Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

POLICY AND STRATEGY, DOCUMENT

A 30by30 framework for Wales

Protecting 30% land, freshwater, and sea for people and nature by 2030.

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Introduction

The misty moors, lush Celtic rainforests, and rugged coasts of Wales are integral to our national identity, shaping our history, culture, economy, health, and wellbeing. Yet the resilience of these cherished places is not secure. We rely on a rich and complex web of life – genes, species, and ecosystems - that regulates our climate, manages water, inspires art, and underpins production of healthy food, amongst other vital services. As we face the **nature emergency** (https://www.climateaction.gov.wales/climate-change/the-nature-emergency/), restoring and protecting the web of life that supports **social, economic, and ecological resilience** (https://www.futuregenerations.wales/a-resilient-wales/) is the essence of Welsh Government's commitment to '30by30'; the **global target** (https://www.cbd.int/gbf/targets/3) to protect 30% of land, freshwater, and sea for people and nature by 2030.

Nature exists in a physical space. 30by30 underscores the principle that protecting this space for nature is essential to restoring it. Sitting within our **Nature Recovery Action Plan** (https://www.gov.wales/nature-recovery-action-plan), this framework for 30by30 in Wales outlines our overall approach and articulates the criteria for areas contributing to the target. It confirms the role our protected areas and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) will play in securing a resilient network of nature-rich spaces that current and future generations can enjoy and benefit from.

30by30 criteria

At the core of 30by30 is a recognition that drawing boundary lines on maps alone neither protects nor conserves and restores nature. Meaningful achievement of the target will embrace an inclusive, co-led, and participatory approach that secures long-term outcomes for people and nature.

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With input from stakeholders, we developed a set of criteria that areas reported under the 30by30 target need to meet, aligning with the requirements of the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** (https://www.cbd.int/gbf/targets/3) (GBF) and International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN):

Protected and conserved areas reported under the 30by30 target in Wales will:

1. Support living organisms and types of habitats that are legally protected and/or of **principal importance** (https://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/Section-7) for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in relation to Wales, sustaining and restoring ecosystem functions and services that are critical for the wellbeing of current and future generations.
2. Contribute towards a proportionate representation of the full range of ecosystems, ecological processes, and ecoregions present in Wales.
3. Aim to contribute to a structurally and functionally connected network with habitat corridors that permit the flow of genes, species, and natural resources, allowing resilience to change.
4. Be effectively managed in perpetuity, establishing a fair and accountable mechanism by 2030 to demonstrate long-term positive outcomes for biodiversity and ecosystems resilience ***in situ*** (https://www.cbd.int/convention/articles/default.shtml?a=cbd-02). This includes addressing threats and pressures that may affect the area's biodiversity values. Positive outcomes should persist indefinitely, being proven through legal or similarly well-defined means for at least **25 years** (https://iucn.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/iucn-wcpa-technical-note-14.pdf).
5. Integrate high-quality, standardised, monitoring, and evidence to support effective management both on the ground and at the national level. Ensure the use and management of biodiversity data adopts **FAIR** (https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/) principles i.e., findability, accessibility, interoperability, and reusability.
6. Contribute to the **sustainable management of natural resources (SMNR)** (https://www.gov.wales/sustainable-management-natural-resources-guide).

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7. Be established, managed, and governed such that the costs and benefits of 30by30 areas are shared **equitably** (https://www.iied.org/20386iied), and will involve transparent, accountable, and inclusive participation in decision-making, recognising the rights, livelihoods, and diversity of the people of Wales.

The 30by30 Target

30by30 is otherwise known as **Target 3** (https://www.cbd.int/gbf/targets/3) of the Convention on Biological Diversity's Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, agreed upon by 196 countries, including Wales through the UK. The full definition reads as follows:

Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognising indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognising and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.

Areas contributing to the 30by30 target

Protected Areas

The IUCN defines a protected area as*a clearly defined geographical space,*

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recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.

For the purposes of 30by30 in Wales, **protected areas** (https://naturalresources.wales/guidance-and-advice/environmental-topics/wildlife-and-biodiversity/protected-areas-of-land-and-seas/types-of-protected-areas-of-land-and-sea/) meeting the 30by30 target will have at least one of the following designations across their entirety:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs)
- Ramsar sites
- Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- National Nature Reserves (NNRs), where underpinned by SSSIs

Including overlapping designations, these areas cover **~11%** (https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/ukbi-c1-protected-areas/#key-results-figure-c1i-extent-of-uk-nationally-and-internationally-important-protected-areas-a-on-land-and-b-at-sea-1950-to-2023) of Wales' land (0.2 million ha) and **~69%** (https://senedd.wales/media/dd0bvfob/gen-ld17000-e.pdf) of Wales' inshore marine area (1 million ha) as of 2025.

The **Biodiversity Deep Dive** (https://www.gov.wales/biodiversity-deep-dive-recommendations) recommendations included a commitment to transform the protected sites series so that it is better, bigger and more effectively connected. In identifying new protected areas, existing guidelines will be applied e.g. JNCC's site selection **guidelines** (https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/guidelines-for-selection-of-sssis/) for biological SSSIs.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) use a series of "**common standards** (https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/assets/0450edfd-a56b-4f65-aff6-3ef66187dc81)" for the monitoring of biodiversity within SSSIs, SACs, and SPAs in line with the other

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UK statutory nature conservation bodies. Assessments in Wales reflect the condition of key species and habitats (‘interest features’).

For SSSIs, SACs, and SPAs to count towards the 30by30 target in Wales, only those with evidence supporting a ‘favourable’ or ‘unfavourable recovering’ condition assessment will be included. Implementing the recommendations from the **30by30 Monitoring and Evidence Expert Group** (https://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/30-by-30-in-Wales-Monitoring-and-Evidence), feature-based assessments, remote sensing, and robust expert judgement will provide the basis for extent-based condition estimates.

Land managers responsible for 30by30 protected areas will be supported to improve their condition. For example, farmers responsible for “designated sites” will have access to a range of universal, optional, and collaborative actions in the Sustainable Farming Scheme designed to enhance the condition of the site’s notifying features.

An enhanced nature recovery role for Designated Landscapes

National Parks and National Landscapes are collectively termed ‘Designated Landscapes’ in Wales. These designations are recognised internationally as **IUCN Category V** (https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/PAG-021.pdf) protected areas for their unique ecological, biological, cultural, and scenic properties. However, not all areas within these landscapes are managed explicitly for nature. Therefore, by definition, the full extent of Designated Landscapes cannot contribute to the 30% target.

Covering 25% of Wales and a significant proportion of priority habitats, **Designated Landscapes** (https://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/30-by-30-in-Wales-Designated-Landscapes) must be a critical focus for reaching 30by30. In practice, this means increasing the proportion of these special landscapes

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driving nature recovery – specifically, those that meet the criteria for inclusion in the 30% target. Doing so can be achieved by harnessing **landscape recovery partnerships** (https://www.gov.wales/ffermio-bro-farming-designated-landscapes). Key to this effort is the engagement and collective stewardship of the people living in, working in, and enjoying these landscapes. This includes the relevant authorities and landowners responsible for their management, many of whom depend on the land for their livelihoods.

Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)

We want to recognise and empower exceptional stewardship for nature outside of protected areas. Achieving the 30by30 target depends on working alongside the communities, individuals, and organisations who already manage areas that are rich in biodiversity but fall outside traditional protected areas.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) defines these areas as "**OECMs** (https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-08-en.pdf)" - "*a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and, where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socioeconomic, and other locally relevant values".*

OECMs are an opportunity for the custodians of our land and seascapes to showcase and support positive delivery for both nature and people. Recognition will be **voluntary**, based on the free, prior, and informed consent of those managing an area.

Importantly, OECM status is a recognition, not a regulation. It does not oblige additional management requirements for landowners. Instead, it acknowledges - through legal or similarly well-defined means - where conservation outcomes are

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already being achieved through existing governance and management.

Our approach is founded on **IUCN guidance** (https://iucn.org/resources/publication/guidance-other-effective-area-based-conservation-measures-oecms), and will use a toolkit co-designed with stakeholders to identify and enhance areas aligning with our 30by30 criteria. This approach will integrate and build on existing public and private mechanisms, such as the Sustainable Farming Scheme.

Once identified, these areas will be publicly recognised as OECMs. This recognition provides a foundation for attracting further public and private investment, ensuring long-term, equitable incentives that support nature recovery.

Areas on a pathway to recovery will be recognised for their contribution to ecosystem restoration. Full OECM status will be granted once there is clear evidence that significant outcomes for the *in situ* conservation of biodiversity are being delivered and are expected to endure in the long term.

Our **OECMs expert group** (https://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/Other-Effective-Area-based-Conservation-Measures) identified areas outside of protected areas that could qualify as OECMs, providing 30by30 criteria are met. These include, but are not limited to:

- Areas effectively managed for biodiversity within the Welsh Government estate.
- Sites of Importance to Nature Conservation and Local Nature Reserves, including those owned by local authorities.
- Areas owned by environmental non-governmental organisations.
- Areas owned by public authorities being managed for biodiversity under the **Section 6 Duty.** (https://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/Section-6)
- Areas protected for historical or cultural values that achieve *in situ* biodiversity conservation.
- Areas owned and/or managed by private individuals, farmers, community

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groups, or managed as common land.
- Areas managed as nature-rich habitat by farmers within the Sustainable Farming Scheme.
- Areas managed as colliery spoils and brownfield sites.
- Areas delivering more effective ancillary or secondary biodiversity conservation, such as water catchment areas and traditional land management systems that maintain high levels of biodiversity.
- Areas providing a connection between protected areas i.e., buffer and connectivity zones.
- Areas managed for biodiversity by Landscape Partnerships, such as within the Sustainable Farming Scheme **Collaborative layer** (https://www.gov.wales/integrated-natural-resources-scheme).

Sustainably managed areas, that support ecosystem resilience, but are unlikely to qualify as OECMs include:

- Intensively managed landscapes with limited biodiversity value.
- Forests that are managed commercially for timber supply.
- Fishery closures or other fisheries management tools, which might be subject to periodic exploitation.
- Agricultural lands managed in a manner that limits *in-situ* conservation.
- Biodiversity or conservation measures that apply to a single species over a wide geographical area.

Creating Resilient Ecological Networks (RENs)

Protected areas and OECMs will form the heart of nationwide Resilient Ecological Networks (RENs) (**Figure 1**). RENs are a concept coined in Wales to describe *networks of habitat in good ecological condition linking protected sites and other biodiversity hotspots across the wider landscape, providing maximum benefit for biodiversity and well-being. Such nature networks have existing or potential for healthy resilient ecosystems which provide a range of important*

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ecosystem services as well as allowing the movement of species across landscapes in response to climate change. The RENs approach is integrated into existing Welsh legislation, thematic and spatial strategies, and policy frameworks, providing long-term support to 30by30 and the wider aspirations of the **GBF** (https://www.cbd.int/gbf/).

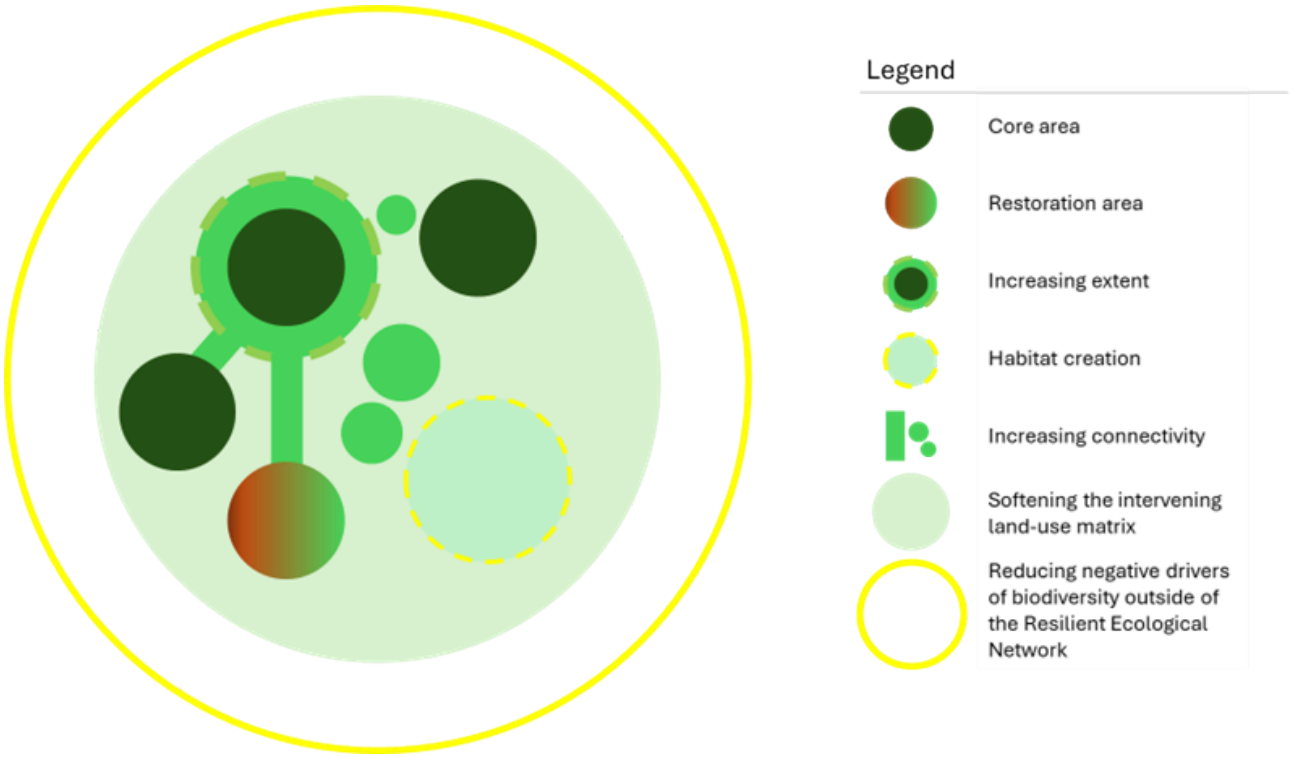

Figure 1 Conceptual resilient ecological network, incorporating plausible actions to increase network resilience, such as increasing connectivity through habitat corridors and stepping stones. Based on the **Practitioners' guide to Resilient Ecological Networks** (https://naturalresources.wales/guidance-and-advice/environmental-topics/land-management/practitioners-guide-to-resilient-ecological-networks/) and **Defining and delivering resilient ecological networks: Nature conservation in England - Isaac - 2018 - Journal of Applied Ecology - Wiley Online Library** (https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1365-2664.13196)

The concept of RENs recognises that ecosystem processes occur at a

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landscape scale and often beyond the boundaries of individual sites. The resilience of ecosystems relies on these processes, such as pollination and seed dispersal, on being functionally and structurally connected.

We have developed a set of "**Nature Networks** (https://smnr-nrw.hub.arcgis.com/apps/c7770d2881394c899123bae210afe370/explore)" maps (**alternate link** (https://datamap.gov.wales/layergroups/geonode:nrw_priority_ecological_networks)) that indicate areas of land providing functional connectivity between protected areas. These will guide the strategic, co-operative development of RENs – integrating protected areas and OECMs. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have **published** (https://naturalresources.wales/guidance-and-advice/environmental-topics/land-management/ecosystem-resilience-field-guide/?lang=en) **guidance** (https://naturalresources.wales/guidance-and-advice/environmental-topics/land-management/practitioners-guide-to-resilient-ecological-networks/?lang=en) for practitioners to develop RENs collaboratively with stakeholders, including landscape partners, to deliver for nature recovery and the ecosystem services they provide. NRW's **Area Statements** (https://naturalresources.wales/areastatements) will also provide much needed evidence for the planning and delivery of RENs.

Monitoring 30by30

Our **Monitoring and Evidence Expert Group** (https://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/30-by-30-in-Wales-Monitoring-and-Evidence) has developed a high-level 30by30 monitoring framework. It encompasses a range of potential metrics that will evaluate delivery and hold progress accountable, reporting towards the GBF's suite of indicators including **Headline Indicator 3.1** (https://www.gbf-indicators.org/metadata/headline/3-1).

Evidence supporting our evaluation of 30by30 will need to demonstrate clear progress in delivery across the 30by30 criteria and the necessary impacts being

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made. The State of Natural Resources Report will be a key mechanism for reporting.

In Wales, we will use the **Management Effectiveness of Protected and Conserved Areas** (https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/mepca-indicator/) (MEPCA) tool as a component of our monitoring framework. The MEPCA indicator has been developed by **JNCC** (https://jncc.gov.uk/) to assess the management effectiveness of protected and conserved areas (including OECMs), with its focus on the achievement of conservation outcomes. It is listed as a complementary indicator for Target 3 in the **GBF monitoring framework** (https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-05-en.pdf).

A vision for 30by30 in Wales

Our vision for 30by30 in Wales is for a thriving, interconnected, comprehensive, equitably governed, and resilient network of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures spanning land, freshwater, and sea – contributing to ecosystem resilience and resulting in the halting and reversal of biodiversity decline in Wales.

Implementing 30by30 will be a significant challenge unless the drivers of biodiversity loss are reduced. It is essential 30by30 sits within a wider transformative approach to support nature recovery across the whole of Wales, including **restoring** (https://www.cbd.int/gbf/targets/2) degraded ecosystems, tackling key drivers of biodiversity loss such as **pollution** (https://www.cbd.int/gbf/targets/7) and **invasive species** (https://www.cbd.int/gbf/targets/6), and achieving **sustainable forestry, agriculture, and fisheries** (https://www.cbd.int/gbf/targets/10).

Our strategic approach will be guided by the **Section 6 duty** (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2016/3/notes/division/2/1/6) to '*maintain and*

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enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems', **the 7 wellbeing goals and 5 ways of working** (https://www.gov.wales/well-being-of-future-generations-wales), and the **sustainable management of natural resources** (https://www.gov.wales/sustainable-management-natural-resources-guide), and integrated into our broader objectives, including climate resilience and food security.

Achieving this vision requires collective effort across Government, key delivery organisations, and the people of Wales. Together, we can create a future where nature and people live in **harmony** (https://www.cbd.int/gbf/vision). *Daw eto haul ar fryn.*

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