Strategy.
- Mandate all new development meet the Green Infrastructure Standards.
- Ensure every child has regular high-quality access to and engagement with nature within education, through their curriculum and by supporting teachers and schools to deliver outdoor learning across all education settings.

Flourishing nature, flourishing people by 2030

We cannot achieve a better state of nature without creating a healthy natural environment for all people to benefit from and enjoy and supporting everyone's engagement and connection with nature.

We need nature, but nature also needs us. If implemented, the Nature 2030 policies will deliver the changes that our environment and people need.

Together, we can create a greener, healthier, happier future.

This People and Nature Manifesto has been published as part of the Nature 2030 campaign, supported by over 100 environmental, climate and health organisations. You can support the Nature 2030 campaign [here](#).

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