

Working to enhance
our region's biodiversity

**Biodiversity
action plan**
update
Spring 2023



Wessex Water
YTL GROUP

FOR YOU. FOR LIFE.

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Wessex Water and biodiversity

In 1998, we became the first water company to publish a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) targeting efforts to conserve and enhance wildlife across our region. Our BAP remains our overarching strategy for conserving, enhancing and working with the natural environment throughout our business.

This BAP details our duties, commitments and targets in fulfilling our aims of conserving and enhancing biodiversity across our region and the actions we will be taking to achieve them.

We are fortunate to live and work in a region renowned for its wildlife and habitats. To the west we have the wetlands of the Somerset Levels, to the east the chalk grasslands of Salisbury Plain and its associated chalk rivers, to the south Dorset's precious heathlands and to the north the limestone grasslands and wooded valleys of the Cotswolds. At the heart of many of these areas are the rivers which flow through our region and the freshwater habitats and species they sustain.

Our region contains:

- more than 470 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- 35 Special Areas of Conservation
- 11 Special Protection Areas
- 27 National Nature Reserves (NNR)
- more than 6200 areas designated as Local Wildlife Sites or Regionally Important Geological Sites
- eight Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (covering over 30% of our region) and two National Parks.

Aside from these iconic landscapes and habitats, much of the rural and urban fabric of our region is host to a vast range of plants, insects, mammals and birds who call the many habitats home.

However, we know that the state of biodiversity in our region must be improved. The biodiversity crisis is as concerning as the climate emergency and the two are

intrinsically linked. Biodiversity in the UK is well below the global average with only 53% of our biodiversity left, placing us in the bottom 10% of the world. We know that the natural environment is essential for our wellbeing as well as being a vital component of our business.

Our commitment

We know that the state of biodiversity across our region could be better. Over the next 25 years, we will further enhance our region's biodiversity, doubling our contribution.

We know that action is more important than words. Below we illustrate how we will be taking action to achieve our commitment.



Our targets and commitments

Our overall aims

- To conserve and enhance biodiversity across our land and region
- To double our contribution to the region's biodiversity over the next 25 years
- To improve or create habitat on our landholding which will achieve a minimum of 5,000 biodiversity units by 2050

How we will achieve our overall aims:

- By working through the following six workstreams to conserve and enhance biodiversity throughout our activities
- By meeting our targets set out below
- By reviewing our Biodiversity Action Plan every five years to ensure it remains relevant and responsive to the challenges faced by our habitats and species
- By providing annual progress reports to clearly evidence and quantify the progress we are making towards our aims.

	Managing our land	Minimising the impact of our activities	Supporting partnerships and projects	Boosting biodiversity through our catchments	Increasing use of nature-based solutions	Increasing tree planting
What does this involve?	We own just under 3,000 hectares of land, which includes several thousand operational sites. Both land and sites host a wide range of habitats and species. Managing our land appropriately will enable us to conserve and enhance the wildlife our sites support	We must operate, maintain and develop our sites and infrastructure in order to supply water to, and treat sewage from, our customers. In order to meet wider environmental goals, we will continually need to improve and expand our sites without compromising the habitats and species they support	Working alone, or solely across our sites, will not create the scale of change needed to improve biodiversity across our region. We will work with, support and assist wider projects carried out by our partners and stakeholders to improve biodiversity outside our sites and activities	Working at a catchment scale and with partners to ensure the environmental integrity and biodiversity of river and groundwater catchments are in good or excellent condition while integrating biodiversity options into our catchment management work with farmers and landowners	We will choose nature-based solutions to problems, such as the creation of new wetlands, where we can, instead of grey infrastructure solutions	Enhancing our planting programme to increase trees and woodland across our region to support biodiversity and deliver wider benefits while contributing to national targets
Our targets and commitments (2020 - 2025)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance commitment E4 - Improve Sites of Special Scientific Interest to deliver 100% of the actions agreed with Natural England ² • Improve 25ha of Wessex Water's land over three sites through positive restoration and creation management techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all capital developments achieve no net loss of biodiversity annually • Ensure all relevant capital developments requiring planning permission achieve biodiversity net gain from November 2023 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance commitment E7 - to deliver 37 partnership projects - working with catchment partners to improve natural capital, by 2025 • Continue to fund and support four projects through our Partners Programme to 2025 • Continue to fund local projects through Wessex Water Foundation's Environment Grant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance commitment E7 - to deliver 37 partnership projects - working with catchment partners to improve natural capital, by 2025 • Deliver > 95ha of habitat improvements in catchment management areas 	Deliver a minimum of 28 nature-based solutions to improve storm overflows by 2030, totalling 14,000m ² of new or existing wetlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To plant 30,000 trees by 2025 to contribute towards the target or 729,835 trees planted (or 438 ha of woodland) by 2030 • Plant a tree every five years for each employee to recognise their length of service and contribution in staff forests

¹ www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-metric-calculate-the-biodiversity-net-gain-of-a-project-or-development

² Details of our performance commitments can be found at <https://corporate.wessexwater.co.uk/our-performance/latest-performance>

	Managing our land	Minimising the impact of our activities	Supporting partnerships and projects	Boosting biodiversity through our catchments	Increasing use of nature-based solutions	Increasing tree planting
Our initial proposed targets and commitments (2025 - 2030), subject to approval of our business plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve or create habitat on our landholding which will achieve a minimum of 1,000 biodiversity units by 2050 in AMP 8 (2025 - 2030) and an additional 1,000 biodiversity units in AMP 9 (2030-2035). For AMP 8, this will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> improving 15ha of Wessex Water's land through positive restoration and management, alongside 10km of hedgerow planting by 2030 Improving management and the condition of 50ha of our woodlands by 2030 Improve or maintain Sites of Special Scientific Interest we own to meet 100% favourable status PR24/AMP8 performance commitment (Ofwat requirement) – measure the change in biodiversity on company owned land and third-party land on which we are working in partnership Double our contribution to the region's biodiversity measured through the number of biodiversity units created per year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute, support and engage with WaterUK CAR Swifts/Swallows project, subject to approval through the business planning process Ensure all capital developments achieve no net loss of biodiversity annually Ensure all capital developments aim to achieve an overall net gain for biodiversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fund a minimum of four large projects that would aim to work with partners to deliver improvements to water quality and an 10% increase in overall biodiversity unit value in habitats involved in the projects Continue to fund a minimum of four projects through our Partners Programme with a renewed focus on biodiverse species, habitats or Local Nature Recovery Strategy implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver more than 210ha of habitat improvements in catchment management areas by 2030 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver a minimum of 28 nature-based solutions to improve storm overflows by 2030, totalling 14,000m² of new or existing wetlands Assess and report on the performance and wider benefits delivered by nature-based solution assets created and maintained across our region by 2030 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To plant 700,000 trees to meet the overall target of 729,835 trees (or 438 ha of woodland) by 2030 Plant a tree every five years for each employee to recognise their length of service and contribution in staff forests

	Managing our land	Minimising the impact of our activities	Supporting partnerships and projects	Boosting biodiversity through our catchments	Increasing use of nature-based solutions	Increasing tree planting
How will we do this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedding our conservation, access and recreation work into day-to-day management of our land and sites, considering the natural capital created through our actions alongside societal and financial values • Understanding and quantifying the biodiversity value of our land by using the national Biodiversity Metric (currently version 3.0/3.1) to quantify progress and change • Creating further areas of high-quality habitat and continuing to invest in specific projects to boost wildlife and public access to our land • Improve the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in our care, including by supporting our agricultural tenants to achieve favourable conditions on SSSIs within their tenancies • Evaluating local nature recovery strategies or species conservation strategies as they are published to see how they influence our approaches and how our land can contribute to achieving their aims 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will ensure that our capital programme has an overall neutral or positive impact on wildlife or habitats at all scales • By assessing our works and activities to ensure ecological and wider environmental issues are identified and that we follow the mitigation hierarchy to reduce our impacts as far as possible • We will support all parts of the business to work to assess their impacts on and benefits for biodiversity • Where possible supporting alternatives to traditional approaches to supply and treatment that make use of the benefits that biodiversity can offer • Seek opportunities to improve, enhance or extend habitats of intrinsic value or for protected species, including through biodiversity offsetting mechanisms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting and contributing to external projects on a variety of scales • Actively working with third parties to protect biodiversity in our region, including project funding • Working with partner organisations and other groups to share research and promote biodiversity • Informing and engaging with the public in our biodiversity work through our existing funding programmes and working with local groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging greater consideration of the ecosystem services provided by catchments within water policy, regulation, investment planning and the actions of other interests; championing partnership-led catchment management work and promoting long-term, sustainable implementation of the Water Framework Directive • Working with land managers engaged with our catchment management work for water quality to also increase biodiversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote outcome based environmental regulation to ensure multi-benefit nature-based solutions are weighed on an equal footing with traditional, carbon-intensive solutions • Champion nature-based solutions such as wetlands alongside our on-site assets to ensure that treatment solutions restore the environment rather than being to its detriment • Work with farmers and landowners to implement low carbon options through nature-based solutions • Potentially working with the academic sector to better understand the natural processes used by wetlands alongside opportunities to maximise and account for the wider ecosystem service benefits provided by nature-based solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for opportunities to increase tree planting on our land • Work with our catchment partners to include new tree planting alongside wider biodiversity improvements • Include tree planting (where feasible) within site development opportunities • Incorporate tree planting within delivery of nature-based solutions • Work with partner organisations to deliver planting at scale across our region
Who we will work with	Natural England, together with our tenants and wider stakeholders (such as Wildlife Trusts or local AONB teams)	Local councils, Natural England, the Environment Agency, Historic England and local stakeholders	Conservation organisations in our Partnership Programme including Wildlife Trusts, Catchment Partnerships and local environmental groups which build biodiversity and create more sustainable and resilient river catchments	Farmers, landowners, communities and local groups to deliver improvements for biodiversity alongside water quality in partnership	Local councils, the Environment Agency and Natural England, alongside landowners and local stakeholders	Internal teams for opportunities on our land or as part of schemes. External landowners, conservation organisations and wider catchment stakeholders to deliver planting across our region

Biodiversity across our land and region

The natural environment with all its diversity of microbes, fungi, plants, invertebrates and animals, is key to sustaining the cycling of nutrients and fresh water and the maintenance of healthy soils and clean air that we all depend on. Despite its critical importance to us, our natural inheritance is still being lost and degraded.

Wessex Water recognises that the environment is essential to the wellbeing of the communities we live and work in as well as being a vital component of our business. We are therefore committed to the protection and sensitive management of the biological diversity, wildlife and landscapes of our area.

Our region

The Wessex Water region is rich in wildlife and this is reflected in the large number of legally protected areas to preserve wildlife. For example, our region includes:

- more than 470 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- 35 Special Areas of Conservation
- 11 Special Protection Areas
- 27 National Nature Reserves (NNR)
- more than 6200 areas designated as Local Wildlife Sites or Regionally Important Geological Sites
- eight Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (covering over 30% of our region) and two National Parks.

Our landholding

We are not a large landowner - our total estate (which includes all our operational treatment works, reservoirs, pumping stations etc) amounts to fewer than 3,000 hectares (one hectare is a little bigger than a football pitch). As of 2022, approximately 41% of our land is being managed for biodiversity (eg, it has a specific conservation/environmental management plan or conservation tenancy).

The first step towards enhancing biodiversity on our own sites and land is to have an understanding of their current value to the natural environment. Over a five-year period from 2015-2020 we ecologically surveyed all our

landholding for sites greater than 0.5 hectares. Following this, we have used Natural England's Biodiversity Metric to calculate the quantity and quality of biodiversity on our land.

This tool measures the value of our land for wildlife, producing outputs in biodiversity units (BU). This metric assigns all habitats a unit value according to their relative biodiversity value (eg, species-rich grassland is more valuable than species-poor grassland).

In essence, it converts the features and condition of wildlife habitats into a measurable unit value. These biodiversity units do not equate to a real-world value, eg, one unit of woodland does not equal one hectare of woodland - instead, it is a way of tracking losses or gains (in the same way as you can track profits and losses financially).

We can also use this metric as a way of measuring the change in the value of our landholding to wildlife - as the number of biodiversity units increase, this means that the overall value of our landholding to wildlife increases.

Our assessment indicates that:

- the Wessex Water landholding was valued at 14,348 biodiversity units (BU)
- our sites of less than 0.5 hectares contribute only 395BU (from 1,825 sites) compared to sites of greater than 0.5 hectare contributing 13,952BU (from 333 sites)
- Clatworthy Reservoir supports a total of 1,935BU, equivalent to 13.5% of the total biodiversity units supported by the entire Wessex Water landholding.
- the two sites of Charmy Down and Shapwick Heath also each contribute more than 10% to the landholding's total biodiversity unit value
- the habitat types on Wessex Water landholdings with greatest biodiversity unit value are neutral grasslands, followed by reservoir and lowland mixed deciduous woodland.

We can now use this information to target our efforts towards maximising biodiversity enhancement at relevant sites.

We are also the stewards of 293 hectares of land designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This protection recognises that these habitats are the most important areas for wildlife in England. We are committed to managing our Sites of Special Scientific Interest to ensure they can meet and maintain favourable condition. Currently, 93% are meeting the target of being in favourable or recovering condition.



Our duties

Wessex Water has a duty to enhance and protect biodiversity as laid down in successive pieces of legislation.

The Water Industry Act 1991 and Environment Act 1995 include general duties in respect of conservation, access and recreation including a requirement: “... so far as is consistent with the functions of the Water Company, to further the conservation of flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest.”

Detailed guidance for achieving this is set out in the Water Industry Code of Practice for Conservation, Access and Recreation (CAR).

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2000 (as amended by the Environment Act 2021), also requires us as a statutory undertaker in exercising our functions to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing biodiversity.

Defra’s guidance to public authorities gives more detail including the need to integrate our duty when we:

- develop policies and strategies and put them into practice
- engage with the planning system and develop our infrastructure (eg, when we seek planning permission to develop our sites)
- manage:
 - our land and buildings, woodlands and natural areas
 - community amenities (eg, recreational activities on our reservoirs)
 - the impacts from waste and pollution; energy; water; wood and plant products
- make decisions about procurement
- implement economic, environmental and social programmes (eg, our Asset Management Plan, AMP programme).

In addition to the enhanced biodiversity duty, the *Environment Act 2021*, sets out that we must:

- achieve the statutory minimum level of biodiversity net gain for all schemes subject to planning permission. We will go further than this and ensure that all our development schemes, irrespective of whether they require planning permission, will achieve no net loss of biodiversity and from 2025, achieve a net overall gain
- play our part in achieving the environmental targets set out under the Act, including:
 - halting the decline in species abundance by 2030
 - increasing species abundance by at least 10% by 2042, compared to 2030 levels
 - improving the England-level GB Red List Index for species extinction risk by 2042, compared to 2022 levels
 - creating or restoring in excess of 500,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats outside protected sites by 2042, compared to 2022 levels
 - 70% of the designated features in the Marine Protected Area network to be in favourable condition by 2042, with the remainder in recovering condition
 - addressing the two principal sources of nutrient pollution by 2037:
 - reduce nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment pollution from agriculture to the water environment by at least 40% by 2037 against a 2018 baseline
 - reduce phosphorus loadings from treated waste water by 80% by 2037 against a 2020 baseline.

This document sets out the policy and actions we will take to comply with our obligations to further the general biodiversity objective set out in the Environment Act.

We are committed to complying with all nature conservation legislation. Doing so helps us meet our overall aims for biodiversity.

National and regional targets

Our duties, aims and targets are influenced by other external directions on biodiversity, including:

- the 25 Year Environment Plan
- the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023
- Defra’s Integrated plan for delivering clean and plentiful water
- existing local Nature Recovery Networks, eg, as published by the West of England Nature Partnership
- the lists of Habitats and species of principal importance in England set out by Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act
- legal protections given to habitats and species such as the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 and the Hedgerow Regulations 1997, among others.

In future, we also expect our plans to be influenced by newly created Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Species Conservation Strategies, Protected Sites Plans (created under the Environment Act) and the wider Nature Recovery Network. Future editions of the BAP will directly address these requirements once the plans are available across our region.

Delivering for biodiversity – our action plan

This Biodiversity Action Plan sets out how we translate our duties, targets and commitments into action on the ground. It is influenced by wider company policy and direction, including our:

- Strategic Direction Statement – corporate.wessexwater.co.uk/our-future/our-strategic-direction
- environmental policy
- current business plan (2020-2025) and emerging business plan (2025-2030).

The BAP:

- Provides a coherent approach to the natural environment within Wessex Water.
- Identifies the activities being undertaken or required to conserve and enhance the biodiversity within our landholding.
- Seeks opportunities to deliver wider biodiversity and environmental benefits throughout our work, and to respond to new challenges in conservation in the UK.

We will deliver our biodiversity aims through the following six key workstreams.



1 Management of our land

Much of our land comprises operational sites, such as our water treatment centres, water recycling centres and reservoirs. However, it also includes undeveloped land adjacent to or separate from existing sites which provide capacity for future operational growth, source protection land, or sites under long-term leases to individuals or organisations.

This land varies considerably in quality and use, from several hectares of farmland, often managed with low inputs to protect water sources, to the typical half hectare sized water recycling centres that are busy, intensively managed operational sites. Much of this, especially land set aside and protected for water supply, is of conservation value or has the capacity to be of value for wildlife.

We have used the new national Biodiversity Metric developed by Defra to understand the value of our land for wildlife and built upon previous work to map the habitats present across our sites. We aim to manage such land sympathetically through site environment plans (SEPs) wherever it is compatible with supply and waste

water treatment activities, and to improve this where possible. This system not only manages habitats, species and features of positive value, but also controls negative impacts such as invasive non-native plants.

Our actions

To achieve our aims, we will:

- continue to manage our land to maintain its current level of habitats and diversity, ensuring that good condition is maintained and seeking opportunities to extend, enhance or restore habitat where possible
- ensure that our land contributes to landscape scale habitat diversity and connectivity, promoting ecological networks beyond Wessex Water land where appropriate
- ensure that our sites contribute positively to the local environment in both rural and urban areas.
- manage our SSSI landholding to achieve and maintain favourable condition
- carry out a rolling programme of ecological surveys to

continually update and understand the condition of our habitats and species.

- use surveys and our work with our stakeholders to carry out targeted management on key sites for wildlife and public enjoyment to maximise biodiversity
- manage sites with protected or priority habitats and species appropriately to minimise impacts on wildlife and on operational processes
- work to remove invasive non-native species from our sites or prevent their spread
- look for opportunities to improve, enhance or extend priority habitats or for protected species
- improve access to appropriate sites and interpretation of their wildlife interest
- continue to inform, train and engage with staff across our business on conservation management and the issues regarding working with wildlife
- investigate options for additional tree planting on our landholding, where compatible with existing uses.

Our targets - We will measure our progress on our land management against the following targets:

<p>Our targets and commitments (2020 - 2025)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance commitment E4 - Improve Sites of Special Scientific Interest to deliver 100% of the actions agreed with Natural England • Improve 25ha of Wessex Water's land over three sites through positive restoration and creation management techniques
<p>Our initial proposed targets and commitments (2025 - 2030), subject to approval of our business plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve or create habitat on our landholding which will achieve a minimum of 1,000 biodiversity units by 2050 in AMP 8 (2025 - 2030) and an additional 1,000 biodiversity units in AMP 9 (2030-2035). For AMP 8, this will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improving 15ha of Wessex Water's land through positive restoration and management, alongside 10km of hedgerow planting by 2030 • improving management and the condition of 50ha of our woodlands by 2030 • PR24/AMP8 performance commitment (Ofwat requirement) - measure the change in biodiversity on company owned land and third-party land on which we are working in partnership • Improve or maintain Sites of Special Scientific Interest we own to meet 100% favourable status • Double our contribution to the region's biodiversity measured through the number of biodiversity units created each year

We will use the nationally agreed Biodiversity Metric (currently version 3.1) as a consistent and transparent method of calculating the impact of our improvements, as recognised in the performance commitment specified by Ofwat.

2 Operational activities and development

Wessex Water routinely carries out a wide range of activities that affect the environment. These may be the daily routine activities of our sewage treatment or water supply sites and networks or through maintenance, improvement and building of new infrastructure and facilities.

Our environment and planning services team works in close cooperation with our engineering and operational teams and external contractors. They also provide liaison with local planning officers, environmental regulators and local stakeholders.

We operate an environmental screening process for our proposed works to ensure that negative impacts to protected or other important species, habitats or features are either avoided, mitigated for, or in the worst case, offset by gains made elsewhere. Our new developments already operate under a system to ensure that there is no net loss of biodiversity as a result of our schemes; we will move towards creation of biodiversity net gain, firstly for projects requiring planning permission but extending to other developments by 2030.

Our treatment processes are founded in nature, using bugs and bacteria as part of the process to clean sewage. These can form the basis for a food chain for species using our sites – from the invertebrates which feed on the bugs and bacteria or the bats and birds which feed on the invertebrates. We will look at opportunities to harness these interactions to solve problems on our sites and boost biodiversity further.

To achieve our aims, we will:

- ensure that our activities have an overall neutral or positive impact on wildlife or habitats at all scales
- support all parts of the business to assess their impacts on and benefits for biodiversity, including training on environmental awareness and good working practices
- where possible, support alternatives to traditional approaches to supply and treatment that make use of the benefits that biodiversity can offer
- screen all projects for their environment and ecological impact, including liaison with relevant external bodies to agree any relevant mitigation or offsetting requirements and proposed environmental outcomes of a scheme

- ensure all habitat and species legislation is complied with during the life of a project including any appropriate protected species licensing
- ensure that appropriate working methods are used during construction and that appropriate materials are used for the reinstatement once work is complete
- seek opportunities to improve, enhance or extend habitats of intrinsic value or for protected species, including through biodiversity offsetting mechanisms
- seek to deploy or develop novel methods for reinstatement to minimise impacts on important features such as priority habitat, such as grassland and hedges
- ensure our projects do not lead to inadvertent spread of invasive non-native species either on to or off our land or aquatic habitats, and control those on existing sites where feasible.

Our targets – We will measure our progress on operational land and activities against the following targets.

<p>Our targets and commitments (2020 - 2025)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all capital developments achieve no net loss of biodiversity annually • Ensure all relevant capital developments requiring planning permission achieve biodiversity net gain from November 2023
<p>Our initial proposed targets and commitments (2025 - 2030), subject to approval of our business plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute, support and engage with WaterUK CAR Swifts/Swallows project, subject to approval through the business planning process • Ensure all capital developments achieve no net loss of biodiversity annually • Ensure all capital developments aim to achieve an overall net gain for biodiversity

3 Supporting external biodiversity partnerships and projects

The scale of the challenges we all face in conserving and rebuilding our natural environment is beyond the level of contribution any single landholding or programme can achieve. We have long sought to engage with and support external partners and projects to deliver the larger scale, multi-functional and linked work needed to achieve our widest aim of conserving and enhancing biodiversity at a regional scale.

We have several mechanisms for contributing to external partnerships.

- We fund and support the partnerships needed over the long term to ensure all stakeholders work together to achieve the wide-ranging requirements of both biodiversity and measures like the Water Framework Directive. For example, our sustained support for our Catchment Partnerships and Local Nature Partnerships.
- We fund and support regional scale projects, mostly through our Partners Programme.
- We engage and fund works at a local community scale through the Environment Fund and our WaterForce volunteer programme.

Our Wessex Water Foundation Partners Programme enables us to participate in much larger projects than would otherwise be possible. The programme offers funding, engagement and support to practical conservation and catchment projects across our region that conserve and enhance biodiversity, catchments and the aquatic environment. It magnifies our other contributions to biodiversity and seeks to achieve our goal of supporting wider national and regional targets while improving our engagement and knowledge of the wider conservation arena.

The Partners Programme is flexible in application and has been used to sustain or originate projects to tackle localised priorities. Its unique combination of support and long-term funding has demonstrated significant long term environmental gains.

We believe that strong partnerships and local co-ordination is crucial to creating successful change. We therefore engage with and support regional partnerships covering a wide range of activities that benefit biodiversity, ranging from strategic level groups such as

local nature partnerships or catchment partnerships to groups of organisations working together in practical conservation work at specific sites.

To deliver our aims, we will:

- continue to support and contribute to external projects on a variety of scales through the Wessex Water Foundation
- work with partner organisations and other groups to share information and promote biodiversity
- inform and engage the public and our customers about our biodiversity work and how they can contribute to local or regional projects
- hold annual Partners Programme implementers' meetings to share knowledge, experience and issues across supported projects and links with our internal teams
- participate in and support local and regional biodiversity and local nature partnerships. This will help implementation and engagement with emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

Our targets - We will measure our progress on external partnerships and projects against these targets:

<p>Our targets and commitments (2020 - 2025)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance commitment E7 - to deliver 37 partnership projects - working with catchment partners to improve natural capital, by 2025 • Continue to fund and support four projects through our Partners Programme to 2025 • Continue to fund local projects through the Wessex Water Foundation's Environment Grant
<p>Our initial proposed targets and commitments (2025 - 2030), subject to approval of our business plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund a minimum of four large projects that would aim to work with partners to deliver improvements to water quality and an 10% increase in overall biodiversity unit value in habitats involved in the projects • Continue to fund a minimum of four projects through our Partners Programme with a renewed focus on biodiversity, species, habitats or Local Nature Recovery Strategy implementation

4 Enhancing biodiversity across our catchments

Catchment scale work is about minimising the effects of human activity on river systems, wetlands and groundwater by directly managing inputs to rivers and the land surrounding them (the catchments).

We work at a catchment scale and with partners to ensure the environmental integrity and biodiversity of river and groundwater catchments are in good or excellent condition. We will encourage greater consideration of the ecosystem services provided by catchments within water policy, regulation, investment planning and the actions of other interests.

There are three drivers for our catchment scale work.

- To achieve the most sustainable solution to reducing pressures on water treatment processes where pollutants are affecting the quality of raw water. We need to remove pollutants from drinking water and for us working in the catchment also means minimising the inputs of diffuse pollution – mostly nitrates and pesticides – into the catchments surrounding our reservoirs or groundwater boreholes. This helps us to provide clean drinking water without using excessive treatment and chemicals, while including biodiversity options in the solutions provided.
- To contribute to achieving the holistic aims of the Water Framework Directive – that all waterbodies meet good ecological status. While our own work and investment

will contribute to reducing pressures from our sector, without wider action taken across all sectors we will not achieve the end goal of waterbodies in good status supporting the healthiest possible levels of biodiversity (including fish and other aquatic species).

- Investigating the impact of our assets on the aquatic and terrestrial environment to ensure our decisions are based on sound science, while testing innovative options to environmental challenges.

Since 2005 we have chosen to engage with land managers to tackle the sources of pollution affecting our assets through our catchment management approach. We have expanded this approach to include work with farmers to reduce nutrients entering rivers such as the Tone, Parrett, Stour and Yeo as an increasingly sustainable means of lowering overall levels of pollution. We are currently providing advice to landowners and managers covering more than 30,000 hectares for water protection, biodiversity and offsetting.

We are now working to deliver biodiversity improvements alongside water quality measures in order to maximise the benefits obtained. This can take the form of reversion of arable fields to grassland habitats, planting of arable margins with perennial nectar sources for pollinators, creating new hedgerows or planting riverbank trees and new woodland.

Much of our work is central to the delivery of the Water Framework Directive. We contribute to river basin management plans by working with the Environment Agency and Natural England on minimising impacts on rivers from discharges of treated sewage effluent and abstractions for drinking water, and by research on the impacts of water company activities on waterbodies and other sensitive sites.

To deliver our aims, we will:

- ensure that work within our catchments explores the widest range of opportunities for environmental gain, working in partnership with other sectors and organisations to deliver a healthy natural environment
- fully integrate biodiversity options into our catchment management approach and work with farmers and landowners across our region to boost biodiversity while reducing nutrients and other pollutants
- where possible support alternatives to traditional approaches to supply and treatment that maximise the benefit to biodiversity
- continue to deliver environmental investigations in collaboration with the Environment Agency, Natural England and local/national stakeholders to answer questions and identify solutions to current and emerging challenges.

Our targets – We will measure our progress towards enhancing biodiversity across catchments against the following targets.

<p>Our targets and commitments (2020 - 2025)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance commitment E7 - to deliver 37 partnership projects – working with catchment partners to improve natural capital, by 2025 • Deliver >95ha of habitat improvements in catchment management areas
<p>Our initial proposed targets and commitments (2025 - 2030), subject to approval of our business plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver more than 210ha of habitat improvements in catchment management areas by 2030

5 Increasing use of nature-based solutions

The scale of the challenges facing the environment are significant. Traditional solutions to treating water are often carbon, energy and chemically intensive and offer limited additional benefits. We firmly believe that we need to make nature-based and catchment-based solutions the default where they are feasible, to deliver wider outcomes with the lowest possible carbon footprint.

Nature-based solutions harness the power and capabilities of nature to deliver cost-effective and sustainable systems which provide environmental, social and economic benefits while also building resilience. For us, this can include the creation of wetland treatment systems to reduce nutrients or sediments instead of traditional treatment processes, or the installation of sustainable urban drainage systems to slow the flow of rainwater into our sewers.

Increasing our use of nature-based solutions will:

- contribute to our aim of restoring the quality of our rivers and coastal water
- boost biodiversity through the creation of new wetland habitat – acting both as a treatment process, but also as a haven for wildlife. In addition, we will also ensure

that land surrounding new wetlands is beneficial for terrestrial wildlife through creation of new habitat

- be delivered alongside existing assets to ensure that treatment systems restore the environment rather than contributing to its detriment
- support our goal of becoming a net zero total carbon business by 2040 through deployment of low energy, low chemical processes
- contribute to increasing wetland ecosystems across the region and nationally – the UK has lost 90% of its wetlands and this affects the species the habitats support. In turn, this will have additional benefits by holding more water in the environment – both to reduce flood peaks and keep rivers flowing during times of drought.

We know that wetlands boost biodiversity. Our wetland at Cromhall has created a 111% increase in biodiversity value which will improve in the future as habitats mature. A Bioblitz (assessment of different biological features) at the site identified that numerous species of plants, birds, bats insects and amphibians have already colonised or are currently using the new wetland system.

To deliver our aims, we will:

- choose nature-based solutions such as wetlands where we can (and the default option where they are feasible), instead of grey infrastructure solutions
- use our voice to encourage our regulators to ensure that multi-benefit nature-based solutions are weighed on an equal footing with traditional, carbon-intensive solutions
- construct nature-based solutions at rural storm overflows to address frequently discharging overflows caused by groundwater infiltration
- work in partnership with local groups such as wildlife and rivers trusts to ensure we maximise the benefits that such infrastructure can deliver.

Our targets – We will measure our progress towards increasing our use of nature-based solutions against the following targets.

<p>Our targets and commitments (2020 – 2025)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a minimum of 28 nature-based solutions to improve storm overflows by 2030, totalling 14,000m² of new or existing wetlands
<p>Our initial proposed targets and commitments (2025 – 2030), subject to approval of our business plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a minimum of 28 nature-based solutions to improve storm overflows by 2030, totalling 14,000m² of new or existing wetlands • Assess and report on the performance and wider benefits delivered by nature-based solution assets created and maintained across our region by 2030

6 Increasing tree planting

Our trees, hedgerows and woodland are a valued part of our wider landscape as well as forming a key habitat for many species. Alongside their value for wildlife, our woodlands play an important role in capturing carbon, keeping our rivers cool, improving water quality and providing better flood protection.

Water companies in England have an ambitious plan to plant 11 million trees as part of wider commitments to improve the natural environment and to support our goal of achieving a net zero carbon water industry by 2030.

However, we want to ensure we achieve multiple benefits from the planting for ecosystem services where possible, so we will be looking for tree planting opportunities through the other workstreams included in this action plan. For example, we have been working with farmers to plant new hedgerows (including hedgerow trees) and buffer strips as part of our catchment management approach to improve water quality.

On our own land, and through our engineering and operational activities, we interact with trees on a daily basis. We value the contribution trees and hedgerows across our region play in supporting biodiversity and

defining landscapes and will seek to maintain existing trees and hedgerows where possible. We recognise that ancient woodland and veteran trees take hundreds of years to establish and require particular care as they are an irreplaceable habitat.

Alongside their benefits, trees are associated with risks which require management, and while we will seek to maintain them wherever possible, there will be occasions when management is required to prolong the life of a tree, condition of a woodland or to deal with health and safety issues.

To deliver our aims, we will:

- seek opportunities to increase planting on our own landholding. We recognise that our landholding is already constrained by existing land uses, but where sites or habitats can be improved by additional planting, this option will be taken
- include options for additional tree planting on our capital development programme, where feasible. We will integrate new trees and woodland in the design and implementation of our nature-based solutions

- we will seek to work with partner organisations and stakeholders to engage with small, medium and large-scale proposals to increase planting throughout our river catchments
- when working in our catchments directly with landowners and managers, look to deliver options which include tree planting to achieve multiple benefits
- engage with both our staff and local communities to support tree planting initiatives to benefit both biodiversity, but also access to nature, mental health and volunteering opportunities
- plant a tree every five years for each employee to recognise their length of service and contribution to the company in our staff forests. These staff forests will be at locations where there is public access to allow both staff and other visitors to benefit from the woodland. The first staff forest is being planted at Durleigh wetlands.

Our targets – We will measure our progress towards increasing tree planting against the following targets

<p>Our targets and commitments (2020 - 2025)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To plant 30,000 trees by 2025 to contribute towards the target of 729,835 trees planted (or 438 ha of woodland) by 2030 • Plant a tree every five years for each employee to recognise their length of service and contribution in staff forests
<p>Our initial proposed targets and commitments (2025 - 2030), subject to approval of our business plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To plant 700,000 trees to meet the overall target of 729,835 trees (or 438 ha of woodland) by 2030 • Plant a tree every five years for each employee to recognise their length of service and contribution in staff forests

We will follow the WaterUK Tree Planting Guidelines to ensure transparency and that our approach is in accordance with other water companies.

Monitoring and engagement

Working to protect and enhance biodiversity is only part of the story. We need to report our achievements, data and information so that our work can contribute to national and regional targets and to demonstrate our progress to our customers and wider stakeholders.

We will continue to use our data and information to inform and engage with regulators and other stakeholders and it is likely to feed into, and be influenced by, emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

We report our activities for biodiversity in a wide range of forms, from publication of studies in professional journals to press releases; from collection of biological data on habitats and species on our land (which we share with environmental records centres across our region) to information boards at sites open to the public.

Increasingly, we make information on our progress available online in order to engage the widest possible audience and to ensure transparency. For example, we have published summaries of each of our environmental investigations on our website through an interactive map.

We have identified targets throughout this document against which our progress can be measured. Where possible, we use recognised systems (such as the Biodiversity Metric developed by Natural England) to quantify our progress in order to ensure transparency.

Reporting against these targets will be undertaken annually, through our Conservation, Access and Recreation report, which seeks to draw together the various strands of our work to provide a comprehensive overview of our activities.

To deliver our aims, we will:

- report progress internally and externally to demonstrate the effectiveness of our work, lessons learnt and progress made
- report the widest possible range of Wessex Water activities that result in benefits to biodiversity
- publish an annual assessment to quantify and qualify biodiversity work across our business as part of conservation, access and recreation (CAR) report
- review this biodiversity action plan within five years, in line with the company business planning process, or sooner if there are significant changes in external approaches
- provide information to our customers, stakeholders and the public through our website and other channels
- improve our data collection and management, eg, by introducing a comprehensive Geographical Information System (GIS) to quantify and track biodiversity assets and changes
- engage with our customers and stakeholders to ensure their priorities and ambitions for biodiversity are understood and, where feasible, incorporated within our plans.



Working to
enhance our
region's
biodiversity



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