
Achieving 30x30 in Wales

Ecological resilience in Designated Landscapes



Through science we can

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Recommendations

1. Integrating Nature Recovery to Management Plans

The Management Plans of Designated Landscapes are a key opportunity to put Nature Recovery ambition and action at the forefront of the ongoing work of these landscapes. The BES' ABCD criteria assist the development and delivery of nature recovery in an inclusive way, aligned with Designated Landscapes ways of working.

Recommendation for A: Not all land in Designated Landscapes currently delivers for nature in the long term – for an area to be considered for 30 by 30, it must be covered by a long term management plan.

Recommendation for B: To build ecological resilience the DECCA framework should be central to all plans for Designated Landscapes. Nature recovery and improving biodiversity will require Designated Landscapes to report on a selection of biodiversity metrics beyond a measure of area.

Recommendation for C: To evidence effective management of Designated Landscapes for 30by30 and beyond, there must be a concerted effort to increase skills and knowledge across the existing network. Nature Recovery will not be successful without appropriate resourcing to deliver the critical data collection and analysis required.

Recommendation for D: Future Management Plans must be developed and delivered inclusively, with genuine consultation and engagement of those who live in, work in or visit Designated Landscapes. The contributions of community-level work and citizen science should be properly recognised.

2. Expanding and strengthening collaboration

National Parks and National Landscapes must build upon their existing collaborations to deliver for nature at a landscape scale. Seeking new collaborative relationships with those within and outside of Designated Landscapes will drive both engagement and funding for nature recovery.

3. Building green skills and embracing new technologies

To capitalise on new methods and technologies in ecology, as well as to make best use of limited resources, green skills should be built up within Designated Landscapes. For example, the need for strengthened GIS (Geographical Information System) capabilities within Designated Landscapes.

Rationale

The British Ecological Society (BES) published a report on 'Protected Areas and Nature Recovery' in 2022¹ which recommended transformative changes in thinking and policy were needed to the UK to meet its international commitments to 30by30. Protected areas need to evolve to deliver for nature, but meaningful area-based conservation requires empowered and resourced statutory agencies, communities and landowners. The **effectiveness** of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) are key to addressing biodiversity loss.

As part of the Welsh Government's Biodiversity Deep Dive, the Designated Landscapes (DLs) Working Group took forward the BES' ABCD criteria to explore what this means in a Welsh context. In January 2025, the BES held a workshop with the Working Group and ecologists to explore the BES' ABCD criteria, and to identify barriers and opportunities for DLs to contribute to 30by30.

Background

Setting the context

The Biodiversity Deep Dive Designated Landscapes Working Group is looking at how DLs can support biodiversity. He highlighted the urgency needed to deal with the nature and climate crises, citing the immediate and intense relationship between communities and the environment. The current lack of pace was noted in the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure (CCEI) Committee report published recently on 'halting and reversing nature loss by 2030'.²

DLs have a broad remit, and delivering this remit in a way that maximises opportunities for people to better understand and enjoy these places is a big ask. This ask is especially difficult when in some cases the bodies charged with managing DLs own very little of the land themselves. This means that to get things done, partnerships, coalitions, networks and personal relationships are invaluable.

Designated Landscapes and biodiversity

National Parks have two primary purposes: "to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage; and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of national parks by the public"³, Which are slightly different from the purposes of National Landscapes: "to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area"⁴.

1 Protected Areas and Nature Recovery, British Ecological Society, 2022: https://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/BES_Protected_Areas_Report.pdf

2 Halting and reversing the loss of nature by 2030, Welsh Parliament CCEI Committee, January 2025: <https://senedd.wales/media/ts0f1ekc/cr-ld16916-e.pdf>

3 National Parks purposes: <https://www.nationalparks.uk/what-is-a-national-park/>

4 National Landscapes purpose: <https://national-landscapes.org.uk/faq>



National Parks are delivering on the sustainable land management objectives: “to produce food and other goods in a sustainable manner; to mitigate and adapt to climate change; to maintain and enhance the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide; and to conserve and enhance the countryside and cultural resources and promote public access to and engagement with them, and to sustain the Welsh language and promote and facilitate its use.”⁵

The fourth sustainable land management objective “to conserve and enhance the countryside and cultural resources and promote public access to and engagement with them” maps onto the National Park and National Landscapes purposes, but there are tensions as we need to move towards thinking more ecologically and delivering on nature recovery. The Welsh Government’s Biodiversity Deep Dive made recommendations for Designated Landscapes, OECMs and monitoring – National Parks and National Landscapes, as designated areas, are responsible for implementing recommendations from all sub-groups, not just those specifically focused on Designated Landscapes.

Priority Ecological Networks

Wales’ Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFGA)⁶ includes a goal for “reversing the decline in biodiversity by 2030, and recovering biodiversity by 2050 as part of the milestones within the WFGA.” Ecosystem resilience can be difficult to assess and difficult to measure. Ecosystems are complex and dynamic, with interactions at different scales and differing responses to disturbance.

Resilient Ecological Networks (RENs)⁷ should be developed at the local scale with local experts and landscapes partnerships, as opposed to at the national scale. The first step to developing RENs is looking at our protected sites, many of which are not in good condition. They can be too small or too isolated to be resilient on their own, but have great potential when considered within a landscape of other high value nature sites.

5 Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asc/2023/4/section/1/enacted>

6 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/contents>

7 Terrestrial and freshwater Resilient Ecological Networks: a guide for practitioners in Wales, NRW, March 2021: <https://nrwcmsv13-a3hwekacajb3frbw.a02.azurefd.net/1cljd5ax/resilient-ecological-networks-wales-handbook.pdf?rmode=pad&v=1db135193bf5430>

Considering the BES' ABCD criteria in Wales

A: Area delivers for nature in the long term

- **What is 'long term' from an ecological perspective?**

The BES report considers 25 years as a minimum time frame for an area to deliver for nature in the long term. This is supported by the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas who elaborate that 25 years is a minimum, alongside the intent to plan for the future.⁸
- **Other views of 'long term'**

Long term for ecology may not align with how other stakeholders understand long term – funding timelines can be as little as a year or two years, whereas corporate reporting occurs on a five year cycle. Landowners may be bound to land management agreements that are much shorter than 25 years, and extension may not be possible.

25 years is also longer than the political cycle in Wales – but to deliver for nature, we need to be able to discuss delivering actions for longer than political terms.
- **Timelines should relate to activity and purpose**

Timelines should relate to activity and purpose – our societal timelines (e.g. one year budgets, four year parliamentary terms, 2030 commitments) offer a chance to reflect, but ecological timelines will be driven by processes and methodologies.
- **Maintaining a sense of urgency and gaining will**

Maintaining a sense of urgency to address the nature crisis is important – it was noted that 'long-term' cannot come at the expense of immediacy. This is especially critical for building both public and political will to take action.

B: Build ecological resilience and improve biodiversity

- **Ecological resilience approach in Wales**

The ecosystem resilience approach is being developed in Wales– which considers ecosystem functionality and services. This works in partnership with the DECCA framework (Diversity, Extent, Condition, Connectivity and Aspects of ecosystem resilience).⁹

The distinction between structural and functional is important and links to DECCA. Diversity is both structural (diverse habitats, array of structures within habitats, structures between habitats) and functional (ecological diversity); extent is structural; condition is functional; connectivity is both structural (physical connections) and functional (patch availability, distances, patch suitability etc.) and adaptability is functional.

8 Technical Note on Defining 'long-term' for protected areas and OECMs, IUCN WCPA, July 2024: <https://iucn.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/iucn-wcpa-technical-note-14.pdf>

9 Ecosystem Resilience in a Nutshell, NRW: <https://cdn.cyfoethnaturiol.cymru/media/696279/ecosystem-resilience-in-a-nutshell-1-what-is-ecosystem-resilience.pdf>

- **Combining holistic and targeted approaches**

It was noted that taking an ecosystem resilience approach should not exclude action on vulnerable species, e.g. the Natur am Byth¹⁰ programme is focussed on saving species from extinction in Wales. A combination of both holistic and targeted approaches are needed to improve biodiversity.

Building ecological resilience across Wales will require widening focus beyond designated sites.

C: Conservation outcomes achieved through effective management and monitoring

- **Data collection and baselining**

Effective management must be grounded in baseline data and a suitable data collection programme. There are emerging opportunities around new and improving technologies, such as remote sensing, to boost data collection capacity. The development of a shared framework for monitoring is key to achieving this.¹¹

- **Resourcing**

Resourcing is a critical issue for both effective management and monitoring. There must be careful consideration of capacity and resourcing for data collection and analysis, as well as keeping data accessible.

- **Skills**

A skills audit of DLs teams could be a useful tool to map where skills and knowledge sit within the network to highlight where there are gaps. These gaps can be addressed through collaborative working through TCLW, and partnerships with academia. Strengthened GIS capabilities within DLs was highlighted as a key skills gap¹² with developing technology and methods of ecological data collection to allow for effective management.

10 Natur am Byth! Saving Wales' threatened species: <https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/what-we-do/our-projects/our-nature-projects/natur-am-byth/?lang=en>

11 Initial recommendations of the 30 by 30 Monitoring and Evidence Expert Group for Wales, 2025, <https://nrwwbp.blob.core.windows.net/media/documents/Initial-recommendations-of-the-30-by-30-Monitoring-and-Evidence-Expert-Group-for-Wales.pdf>

12 Berry, G, Cosson, T, Davies, H, Davies, K, Hadfield, T, Johnstone, T, Jones A, Lovell, R, Owen, R, Sinnadurai, P, Story, E, 2024. Initial recommendations of the Designated Landscapes expert group for Wales. 61pp, Designated Landscapes expert group, <https://landscapeswales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Initial-recommendations-of-the-Designated-Landscapes-Expert-Group-for-Wales.pdf>



D: Developed and delivered inclusively

- **Nature connectedness**

The cultural and policy context in Wales lends itself to a people-centred approach to nature, and an emphasis in society on nature connection. However, it was noted that there is still a lot of developing work on good governance and equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) needed to embed a truly inclusive approach.

- **Resourcing**

There remains a gap in resourcing between public bodies and community groups – with attempts to fill this gap with an all-Wales approach. Attendees highlighted their organisations’ considering young people as a strategic priority, with the importance of intergenerational conservation projects such as the Penpont Project at Bannau Brycheiniog.¹³ It was also noted that the development of National Nature Service Wales¹⁴ may support future resourcing needs.

- **Recognising contributions**

Currently some community-level work that feeds into Management Plans doesn’t get recognition. It was noted that recognising the contributions of community groups and facilitating access to support for these groups to contribute is essential to close this gap.

- **Consultation and engagement**

Meetings and workshops to discuss interventions for nature recovery often involve staff who attend as part of their role, but land owners and farmers may be unable to attend without financial incentive, which can result in gaps in engagement. It was noted that there has been a public consultation for the proposed new National Park in North East Wales. The process has involved online and in-person events and has been carried out over a long time to allow for issues raised to be addressed. Ultimately someone needs to make a decision and it is important to note that codesign doesn’t mean consensus – it was noted that sometime existing power structures between ‘owners’ and ‘users’ can result in conflict.

13 The Penpont Project: <https://future.bannau.wales/action/the-penpont-project/>

14 Nature Service Wales: <https://natureservice.wales/>

Reporting on 30by30

Data needs and uses

- **Access to data:**

Challenges arise from both a lack of data and a lack of access to data that does exist.

Data usage across Wales can be uneven, which leads to a lack of baseline data, especially when dealing with social science data.

Where there is access to data, DLs often have a lack of capacity to use and analyse it.

- **Monitoring and reporting:**

Monitoring efforts across Wales are fragmented, there are opportunities to increase capacity by joining up existing datasets and pooling resources. This facilitates effective management to take place as this data is required to make informed decisions.

Management Effectiveness of Protected and Conserved Areas (MEPCA) Indicator

The MEPCA Indicator¹⁵ has been listed as a complementary indicator under Target 3¹⁶ of the Monitoring Framework (often referred to as 30 by 30, as the target is for 30% of land, waters and sea to be effectively conserved by 2030) agreed at COP15.

- **Awareness of MEPCA indicator:**

Strong support from across participants for a full briefing on the MEPCA Indicator from JNCC specifically for National Parks and National Landscapes – many saw this as an opportunity for cross-border learning to be shared.

- **Skills within DLs in Wales to contribute data needed for the MEPCA indicator:**

There were concerns raised about the potential additional burden of producing monitoring reports without any gain to individual DLs – highlighting the importance of the MEPCA Indicator being linked with Management Plans where possible so as not to result in additional work. Where there are challenges measuring processes and functions, as opposed to features, integrating DECCA and MEPCA was considered a positive.

Attendees emphasised that those working in DLs are pulled in all directions and have no additional capacity, so may not prioritise gathering data for MEPCA. Citizen Science was raised as a possible tool to both engage the local community and land owners, as well as to collect monitoring data – with the caveat that this would require additional capacity for quality control and data analysis.

It was noted that there is an opportunity to support upskilling of DLs teams. Retaining and developing existing DL teams would benefit both reporting on 30by30 and increasing capacity within DLs.

15 MEPCA Indicator: <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/mepca-indicator/>

16 Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework: <https://www.cbd.int/gbf/targets/3>

Management Plans

- **Ecological resilience and monitoring:**

Integration of monitoring into Management Plans is essential because monitoring requires the setting of output and outcome objectives to be monitored. So is a feedback process to ensure that management is informed by evidence that arises from monitoring. This is how common standards monitoring works, for example. Monitoring is often considered as an afterthought but needs to be built into processes from the beginning to get best value for money, and baseline data surveillance.

- **Consistency across Wales:**

Different Designated Landscape bodies approach the process in their own way – there needs to be room for landscape bodies to manage themselves individually – too much standardisation would not be appropriate with the range of scales of resource between them. Highlighting different approaches work well for different landscapes: Forum Yr Eryri works well for Yr Eryri, whilst the use of doughnut economics works well for Bannau Brycheiniog. We can aim to share and highlight effective practice without enforcing uniformity. Sharing of effective practices from DLs across the four nations of the UK was also seen as a benefit to attendees. However, there should be alignment in terms of monitoring and reporting, to ensure that nature recovery is on target, and communication of this with the public.

- **Prioritising actions for nature:**

Ecological resilience should feature in the objectives of Management Plans and weave through them, this is especially important in light of future climate change.

Resilient Ecological Networks could be employed as a process for prioritising actions for nature. With limited resources, what should be prioritised? Could we build up from individual sites to whole landscape scale?



Barriers and Opportunities

Competing land use

Complexity:

The complexity of land use within DLs is multifaceted, including people and nature connections, natural and cultural elements, the need for effective management and the need to meet regulatory standards. There are opportunities for public bodies to cut through and simplify these processes — more collegiate working and a passporting system could remedy this.

Designated Landscapes in Wales are not only rural landscapes, they include settlements too, so there are multiple objectives. There is a need to consider culture, history, traditions and economics – as these all feed into what defines a landscape.

Scale:

Scale is a key consideration – one thing may work across the whole of Wales, whilst another may only work across a specific region.

Competing land use can feel like an abstract subject as often discussed at planning level – the production of visuals of what landowners could do to contribute to nature recovery (hedgerows, small ponds, mosaics of habitats, etc) would be useful to show the wide variety of interventions that act as ‘stepping stones for nature’. This would help support awareness of what a Priority Ecological Network looks like.

Ffermio Bro (Farming in Designated Landscapes)

The Sustainable Farming Scheme¹⁷ will comprise of three layers – universal, optional and collaborative. A pilot programme for the collaborative layer has been announced for those farming in designated landscapes; Ffermio Bro “will integrate incentives for positive farming practices with the purposes of Designated Landscapes”.¹⁸

Networks and trust:

Building trust between farmers and DLs and is essential to achieve the transformative change needed to deliver nature recovery. Ffermio Bro could act as a bridge to identifying larger scale opportunities and investments, and enable all components of DECCA across the landscape.

The Nature Friendly Farming Network in Wales was noted as a good example of connecting farmers to ecology, and Ffermio Bro could be an opportunity to bring more ecological knowledge to farmers. With strengthened networks across DLs there is potential to create a kaleidoscopic landscape, for example through farmers working collaboratively to create rotating landscape types.

It was noted that England’s equivalent scheme (FiPL – Farming in Protected Landscapes) has been well received.¹⁹

17 Sustainable Farming Scheme, Welsh Government: <https://www.gov.wales/sustainable-farming-scheme>

18 Ffermio Bro: a new scheme for farmers in Designated Landscapes: <https://landscapeswales.org.uk/ffermio-bro-a-new-scheme-for-farmers-in-designated-landscapes/>

19 Farming in Protected Landscapes, Year 3 Report, 2025, <https://national-landscapes.files.svdcn.com/production/assets/images/Documents/Reports/Final-FiPL-Report-2025.pdf?dm=17411836044>

Timelines:

It is essential that the scheme functions long term to embed best practice and to build trust, with some concerns that Ffermio Bro may not continue beyond a pilot scheme – this would put new partnerships developed as part of the scheme at risk.

The benefits of securing long term funding of the scheme also include supporting farmers to deliver for nature in the long term – it would provide an opportunity for farmers to look at what they have now, how it could be improved, and identify the likely pressures and changes to natural assets. In the even longer term, support might be provided to share the learning with future farmers at local agricultural colleges. The scheme could provide a chance to upskill farmers, advisors and ecologists – resulting in benefits for both the landscapes and the careers of people within them.

Skills, resourcing and funding

Use of AI and other technology:

Increasing use of LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) and GIS (Geographic Information System) modelling – but still needs ground-truthing by ecologists.

Discussion around the use of AI and the need to ensure it is ‘ground-truthed’ on relevant data from Wales – and that this may differ across the multitude of landscapes in Wales alone.

Funding:

A key barrier highlighted was funding – the need to focus finite resource to get the best value for money. Short term funding requires staff to spend time on project development and reporting, and hinders their ability to think longer term. Acknowledging that funding goes beyond Welsh Government, and further work is needed to unlock private green finance. Collating examples where focused resource and funding has had positive impact as evidence for further investment (examples include peatland restoration across Wales²⁰).

Time and urgency:

It was noted that there is a mismatch between the speed at which actions are needed for nature recovery, and the speed at which change occurs through DLs and public bodies in Wales. Nature recovery needs to be prioritised in order to address this, especially as any delay in action is only compounded by the time taken to recover nature once interventions have been made. For example, nature recovery should be prioritised in Management Plans, but there is delay in action until this is the case – with new Management Plan guidance and a summary being prepared by NRW, time is of the essence to help guide DLs as they review their current Management Plans.

Communication and collaboration:

Building trust across large partnerships and collaborative groups takes time and substantial resource to maintain productively, whilst keeping all partners and stakeholders up to date with developments is key to making progress.

Language was noted an important consideration – not only the need to consider both Welsh and English, but also that DLs’ choice of words around nature recovery can have a huge impact – e.g. ‘Rewilding’ can be a difficult term to use in Wales.

²⁰ Peatland restoration in Wales: <https://www.gov.wales/welsh-government-beats-peatland-targets-year-early-saving-more-8000-tonnes-carbon-every-year>

Conclusion

Designated Landscapes in Wales are integral to meeting the challenge of reversing nature loss and building long-term ecological resilience. This report underscores the importance of embedding nature recovery into every aspect of the planning, delivery and monitoring of these landscapes, using the British Ecological Society's ABCD criteria — Area, Biodiversity, Condition and Delivery — as a guiding framework.

To deliver on these ambitions in a consistent and measurable way, the work of Designated Landscapes must now align with emerging tools for assessing management effectiveness, particularly the MEPCA (Management Effectiveness of Protected and Conserved Areas) indicator. MEPCA provides a structured and evidence-based way to assess whether protected areas are being managed in a manner that achieves conservation outcomes, and offers a valuable complement to the ABCD criteria. Integration of the DECCA framework (Diversity, Extent, Condition, Connectivity and Adaptability) further supports this by grounding action in ecological principles.

In addition to the many projects and programmes already in existence in Designated Landscapes to support nature recovery and climate action, Ffermio Bro offers a key opportunity to support positive farming practices that contribute directly to these outcomes. By embedding the principles of regenerative agriculture — such as restoring soil health, enhancing biodiversity, and reducing reliance on external inputs — Ffermio Bro can act as a delivery mechanism that links farm-level practice with positive landscape-scale change, monitoring and assessment.

To be effective, this integrated approach requires long-term resourcing, investment in monitoring and data systems, and the development of new skills across DL teams. Crucially, this must include building capacity to contribute data to tools like MEPCA and to interpret these assessments as part of adaptive management cycles. The inclusion of citizen science, community contributions and knowledge exchange networks will also be essential to maintaining momentum and legitimacy.

Wales is well-placed to lead in demonstrating how designated landscapes can deliver measurable, credible, and inclusive nature recovery. Being mindful of the ABCD criteria and the additional recommendations for protected landscapes as we deploy the MEPCA indicator ensures that ambitions are not only well-founded but can be tracked, evaluated, and improved over time — creating landscapes that are dynamic, resilient, and capable of supporting nature and people for generations to come.



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