

30by30 on land in England: confirmed criteria and next steps

29 October 2024

Introduction

The UK has committed to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 (30by30), to support the [global 30by30 target](#) agreed at the UN Biodiversity Summit (COP15) in 2022. Our commitment to this international target is enshrined within the 2023 [Environmental Improvement Plan](#), and we are currently undertaking a review of this plan to make sure it is fit for purpose to deliver on our ambitious targets for nature.

Our 30by30 commitment presents an important opportunity to demonstrate the UK's international leadership on nature conservation. Reaching this target will be supported by continued commitment to deliver on legally binding targets within the Environment Act 2021.

The piloting of the 30by30 assessment and reporting process, commenced in late 2024, and will be followed by the publication of full 30by30 guidance in 2025.

This sets out Government's approach to delivering 30by30 on land and inland water in England. At sea, we have 181 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), including 3 Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs), across 35,000 square miles or 40% of English waters. At the UK level, MPAs cover 38% of our seas, exceeding the marine coverage aspect of the 30by30 target.

Vision for 30by30 on land in England

Delivering the UK's 30by30 target on land in England means ensuring that the most important and wildlife-rich habitats are benefiting from effective, long-term conservation and management for nature. This includes existing habitats as well as those being created or restored as part of a long-term project. While some areas are not suitable for 30by30, our approach recognises that nature-friendly farming may be able to play a role in supporting 30by30.

Areas contributing towards 30by30 (30by30 areas) will include land within and beyond Protected Areas. These areas should be well-connected with each other and with the wider landscape, and should represent the range of wildlife-rich habitats and important species found in England. They will form the core of the Nature Recovery Network. This should include significant areas of our Protected Landscapes. This vision will be informed by the Land Use Framework, and Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Contributions towards 30by30 will be made on a voluntary basis, encouraging and supporting buy-in from landowners and land-managers. This will be integrated into existing mechanisms, such as Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes and Biodiversity Net Gain.

Applying the 30by30 criteria

Together, the criteria provide a comprehensive assessment to ensure that areas are effectively conserved and managed. An area must therefore meet all 3 criteria to be able to contribute towards 30by30.

The whole area being assessed should meet the criteria. However, exceptions can be made for very small parts of an area which may not meet the criteria, as long as these do not include any of the following excluded land uses or activities:

- built-up areas
- intensive farming or aquaculture
- intensive commercial forestry plantations
- active mining or oil or gas extraction
- major infrastructure, including motorways, A-roads or active railway lines or tracks

This does not include the verges or margins which may be bordering these areas.

An area contributing to 30by30 could be:

- an entire landholding or estate
- a section or part of a wider landholding or estate
- a cluster of individual, connected areas across multiple landholdings or estates, which are working together to deliver in-situ conservation and so could be considered as a single area

What matters is that the area meets the 3 criteria outlined below.

Confirmed criteria for 30by30 on land in England

Criteria have been developed, that land needs to meet, to contribute towards 30by30 in England. These focus on 3 themes:

1. Purpose
2. Protection
3. Management

Additional guidance on how each of these criteria can be met is being developed, along with the mechanism for assessing and reporting.

Criterion 1: Purpose

30by30 areas should be able to demonstrate that their purposes or management objectives will ensure the delivery of in-situ conservation outcomes. The area's purposes should include in-situ conservation, but this may not be its primary or sole purpose. Any wider purposes must be appropriately managed so as not to prevent or significantly limit the delivery of in-situ conservation outcomes.

Protected Sites and nature reserves are designated for the purpose of in-situ conservation, although they may have additional purposes. [Protected Sites on land](#) include the following designations:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
- National Nature Reserves (NNRs)
- Ramsar sites

Other areas may be delivering towards in-situ conservation outcomes, even if this is not the primary or sole purpose of the area. While some areas are unsuitable for 30by30, contributions to the target could include areas within or near our towns and cities, or within a larger area or farm primarily managed for food production.

Key metric: Will the purposes or management objectives for this area ensure the delivery of in-situ conservation outcomes?

Criterion 2: Protection

30by30 areas should be able to demonstrate that in-situ conservation will be sustained over the long term (at least 20 years), and that the area will be protected against loss or damage to important biodiversity values, through legal or other effective means. This includes protected area designations, conservation covenants, long-term ownership and relevant long-term management obligations.

This criterion confirms the long-term status of areas contributing towards 30by30. It recognises the role that long term management objectives and commitments can play in securing long-term conservation. Assessment against the management criterion below will ensure that management is being planned, implemented, and reviewed effectively, to deliver towards in-situ conservation outcomes.

Key metric: Is the conservation of this area secured for at least 20 years, through legal or other effective means?

Criterion 3: Management

30by30 areas should be effectively managed and able to demonstrate overall progress towards in-situ conservation outcomes.

Management should provide confidence that governance or ownership of the area has the mandate and capacity to achieve and sustain such outcomes. Management mechanisms should identify, implement and prioritise the delivery of in-situ conservation. Monitoring should be in place to identify baselines and assess progress.

Key metrics:

- Does the area's governance or ownership have the ability to implement reasonable management actions to achieve in-situ conservation outcomes?
- Is there a management plan or similar that is designed to deliver in-situ conservation outcomes?
- Are management measures being implemented, with appropriate monitoring, evaluation and learning in place to assess progress and inform future management?
- Is the area achieving, or making progress towards, in-situ conservation outcomes, with reasonable confidence that these outcomes will be achieved?

Areas that currently count towards 30by30

An initial review has been undertaken, of existing government analysis on the area of England's land recognised as already counting towards 30by30.

To be consistent with the criteria outlined above, SSSIs should only count towards the target when they are in favourable or unfavourable recovering condition. On this basis, the indicative figure for areas currently counting towards 30by30 has been revised (see Table 1).

These figures are indicative and intended to provide a general sense of the scale of action required to meet the UK's 30by30 commitment. This should not be considered a full and comprehensive analysis of the area of land likely to already be meeting the 30by30 criteria in England. Such analysis will be enabled through the development of the 30by30 assessment and reporting process and a 30by30 delivery strategy. Given differences between the below methodology and official SSSI reporting which may result in minor discrepancies, these figures should only be considered in a 30by30 context, and not considered for the evaluation of wider government targets or objectives.

Table 1. Indicative assessment of land currently counting towards 30by30

Area	Approx % of England (t Mean Low Water)
Total areas that currently count (indicative)	7.1%
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in favourable or unfavourable recovering condition (note 1)	6.4%
Additional areas beyond SSSIs (public woodland under favourable management for biodiversity, and National Nature Reserves) (note 2)	0.7%

Note 1. Source: [Sites of Special Scientific Interest Units \(England\)](#), Natural England Open Data Publication (2024), extent to Office of National Statistics (ONS) Mean Low Water boundary (2022).

Note 2. Sources:

- Public woodland – analysis derived from [National Forest Inventory England](#), Forestry Commission (2021), and [Sustainably Managed Woodland England](#), Forestry Commission (2023)
- [National Nature Reserves \(England\)](#), Natural England (2023), extent beyond existing SSSIs

Next steps: establishing the 30by30 assessment and reporting process

There will be 2 routes within this process. The first, self-assessment, will enable land to be brought forward by landowners and land-managers, to be approved by Natural England. The second route, internal assessment, will draw on data already held within Defra Group (including core Defra and its delivery bodies) to identify and assess potential 30by30 areas, minimising the burden on landowners and land-managers while still ensuring the necessary consents.

From autumn 2024, Government will be working with a small number of partners to begin piloting and developing both routes of the 30by30 assessment and reporting process. Piloting will focus on 2 core objectives:

- to develop robust guidance to ensure that the criteria are applied clearly and consistently across different habitats, organisations and sectors
- to ensure that the systems and processes underpinning 30by30 assessment and reporting are functional and can be easily used by all partners for the assessment, recording, reporting and review of 30by30 areas

In developing and piloting the 30by30 assessment and reporting process, we will take into account the following factors:

- recognising available resource and capacity to support the process, within Defra Group and beyond, and the need to minimise additional data collection, assessment and reporting wherever possible
- the importance of ensuring a robust process that ensures the criteria are consistently applied
- accommodating for the necessary future scale of 30by30, and the number of individual areas which will need to contribute in order to meet the target
- developing a system which is consistent with reporting requirements for the global 30by30 target under the Convention on Biological Diversity, including the recognition and reporting of Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs)
- that further contributions towards the target will be made on a voluntary basis

Protected Landscapes and 30by30

Home to nationally significant habitats, wildlife and heritage, our Protected Landscapes (National Parks, National Landscapes, and the Broads) are special places, covering nearly a quarter of England and containing around half of England's priority habitats and SSSIs, 60% of deep peat, and nearly 88% of heather and acid grassland habitats. However, these iconic landscapes continue to suffer the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Our Protected Landscapes will provide the backbone to 30by30 in England, contributing towards the target where they are effectively managed and delivering in-situ conservation. We recognise that we can, and must, go further within Protected Landscapes than other areas to meet our national environmental targets, including 30by30. This will be driven by the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, as well as further action to ensure that these special places are wilder and greener. Through their management plans, existing structures and strong partnerships, Protected Landscapes organisations can also play a convening role to champion, identify and support areas that meet, or have potential to meet, the 30by30 criteria.

It is important that Protected Landscapes deliver a significant contribution towards 30by30 in England. This is key to delivering landscape-scale nature conservation and realising our vision of a well-connected and ecologically representative 30by30 network. At the same time, we recognise that these are unique landscapes operating in different contexts, and therefore their specific contributions to 30by30 will vary.

Although much land within Protected Landscapes should meet the first of the 3 30by30 criteria (purpose), these areas will only contribute towards 30by30 where they also meet the protection and management criteria. Only areas within Protected Landscapes which are assessed as meeting all 3 of the 30by30 criteria will be able to contribute towards the target.

30by30 areas and OECMs

Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) are internationally defined by the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) as ‘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, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values’.

In line with international reporting requirements, each 30by30 area in England will need to contribute towards the global target as either a Protected Area or an OECM. This means that any 30by30 area which is not within a designated Protected Area, will need to be recognised as an OECM for international reporting purposes. We are currently developing a mechanism to formally recognise OECMs in England.

OECM status does not impose any additional management obligations onto an area or landowner, but simply recognises where sufficient protections and management are already in place.