

Background Ennerdale is a spectacular upland landscape with rock outcrops, extensive woodland, dynamic natural rivers, a glacial lake and highly valued flora & fauna. Established in 2002 Wild Ennerdale is a partnership of people and organisations led by the principal landowners in the valley, The Forestry Commission, National Trust and United Utilities with the support of Natural England.

Wild land is a relatively new concept in the UK and involves giving natural process greater freedom to develop our future landscapes. Nature conservation in England is generally focussed on small-scale interventions, Wild Ennerdale is one of the UK's largest wild land projects allowing ecosystems throughout the valley to evolve with greater freedom. Its experience in managing land through minimal human intervention is already widely acclaimed and shared by others.

Vision

“to allow the evolution of Ennerdale as a wild valley for the benefit of people, relying more on natural processes to shape its landscape and ecology”

Guiding Principals

- Give freedom to natural processes allowing robust, functioning ecosystems to develop on a landscape scale.
- Consider and respect the historical and cultural assets of the valley.
- Protect and enhance the sense of wildness
- Develop greater public enjoyment, engagement and social benefit.
- Establish sustainable business opportunities
- Monitor change on a large scale and over a long period of time.
- Share results and information as a demonstration to others.
- Only intervene where complementary to the Vision or where a threat to the vision is posed.
- Focus management and decision making more at the landscape scale.

Achievements

- Three different organisations, Government, Charity and Private Company operating as one.
- 1500ha Pillar SSSI in improving condition.
- Commended in UK Landscape Award 2010.
- Significant community involvement, Quarterly Partnership Newsletter read by over 500 local households, Ennerdale Centre development, Events programme.
- Volunteer Group providing opportunities for volunteering contributed the equivalent of 2 full time equivalent staff annually.
- Extensive grazing herds of cattle roaming over 1500ha of forest, mountain and valley bringing significant new business to valley farm tenants.
- Completion of baseline monitoring programme including birds, vegetation and forest.
- Increased presence and reputation 15,000 website visits annually from over 70 countries, 800 + Facebook fans. Regular media articles and presentations at conferences.
- Over 35,000 native broadleaves and 5,000 Juniper planted.
- 25ha of new heath land created and 6ha of bog in restoration. Existing Native woodlands expanding.
- Projects supporting survival of Arctic Charr, Marsh Fritillary, Red Squirrel.
- Cultural history mapped, shared and protected, through online photo archive, historic sites guide, archaeology management plan.

Shaping the landscape naturally

Context and Continuity Ennerdale is a remote Cumbrian valley on the western fringe of the Lake District National Park. It is 9 miles long and extends to an area of 11,640 acres (4711 ha). The valley narrows from west to east and is surrounded by dramatic ridges which include some of Lakeland's highest summits such as Great Gable and Pillar both over 3000ft high. At the western end of the valley lies Ennerdale Water which supplies 60,000 customers with drinking water.

The area is highly significant for its rich legacy of archaeological remains being described as the Lake District's best remaining example of a settled medieval valley. It is also home to diverse habitats for flora and fauna, which range from regional to international importance. Over 40% of the area is designated as 'Site of Special Scientific Interest' and "Special Area of Conservation". The continuous transition of vegetation types, from lakeshore through woodlands and open heath land, to the mountain tops, is spectacular.

As the valley develops, it is hoped that there will be a series of naturally evolving and interacting ecosystems across the valley that are far more robust in the face of stresses such as climate change. Farming and forestry will maximise ecology and landscape value. It cannot be predicted exactly how biodiversity may develop as natural processes are given greater freedom. Being able to observe these processes at work, over generations, will be one of the marvels of change in Ennerdale. Sharing these experiences will ensure that the lessons learnt will have a resonance far beyond the boundaries of the valley.

Funding The Partners, Natural England, Individual donations, Environment Agency, The Tourism & Conservation Partnership & Honister Slate Mine.

With emphasis on low input management, ongoing costs will continue to be met by the partners to avoid the risk of becoming too funding driven and influenced by external policies and agendas.

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Lessons Learnt

- Spend time agreeing a clear vision and philosophy of working.
- The power of partnership working.
- The important role of advocacy, winning champions in influential places.
- Allowing time to develop relationships, without a fixed timescale or targets to add pressure to the project,
- Mimicking natural processes by being opportunistic.
- Gathering up base line monitoring early in the process.