

Best Practice Information Sheet

Managing wetlands

Sheet 41.0a

Recognising wetlands

Why change?

Wetlands are areas of land, which, under natural conditions, remain waterlogged for most of the year. Wetlands are valuable assets. By mapping them on your farm, you can start to understand the way they function and the benefits of their management including:

- grazing during summer or periods of limited forage
- improved water quality
- pollution control
- increased biodiversity and farm diversification potential.



Wetland areas are present on many farms

Steps to success

1. **Review the current situation** by marking wetlands (sometimes referred to as bog, fen, marsh or moorland), on your farm map. They can often be found on valley footslopes, where groundwater may seep out at the surface, and in other low-lying positions such as at the back of river floodplains. Distinctive types of vegetation and soils will indicate the presence of wetlands and include:
 - fen, tussocky grassland or willow scrub
 - patches of rush in improved grass fields
 - cultivated topsoils which are very dark coloured or greyish and mottled gleyed soils
 - ground conditions that are softer than surrounding areas
 - the presence of standing water on the land following rain or flooding.
2. **Identify potential opportunities** for wetland management on your farm, which can provide a wide range of environmental benefits, as well as increasing the potential for diversification. Different wetlands provide different benefits. It is important to map your wetlands so that they can be managed appropriately and the opportunities for restoration assessed. Many wetlands have been degraded but have the potential to be restored using simple management techniques, such as blocking drains or diverting surface water.
3. **Calculate the cost-benefit of these opportunities** by comparing the costs of good or improved management techniques such as time, machinery and labour, against the potential benefits which include:
 - reduced 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 drainage costs
 - improved summer grazing when production on drier land may be limited
 - enhanced wildlife habitat
 - increased potential for diversification or support to existing accommodation enterprise.
 - wetlands attract payments under agri-environment schemes such as Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) and Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)
4. **Develop an action plan** for mapping and evaluating your wetlands in order to sustain commercial and conservation functions. Remember that the appearance of wetlands can alter seasonally.

Managing wetlands

Sheet 41.0b

Recognising wetlands - Examples of wetland habitats



Culm Grassland



Marsh



Reedbeds



Footslope wetland



Rush growing in pasture



Willow carr

Remember

- Different wetlands provide different commercial and conservation benefits to your farm.
- Wetlands attract payments under agri-environment schemes such as Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) and Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)

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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