

The role of nature recovery in furthering the key missions of the UK Government

This short paper on the role nature can play in delivering the five missions of the new UK Government has been prepared by Wildlife and Countryside Link, a coalition of 86 environmental organisations working to protect the natural world.

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24.09.2024

- Economic growth: Nature recovery to safeguard the foundations of the economy: Analysis from the World Economic Forum estimates that half of all economic activity is moderately or highly dependent on nature.¹ The WEF's Global Risks 2023 report also highlights that biodiversity loss is one of the top four risks to the global economy over the next 10 years.² The UK is not immune from these risks; the ongoing decline of nature on these islands, recorded since the 1970s and sustained over the past decade³, presents 'extreme risks and uncertainty' for the UK economy (Dasgupta report commissioned by HM Treasury in 2021).⁴ If this decline is not arrested, future UK Governments will have to grapple with escalating economic consequences, from falling farm yields⁵ to the extinction of economically significant species like Atlantic salmon.⁶
- Climate: Nature recovery to better guard against climate change: The restoration of natural habitats constitutes the most proven, cost-effective carbon capture technology available to us, capable of providing a third of the climate change mitigation needed to reach net zero by 2050.⁷ Just as nature can help the UK to play its part in fulfilling the global agreements that provide our best hope for preventing catastrophic climate breakdown, so too can nature help us adapt to the climate change already underway. Restored habitats can help safeguard food production by increasing pollination and soil health⁸, provide cool spots in overheated landscapes⁹ and absorb much of the force of flooding.¹⁰
- Health: Nature recovery to provide effective preventative healthcare: The uplift in mood nature provides is measurable; survey work suggests that spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature leads to a significant increase in wellbeing. The combination of these mental health benefits, and the physical activity required to access nature, makes for an effective preventative healthcare tool. More access to healthy green and blue spaces means more people in better health for longer, reducing demands on the NHS. It has been estimated that giving everyone in England good access to green space could save the NHS around £3 billion a year.¹¹

¹ <https://www.weforum.org/press/2020/01/half-of-world-s-gdp-moderately-or-highly-dependent-on-nature-says-new-report/>

² https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2023.pdf

³ <https://stateofnature.org.uk/>

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60182857d3bf7f70c2afe5bb/Dasgupta_Review_-_Headline_Messages.pdf

⁵ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921800920300793>

⁶ <https://ifm.org.uk/atlantic-salmon-in-crisis/>

⁷ <https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Nature%20Based%20Solutions%20-%20Link%20briefing%20note%2005.04.22.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.nffn.org.uk/resources/nffn-the-sweet-spot>

⁹ <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate/cooling-effect-trees-and-green-spaces-cities>

¹⁰ <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/nature-can-help-prevent-flooding>

¹¹ <https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Improving%20public%20access%20to%20nature%20-%20Link%20briefing%20-%2002.05.2023.pdf>

- Safer streets: Nature recovery to bring pride and joy to communities: People across the UK are united in their love of nature, visiting wild spaces for recreation and tuning in to nature programmes in huge numbers (12 million people watched Sir David Attenborough’s Wild Isles series in 2023). The healthier nature is, the more available and robust this source of joy is. Thriving local wild spaces bring community pride as well as joy; polling shows that local green space is the most important thing to foster pride in people’s communities, even more than pubs and high streets.¹²
- Education: Nature recovery to help pupils get more out of their education: Time spent in nature is associated with positive outcomes for children’s learning experiences in schools, including improved attainment and engagement with their peers, teachers, and subject matter.¹³ The Department for Education’s ‘Children and Nature’ programme, which ran in 2022 to provide pupils with increased access to woodland and other natural spaces in their learning work, reported that 94% of participating schools agreed that the programme had a positive impact on children’s mental health, wellbeing, and resilience. More access to more and healthier nature is a boost to learning.¹⁴

¹² <https://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Levelling Up Poll.pdf>

¹³ https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Nature%20nurtures%20children%20Summary%20Report%20FINAL_0.pdf

¹⁴ https://ifm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Link_Edu_Policy_Group_Policy_Paper_March2024.pdf