

wildwaterforestmountains ennerdale

Stewardship Plan Consultation Summary Response July 2018

Thank you to all who provided feedback on our Stewardship Plan. Replies have been sent directly to all those who got in touch and this document aims to capture a broad overview of some of the themes which present opportunity for more detail to be provided. Other themes were covered too and are incorporated into our plan and/or responded to directly with consultees.

Scope of the Plan

The Wild Ennerdale Stewardship Plan has directed a core part of our work since the first plan was written in 2006. Earlier this year the document was refreshed and updated, providing an insight into our 'direction of travel' for the next decade. The plan went out for public consultation during April and May 2018.

With natural processes at the heart of our vision, the style of the plan reflects the opportunistic approaches we have in the valley and the need to be flexible and responsive to change. The combination of text and maps offers a broad dialogue and illustration of how we envisage an evolving landscape on a big scale and the varying types and levels of intervention appropriate to the vision.

The plan is not designed to provide high levels of detail on various themes, nor is it written in a way which would restrict natural process opportunities through being too prescriptive. We do however strive to achieve a balance between aspirations and detail. As projects develop then we will share further information via appropriate means such as our website, planning applications and local consultation. An example of this would be the valley head planting proposal which forms part of this plan at a landscape scale, but has a (separate) more detailed project delivery plan with maps and continues to be revised and shared as that project progresses. This is also being shared through our website.

Vision & Guiding Principles

Our vision has served us well over the last decade and we are comfortable with it as our core value for the next. We have guiding principles to support our vision which have also served us well and were refreshed in line with our update of the 'Memorandum of Agreement' for the partnership. We have added in a new guiding principle for Landscape Character.

Ennerdale Water Infrastructure

The stewardship plan incorporates some of the likely outcomes of the United Utilities West Cumbria project. The project will provide an alternative drinking

water supply for West Cumbria (Thirlmere Reservoir) and abstraction at Ennerdale Water will therefore cease around 2022-2023. Wild Ennerdale has therefore considered the implication of removal of infrastructure at Ennerdale Water - the main weir, the bridge over Ben Gill, and several smaller weirs in the top 500m of the River Ehen. Removal of these would lead to a lower water level in the lake and a more natural flow down the river Ehen. However the removal of infrastructure is an assumption that Wild Ennerdale Stewardship Plan makes, so we can build in aspirations for the land around a lower lake as water levels change.

Whilst we do know that abstraction of drinking water from Ennerdale will stop, decisions on infrastructure removal are not made by the Wild Ennerdale Partnership. In this case they would be made by United Utilities, Natural England, The Environment Agency and The Lake District National Park. Removal would be subject to a planning application and would involve broader public consultation as part of this process. It seems unlikely that any decisions would be made in the next few years and various studies and research is currently underway to look at the impact on the lake, river and surrounding landscape.

Low Moor End (United Utilities)

More than half of the River Ehen mussel population is found in the top 2 miles of the river. This includes the land adjacent to Low Moor End. To ensure that the River Ehen is a healthy river system, the land surrounding it must be managed sensitively to minimise inputs of sediment and nutrients, which can damage this sensitive habitat and the species that live within it. A package of work known as "compensatory measures" is being implemented to achieve this low-intensity land management. In line with Wild Ennerdale aspirations, the aim of the compensatory measures package is to restore natural ecosystem processes, which means; a functioning water cycle, mineral cycle, increased species diversity, and maximising the use of the sun's energy to drive all the processes.

These processes are essential for rich, healthy and functioning land but often get broken down where there is intensive land management and this as a result can lead to sediment and nutrients entering the river. The compensatory measures package is an opportunity to help restore these natural processes and some initial physical works will be required to achieve this. Works will include: the installation of natural willow leaky dams to capture silt and nutrient run-off; encouraging natural regeneration of scrub and woodland to help restore healthy complex soils; planting of appropriate native trees to help the water cycle recover by allowing more water to infiltrate the soil rather than run-off the land, trees also provide added habitat and food for lots of species; and the removal of redundant infrastructure such as broken down riverside fencing to prevent it falling into the river damaging the habitat and causing blockages. This low-intensity management also means that the land will not be used for food or timber production and as such, no additional nutrient application or grazing will be required.

The compensatory measures package was drawn together by United Utilities, Natural England and The Environment Agency and has been agreed by Defra. The Wild Ennerdale partnership is delivering some of the management needed (working with a dedicated River Ehen Project Officer) and using its experience in low intensity land management and its volunteer group to sensitively manage these parts of the Ehen catchment.

The footpath through Low Moor End and buildings are not part of the compensatory measures package. The long-term aspiration for the footpath (along the roadside hedgerow) will be for it to form part of a wider network of routes to better connect the village and lake. This network is currently being considered. The buildings at Low Moor End are owned by United Utilities and currently serve as a base for operational use. Decisions on their longer term use will be made by United Utilities.

Conifers

We have a continuing ambition to decrease the amount of non-native conifers (primarily Sitka Spruce) in the valley. This has been a key driver since the start of our partnership and will continue throughout the lifetime of this plan and no doubt beyond.

We are clear that we are not trying to eradicate conifer completely from Ennerdale. The conifer forest offers an important habitat for wildlife, provides a timber resource, locks up carbon, helps stabilise soils, adds structure and colour to the landscape, provides shelter and connective corridors, is an asset for recreation and is part of the recent industrial history of the valley. Due to the scale of conifer planting by the Forestry Commission over the last century, the dominance and abundance of Sitka Spruce is the main issue, rather than the presence of conifer.

Since the start of Wild Ennerdale, we have focused on removing the more mature, seed bearing conifers and are gradually shifting towards a more mixed forest comprising native broadleaf and conifer species. Most of this shift has been due to planting broadleaves within the existing forest boundary, though this next plan phase will see new broadleaf woodland expanding beyond existing boundaries at the far eastern end of the valley. Importantly, we view a mixed forest structure as being more tolerant of climate change and more resilient to tree disease.

Extensive cattle grazing is also facilitating the transition of the forest and Silver Cove is a particularly good example of how a previous larch plantation (felled late 90's) is becoming much more diverse in tree and scrub species and structure. It is also being observed how new woodland is colonising areas at higher altitudes now sheep grazing is not a constraint. Conifers are still present, but they are being kept more 'in check' by a variety of other species.

Attempting to clear all the conifers from Ennerdale is both unrealistic in terms of resources and cost and is not desirable for the reasons described above. That said, we are always willing to work with partners if opportunities exist to accelerate the process of reducing the dominance of Sitka Spruce.

Wildlife Support & Introductions

Wild Ennerdale has supported many species in the valley over the last decade through partnership working. A new 'infographic' on the website provides a snapshot of this work with some of the species such as Arctic Char, Marsh Fritillary Butterfly and Red Squirrel.

The term 'wild' is often associated with introductions, in particular top predator species such as Wolf and Lynx. Also well documented as re-introductions are species such as Beaver and Wild Boar.

We have had an assessment done of the River Liza for Beaver introduction and it was deemed unsuitable due primarily to the dynamic nature of the river. We have also more recently done some research and field visits to learn more about the feasibility of Pine Marten. There is good scientific evidence to support the re-introduction or population reinforcement of this species in Cumbria, particularly in relation to the Red Squirrel and the linked benefits they bring to an iconic species under threat. We will be researching further this possibility with partners and will provide information as plans progress. We are not considering any re-introduction of Lynx, Wolf or Wild Boar.