

North West Biodiversity Forum
Communication Plan

www.biodiversitynw.org.uk

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1. Introduction

Biodiversity encompasses the whole variety of life on Earth. It includes all species of plants and animals, but also their genetic variation, and the complex ecosystems of which they are part. It is not restricted to rare or threatened species but includes the whole of the natural world from the commonplace to the critically endangered.

The world is losing biodiversity at an ever-increasing rate as a result of human activity. In the UK we have lost over 100 species during the last century, with many more species and habitats in danger of disappearing, especially at the local level. On a world scale the rate of loss is now recognised to be a cause for serious concern, requiring concerted international action to prevent continued loss of biodiversity.

The natural environment and the species it contains have immense value not only in terms of environmental quality but also in terms of social wellbeing and sustainable economic growth. From tourism and recreation, to job creation and skills development, biodiversity rich environments bring a wealth of benefits to society.

In response to the threats to biodiversity, there is an England Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, which identifies priority species and habitats. The North West has a significant proportion of England's species and habitat biodiversity targets. At the regional level, regional biodiversity targets have been established for habitats delivering the North West Region's contribution to the UK biodiversity targets.

North West Biodiversity

The North West is a region of great contrasts in the character of its landscapes and countryside. It possesses four distinct landscapes, each with characteristic wildlife and conservation challenges:

- The coast, stretching from the Dee Estuary to the Solway Firth;
- The rural uplands of Cumbria and the Pennines;
- The mixed urban and rural lowlands including the rich agricultural land of Cumbria, Lancashire and Cheshire;
- The Mersey belt including much of Merseyside and Greater Manchester along with the urban core of Manchester and Liverpool.

Beyond the conurbations of Greater Manchester and Merseyside, the North West remains predominantly rural. The region contains some of England's most beautiful and unspoilt countryside, from the central fells of the Lake District, to the farmland of the Cheshire Plain and the stunning Lancashire Hill Country. As a consequence 18% of the land within the North West has been protected through designations, such as National Park and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

However, industry has had an enormous impact on the North West, and the region's natural resources were exploited from the earliest times. Industrial decline has left a legacy of derelict, underused and neglected land. For example, over 96% of the once extensive Mersey Basin mires and mosses have been lost with conversion to agricultural use, drainage, development, waste disposal and the removal of peat.

Further to this, post-war agricultural has resulted in significant declines in habitats and species across the region, such as skylarks, song thrushes and brown hares. Unimproved lowland meadows are now very rare in the North West, as well as nationally and internationally, with many lost as a consequence of more intensive farming practices resulting in improved grasslands, which have a low biodiversity and are of limited nature conservation interest.

Upland and lowland river systems are prominent landscape features and several canals cross the Region. Natural Lakes are a very important part of the landscape of the Cumbria Fells and Dales. One of England's rarest fish species, the vendace, is found here. Eighty-five percent of the Region's water supply is collected and stored in upland reservoirs. There is a wealth of water bodies in the Cheshire Plain and Mersey Valley, including meres, ponds and subsidence flashes. However, river floodplains across the region have been heavily modified. The creation of new wetlands is a priority within the region providing opportunities for rare and endangered species such as the bittern.

The North West's coastline and estuaries offer an ever-changing landscape of sand and pebble beaches, intertidal silts and muds, salt marshes and cliffs, which have in parts been heavily modified through coastal defences and urban development. However, the region also has almost one third of England's sand dunes, with some 20% of the English total lying on the Sefton Coast, Merseyside.

The North West has a woodland cover of only 6.7% (compared to 8.4% nationally). Of these existing woodlands, many are in need of active management and restoration, in particular our precious Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland which total 1.6% of the region's land mass. In this context, the creation and stewardship of woodlands for biodiversity is a high priority, as reflected in the Regional Forestry Framework.

2. Purpose of Plan

The work of the North West Biodiversity Forum aims to bring partners together to achieve more by working together. Good communications is an essential part of this work.

This Communications Plan is concerned with all communications of the North West Biodiversity Forum during the period from August 2007 – March 2009. This Plan will outline current communication activity and propose future developments for improved communications both within the Forum and for external audiences.

The overall purpose of communications from the NWBF is:

- To improve the provision of information;
- To ensure the Forum is effective in influencing policy and strategy;
- Strengthen and widen the regional partnership;
- To ensure the North West communicates its contribution to the delivery of UKBAP targets.

The purpose of the North West Biodiversity Forum's communications plan is:

- To outline the current communications activity;
- To identify where communication can be improved and suggest methods of improvement;
- To create a plan which is focussed on assisting the delivery of the Business Plan at a strategic level.

The biodiversity projects contained within the Business and Communications Plan also have specific communications actions attached to them. However, this plan is aimed at overall Forum communications and not specific communications for individual projects.

3. Target Audiences

For communications to be effective, they should be tailored to the specific audience required. As a consequence, NWBF has identified the following as target audiences for its work, and hence communication:

Target audiences include:

- The environment and regeneration sector in the North West
- Major landowners in the North West
- Large businesses in the North West
- Key decision-makers and influencers
- North West MPs
- Senior decision-makers of North West Local Authorities

4. Key Messages

The Forum currently does not have key messages set out. It is proposed that the Regional Executive Group develops the key messages for the Forum to be used for wider publicity, promotion and awareness raising. These key messages must be agreed by the wider Forum.

5. Current Communications

There are a variety of communication tools that can assist the NWBF in delivery of its communications. These include:

- Clear brand – through a logo or corporate image;
- Regular newsletter;
- E-bulletin – email communications;
- Exhibition Boards;
- Regional documents;
- Website;
- Meetings; and,
- Events

These are reviewed below.

i. Brand

The NWBF does not currently have a logo or clear brand identifying it from other regional biodiversity partnerships. It currently uses the generic UKBAP logo on written communications and on the website.

ii. Regular Newsletter

The NWBF does not produce a regular written newsletter. It does produce a quarterly e-bulletin (see below), but this is an internal communication tool. It does not have a regular newsletter for a wider audience, but uses other channels for this communication need.

iii. E-bulletin

The Regional Biodiversity Manager produces a quarterly e-bulletin. This bulletin is an attached .pdf file to an email that can be printed if required. It is sent to the Forum members and they are encouraged to email further as appropriate. Additionally, the bulletin is also sent to the local partnerships. The purpose of the e-bulletin is to provide a mechanism for Forum members and Local Biodiversity Managers to inform a wider audience of their work, along with national information that may be of interest, such as new publications and research, updates on legislation, projects etc.

iv. Exhibition Boards

The NWBF does not have any exhibition Boards and instead uses partners communication Boards at events as appropriate.

v. Regional documents

The NWBF has produced a range of regional documents. These are listed below:

NWBF

- Regional Spatial Biodiversity priorities (in prep)
- NWBF Regional Biodiversity Business and Communication Plan (2006/2007)
- Regional Biodiversity Targets. Presented by English Nature after consultation with the NWBF at the RPG Public Examination, Matters 10 & 11 (2002)
- Model Policies for the RPG, submitted to the NWRA, RPG Team (1999)
- Biodiversity Indicators (draft) (1999)
- Wild About the North West: A Biodiversity Audit of the North West (1999)

NWBF in partnership with others

- Marketing the Natural Environment of the North West (2006)
www.nwda.co.uk/publications.aspx?Publications=1&area=78&subarea=81&Item=20065300403897407&publicationview=1&navfromaofi=1
or
nwda-cms.amaze.co.uk/DocumentUploads/Final_report.pdf

- The Natural Assets of Northwest England: An Appendix to Marketing the Natural Environment of the Northwest (2006)
www.nwda.co.uk/publications.aspx?Publications=1&area=78&subarea=81&Item=20065304908877461&publicationview=1&navfromaofi=1
- Report on the NW Wetlands Network identifying priority wetland projects that deliver economic benefits (2006)
www.environment-agency.gov.uk/regions/northwest/346910/346950/1357725/?version=1&lang=_e
- Natural Tourism supplements in the Observer and Telegraph (April 2006)
nwda-cms.amaze.co.uk/DocumentUploads/EnglandsNorthwest_Telegraph.pdf
- Climate Change and the Visitor Economy report (2006)
www.snw.org.uk/tourism/down_research.html
- Your Region, Your Nature: Make the Links – Benefit from your Biodiversity (Defra, 2005)
www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/pdfs/biodiversity/20060810YourRegion.pdf
- Life-Support: Incorporating Biodiversity into Community Strategies (Defra, 2004)
www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/biodiversity/lifesupport/lifesupport.pdf
- NWDA Magazine Issue 3, Page 9 – article on Natural Economy (July 2004)
www.nwda.co.uk/SimpleContent.aspx?publications=1&area=78&subarea=81&item=20047072602081084&publicationview=1
- Economic and Regenerative Value of the Natural Environment – report on the economic assessment of 80 natural environment projects (2003)
www.nwda.co.uk/SimpleContent.aspx?publications=1&area=78&subarea=81&item=20038220301254655&publicationview=1
- Action for Biodiversity in North West England. In partnership with GONW and NWRA (2000)
- The Environmental Economy of the NW. Technical Report produced by ERM and summary booklet by the Steering Group. (2000)

vi. Website

The Forum currently has a website which was developed in 2002, with development upgrades added to the site in 2003-4. The website address is www.biodiversitynw.org.uk.

The website has three sections:

- A public access open site providing information on habitats and species within the NW – an online version of ‘Wild About the North West’ – which is a searchable database highlighting presence of habitats and species;
- An open access section for the North West Biodiversity Forum – which provides details of the Forum, its partners, and information on the 5 LBAP partnerships and Local Record Centres;
- A password only section available to NWBF members only, where files can be accessed and stored for Forum members use.

The website content is managed by the Regional Biodiversity Manager, where the content is editable on the site. However, much of the current website is static and therefore cannot be updated. This includes a large section of the website on species and habitats present across the region under the ‘Wild About the North West’ section.

The website is currently being redeveloped and will be relaunched June 2008.

vii. Meetings

There are four forms of meetings within the NWBF arena:

- Quarterly meetings of the full Forum. These meetings are themed around specific topics aimed at assisting the delivery of the NWBF Business Plan. They aim to ensure participation in Forum business by all Forum members and are used for consultations, discussions, planning of events and for members to publicise their organisations work and events. Meeting notes are produced from each meeting and circulated around all members.
- Quarterly meetings of the Regional Executive Group. This group meets to action the business of the Forum, ensuring progress of the business plan. Meeting notes are written from this meeting from which key messages are produced. These key messages are circulated amongst the wider Forum members and LBAP partnership (Chairs and LBMs). ;
- Quarterly meetings of the NWBF Chair with the 5 LBAP partnership Chairs. These meetings are aimed at ensuring the linkages between the regional Forum and the local partnerships. They are used to highlight opportunities for closer working and to ensure funding is in place for the NW Biodiversity Service – the 5 local managers. Meeting notes are produced from this meeting and circulated to the NWBF Chair, LBAP Chairs and LBMs;
- Regular meetings of the Regional Biodiversity Manager with the 5 Local Managers to discuss work and delivery progress, to share best practice and experiences and to ensure close working across the 5 sub-regions with the regional partnership.

Additional meetings are held within sub-groups of the Forum. Currently, there is a Business and Biodiversity sub-group, but this has not met since December 2006.

viii. Events

The NWBF has held a variety of events, mainly in the form of extended meetings, widening the audience to non-Forum members. These have included:

- Themed NWBF meetings, such as wetlands and an LBAP meeting;
- Business and Biodiversity Conference, held December 2006. This event was focused at promoting the benefits of involvement in the BAP process and general biodiversity enhancement to businesses across the region.
- NERC Biodiversity Duty event – a half day conference aimed at public bodies across the region. Event funded by Natural England for promotion of the Duty. Funding also made available for 5 local events aimed at local authorities.

The NWBF has not held any other events.

6. Proposals for Communications

Based upon the outline above of current communications, the following are proposed:

i. Branding – due to a lack of resources to fund a branding exercise and development of a new logo for the Forum, it is proposed that the NWBF retains the current use of the UKBAP logo and retains the same name as North West Biodiversity Forum.

ii. Regular newsletter – due to a lack of resources it is proposed that the development and production of a regular newsletter is postponed until a further time when sufficient resources are available. In the interim, the Forum will focus upon digital circulation through the website and e-bulletin (see below).

iii. E-bulletin – a quarterly e-bulletin in the form of a digital newsletter will be produced, which will be circulated around the Forum, LBAP partnerships and wider interested parties. The RBM will request news from Forum members for inclusion within this bulletin.

The purpose of the bulletin will be to provide key information on biodiversity generally, from national updates, reports and research information to projects delivering biodiversity benefits and local news of relevance and interest to the regional forum.

iv. Exhibition Boards – due to lack of resources it is proposed that the development and production of exhibition boards is not a priority for 2008, but should be re-visited in 2009 if funding can be found for this communication tool. The use of exhibition boards would allow the Forum to have a more professional presence at suitable events, and widen the awareness of the Forums work, and therefore should be considered within the future.

v. Regional documents – the Forum should continue to publish regional documents. Further to this, the Forum should identify publication priorities for 2008/09. These may include:

- NW Biodiversity Service Success Stories publication – case studies of best practice
- Regional Targets – outlining regional and local contribution to national targets
- Leaflet outlining the NWBF and Biodiversity Service

The Regional Executive Group, in consultation with the wider Forum, should identify the publications to be produced for 2008/09.

vi. Website – the website is being re-developed to allow a more responsive web presence for the Forum. This will include:

- Introduction to the Forum
- News page
- NERC Biodiversity Duty pages and information
- Business and Biodiversity pages – case studies of examples
- Local Record Centre pages, with links to and to NBN gateway
- Local Biodiversity Partnership pages – with links to 5 websites
- Regional audit pages – for details of species and habitat presence
- General information pages

There will be the facility to create new pages and sections and therefore allow the Forum to shape the website as it requires.

The website will be re-launched in June 2008.

The website should be expanded in 2008/09 if suitable resources are available to allow for projects to be highlighted and case studied across the region. This would be the development of a spatial map allowing the user to query projects within the North West which could be added to the website to highlight good examples, best practice etc. and link up to BARS.

vii. Meetings – the Forum should continue with regular meetings, and the ongoing meetings of the LBAP Chairs and Regional Executive Group.

Over 2008, the Forum will experiment with the themeing of meetings initiated in 2006 as a response to members survey, and build on these to include a field visit as part of one of the quarterly meetings.

There will also be the opportunity for the Forum to hold joint meetings, in particular a joint meeting between NWBF and North West Coastal Forum, and NWBF and North West Geodiversity Forum. These joint meetings will be investigated by the RBM and proposed to the NWBF for agreement.

viii. Events - the RBM will communicate regional events of interest to the wider Forum, but there are no plans currently for a NWBF regional event as well as the quarterly meetings proposed for 2008/09. However, following from the initial round of NERC Biodiversity Duty awareness raising events, the Forum should outline its action for 2008/09 to continue this work.

Note: This will be updated following from the annual review of the NWBF Business Plan.

6. Summary of Plan

Summary of planned Communication action for 2008/09

Action	Q1 (Feb – April)	Q2 (May – July)	Q3 (Aug – Oct)	Q4 (Nov – Jan)
Key Messages	Discuss Key Messages in REG – consult NWBF	Agree NWBF key messages		
E-bulletin	March	June	Sept	Dec
Regional Documents	Discuss potential publications			
	Initiate Success Story document	Complete Success Story document	Identify and collate case study data	Produce case study publication
	Publish Regional Habitat Targets	Agree communications for delivering targets	Review awareness of targets and review communications	
Website	NWBF website redeveloped	Launch new website. Develop web content and ensure partner contribution	Investigate development of project phase of website	Possible Phase 2 development (project/GIS mapping functions)
	Web content production	Web content production	Web content production	Web content production
Meetings	NWBF - Feb	NWBF – May Potential site visit	NWBF - Sept	NWBF - Dec
	REG – meetings with LBAP Chairs Feb & April		REG – meeting with LBAP Chairs Oct	
	Ongoing quarterly meetings of the REG, also the RBM with the LBMs			
Events		Involvement in NWCF meeting – June (Maritime BAP)		

Contact information

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Appendix 1. Forum partners.

Cheshire County Council
CLA North West (Country Land and Business Association)
Cumbria Biodiversity Partnership
Cumbria County Council
Defence Estates (MOD)
DEFRA
Environment Agency
EPIC (Exmoor Ponies in Conservation)
Forestry Commission
FWAG (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group)
Government Office North West
Greater Manchester Ecology Unit
Highways Agency
Lancashire County Council
Landlife
Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service
NFU (National Farmers Union)
Natural England
North West Development Agency
North West Regional Assembly
RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds)
The National Trust
The Wildlife Trusts
United Utilities
Woodland Trust

Exec Group members:

Chair – Sarah Peet
Natural England – Michelle Young
LBAP representative – Suzanne Waymont
North West Regional Assembly – Debra Holroyd
Voluntary partner – RSPB – Andrew Gouldstone
Regional Biodiversity Manager – Amanda Wright