

Best Practice Information Sheet

Managing wetlands

Sheet 40.0a

Introduction

Why change?

Wetlands can provide a range of environmental benefits and may save you money as well as being an important wildlife habitat. Good management can balance commercial and wildlife interests on a sustainable basis. Different kinds of wetlands offer different opportunities and their location, particularly in relation to drains, ditches and run-off, is key. It is important that wetlands form a part of your farm plan to provide:

- summer grazing
- water quality improvement
- pollution control
- wildlife habitat and biodiversity.



Wetlands can be valuable assets

Steps to success

- 1. Review the current situation** by identifying wetlands on your farm. There are many types of wetlands and their appearance can vary depending upon their management. Check whether the wetland site is designated or under agreements and review management requirements. For further information on how to recognise the different types of wetlands that you might find on your farm, see Sheet 41.
- 2. Identify potential opportunities** for balancing commercial and environmental benefits that your wetlands can provide. The potential to modify, rehabilitate or create wetlands requires that management decisions are appropriate to the location, and physical and chemical characteristics, of your wetland, and its existing or potential value for diversification and/or biodiversity (see Sheets 42, 43 and 44).
- 3. Calculate the cost-benefit of these opportunities** by evaluating the site and comparing the costs of modification, rehabilitation and creation of wetlands as part of your farm plan. Many wetlands have been degraded but have the potential to be restored using simple management techniques. Changes to drainage networks such as the blocking of drains or diversion of ditches, or reduction in fertiliser usage may be all that is necessary to restore some wetlands. Look out for these opportunities to assess the potential for wetland restoration. Good wetland management can save you money and often result in direct financial benefits or enhance opportunities for your farming business that include:
 - reduction in the risk of environmental pollution and costs of legal action or civil claims for damages
 - protection of water quality in rivers
 - reduced waste management costs
 - reduced costs of drainage
 - improved summer grazing, when production on drier land may be limited
 - enhanced wildlife habitat
 - increased potential for diversification or support to existing accommodation enterprise.
- 4. Develop an action plan** for managing your wetlands:
 - assess the variety of commercial and conservation benefits your wetlands might provide
 - determine the types of benefits you want to achieve from good wetland management
 - decide on priorities for action, implement new management techniques gradually and assess your progress on a continual basis
 - investigate funding available for wetlands under Environmental Stewardship and other agri-environment schemes.

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Sheet 40.0b

Practical examples



Wetlands for grazing (see Sheet 43):

- The natural supply of water in wetlands ensures that plants continue to grow even during dry summer periods.
- Wetland areas can provide valuable grazing when forage may be of limited supply on better quality agricultural land.
- Grazing may be vital to maintaining the wildlife interest of some wetland habitats.

Wetlands for conservation (see Sheet 44):

- Original wetlands in many countries have now been largely destroyed. The remaining areas serve as valuable habitats to a wide range of extremely rare plants and animals.
- The presence of wetlands enhances wildlife habitats and interest on the farm.
- Wetlands can support enterprises such as tourism and fishing.
- Wildlife conservation wetlands help to maintain the structure and function of natural systems.



Wetlands for water quality (see Sheet 42)

Remember

- Wetlands can provide a range of environmental benefits, many of which can save money.
- Wetlands offer opportunities to maintain diversity and rare habitats on your farm.
- Check cross compliance regulations regarding overgrazing and unsuitable supplementary feeding on natural or semi-natural vegetation (GAEC 9) and vehicle movement on waterlogged land (GAEC 3).
- Funding for wetland creation, restoration and management is available under Environmental Stewardship and other agri-environment schemes

For further information: Defra (www.defra.gov.uk), Environment Agency (www.environment-agency.gov.uk), ECSFDI (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/landmanage/water/csf/delivery-initiative.htm>), Natural England (www.naturalengland.org.uk), Cross Compliance Helpline 0845 345 1302 (www.crosscompliance.org.uk) and ART (www.associationofrivertrusts.org.uk)



This information sheet is part of a series providing farmers with advice on land management practices to protect water bodies, produced by Association of Rivers Trusts with support from the England Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery Initiative. The advice will also enable farmers to use farm resources more efficiently and help meet Nitrate Vulnerable Zone and Soil Protection Review requirements under Cross Compliance and environmental regulation.



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