

PROPOSALS FOR AN ENGLISH BEAVER STRATEGY

CURRENT AND FUTURE PROPOSALS FOR RESTORING AND MANAGING BEAVERS

Prepared for Defra and Natural England by the English Beaver Strategy Working Group

25-YEAR VISION FOR BEAVERS IN ENGLAND

Beavers have been restored to their former range in suitable catchments¹ across England. They are living alongside communities and managed locally, helping to create diverse freshwater habitats for wildlife and building climate resilience.

TIME FOR A NATIONAL STRATEGY

On 6th August 2020, the government hailed the success of the 5-year River Otter Beaver Trial (ROBT) in Devon, recognising its benefits to the local area and ecology, and allowing the beavers to remain permanently and continue expanding their range naturally.² As yet, key stakeholders have not agreed a national strategy for clarifying the status, holistic management and restoration of free-living beavers in England. Now is the time to align interests and help people to accept beavers back into the countryside.

The ROBT Steering Group published the Beaver Management Strategy Framework³ to demonstrate how beavers and people can co-exist in a managed and productive landscape; and how to manage potential conflicts through engagement, education and support. This should form the basis of a national strategy and management framework using a catchment-based approach integrated with catchment spatial plans and local support.

This document has been drafted by Beaver Trust and the English Beaver Strategy Working Group. It is a unique gathering of consensus from diverse interest groups on proposals for an English Beaver Strategy with two components:

1. Current: The status and management of current beaver populations.
2. Future: Implementing the first 5 years of a national beaver restoration plan.

The proposals attempt to balance co-existence and restoration with management and livelihoods. They are informed by the ROBT reports⁴, experience and science from Scotland⁵ and other European countries⁶, and consultation with wildlife, farming, fishing, forestry, water and conservation groups. Key references are provided at the end.

An English Beaver Strategy could help the Government achieve the Environment Plan, Agriculture Bill, Water Framework Directive, English Tree Strategy, Flood Strategy, COP 26 and UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration targets.

STATUS OF BEAVERS IN ENGLAND



The Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*) co-evolved in Britain with other native wildlife such as fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and invertebrates.⁷ After 400 years absence in increasingly managed landscapes, beavers have been unofficially released in English rivers and now live in wild, self-sustaining populations ([see green points on the map](#)). Beavers were released into an enclosed trial in England at Ham Fen in 2002, with a total of 9 extant enclosures (red points) in 2020.

In 2009, Natural England (NE) concluded that it is feasible to reintroduce beavers into England, that many benefits may accrue and measures can be put in place to deal with adverse consequences.⁸

The ecological benefits⁹, disbenefits and management of beavers are understood by some stakeholders^{10,11}. While beavers may increase biodiversity and alleviate floods, droughts¹², pollution and carbon emissions¹³, they may have localised impacts on agriculture, forestry, drainage, migratory fish^{14,15} and infrastructure.

1.5 million beavers¹⁶ have been successfully restored in 28 European countries including ones with similarly intensively managed farmland and rivers to England such as Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland and France.

As a native, wild-living species, Eurasian beavers are a European Protected Species (EPS) in Europe under the EU Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC).

EPS status was given to beavers in Scotland in 2019 and allows licensed management including translocation, dam removal and lethal control.

The Eurasian beaver is listed as 'Critically Endangered' in England and 'Endangered' in Britain on the IUCN-compliant Red List, which is accepted by all of Great Britain's Statutory Nature Conservation Organisations. Eurasian beavers are listed under 'Animals no longer normally present' in Schedule 9 Part 1B under section 22(5) WCA 1981.

PROPOSALS

1. Current: Status and management of current beaver populations

A regulatory framework and management strategy for free-living beavers in England should be created. The following proposals are suggested:

- 1.1. Allow existing wild beaver populations in England to remain and expand naturally through local river catchments, supported by representative local beaver management groups (BMGs), management plans and monitoring.
- 1.2. Recognise Eurasian beavers as a native species with appropriate legal status in England and safeguards that enable timely, responsible and effective management and their reintegration into the landscape.
- 1.3. Establish a robust national management framework with a hierarchy of increasing impact: actions starting with education, risk avoidance, mitigation, then trapping and relocation, and lethal control.
- 1.4. Provide a framework for long-term public and private financial assistance for catchment management, risk avoidance and liabilities including BMG support and mitigation measures for stakeholders affected by the impacts of beavers.

2. Future: Implementing the first 5 years of a national beaver restoration plan

A 5-year implementation plan to start delivering the 25-year vision for restoring beavers to suitable habitats in their former range should be created using IUCN Guidelines for Reintroductions and Other Conservation Translocations. The following proposals are suggested:

- 2.1. Agree an implementation plan for restoring beavers in England, prioritising catchments with suitable habitats where benefits will outweigh costs and beavers are more likely to be accepted.
- 2.2. Develop integrated catchment funding mechanisms to incentivise stakeholders to give space to water and support mitigation schemes by reflecting the ecosystem services provided and impact on existing land-uses.
- 2.3. Licence wild releases of beavers, including from enclosures, into suitable rivers as part of catchment planning, and following suitability assessments, community consultation (e.g. neighbouring stakeholders) and establishing BMGs.
- 2.4. Approve guidelines for the translocation of responsibly-sourced Eurasian beavers, including approaches to managing genetic diversity (e.g. via movement between countries) and disease risks (e.g. via health screening and quarantine).
- 2.5. Support catchment partnerships, communities and land-based businesses to develop catchment restoration plans with nature-based solutions, raise awareness and help community stakeholders to co-exist with beavers.

COLLABORATION

Following the decision on the future of the River Otter beavers, Defra and NE are encouraged to publish a timeline to engage with stakeholders including the English Beaver Strategy Working Group to undertake three phases of collaboration:

Phase 1 08/20 - 10/20: Agree and start to deliver the proposed current strategy under point 1.

Phase 2 11/20 - 04/21: Agree, plan and resource the proposed future strategy under point 2.

Phase 3 05/21 - 04/26: Deliver the first 5 years of a national beaver restoration plan across England.

Beaver Trust and the members of the English Beaver Strategy Working Group are grateful to have the opportunity to collaborate with Defra and NE at this critical time as England transitions from beaver trials and unregulated wild populations to co-existing with and restoring wild populations with education and management support.

Please liaise with James Wallace at Beaver Trust to coordinate collaboration between Defra, NE and the Working Group.

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CONTRIBUTORS

NB: All members of the Steering Group and broader Working Group were invited to contribute to this strategy document. Some members are unable to support the proposals (* identified below). All members wish to engage with Beaver Trust, each other and the Government developing an English Beaver Strategy together. We have invited other organisations to join the Working Group and welcome new members.

Convened by:

- James Wallace, Chris Jones and Eva Bishop, Beaver Trust

Steering Group:

- * Alisha Anstee and Paul Cottingham, NFU (not able to support the proposals)
- Ann Maidment and Harry Greenfield, CLA
- Charlie Burrell, Knepp Estate and Beaver Advisory Committee for England
- Derek Gow, Derek Gow Consulting
- Fiona Mathews, The Mammal Society
- Jane Sears and Jennifer Smart, RSPB
- John Gurnell, independent scientist
- * Paul Coulson, Institute of Fisheries Management (not able to support the proposals)
- Peter Burgess and Mark Elliott, Devon Wildlife Trust
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Working Group:

- Alastair Chisholm, Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management
- Alastair Driver, Rewilding Britain
- Andrew Kerr, Sustainable Eel Group
- Archie Ruggles-Brise, Spains Hall Estate
- Ben McCarthy and Stewart Clarke, National Trust
- * Caroline Drummond, Linking Environment and Farming (not able to support the proposals)
- Chris Price, Rare Breeds Survival Trust
- David Gasca-Tucker, Atkins
- * Denise Ashton, Wild Trout Trust (not able to support the proposals)
- Duncan Halley, Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA)
- Duncan Pepper, The Fishing Guide
- * Helen Senn and Helen Taylor, Royal Zoological Society Scotland (external supporter/consultee)
- Helena Soteriou, Becky Elliott and Rosemary Waugh, Thames Water
- James Nairne, Scottish Wild Beaver Group
- James Robinson, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust
- Jan Stannard, Heal Rewilding
- Jeremy Biggs, Freshwater Habitats Trust
- * Kate Rice, Southern Water (not able to respond at this time)
- * Mark Lloyd and Arlin Rickard, The Rivers Trust (not able to support the proposals)
- Martin Lines, Nature Friendly Farming Network
- * Nick Phillips, Woodland Trust (not able to support the proposals, need more time)
- * Richard Benwell and Jodie Le Marquand, Wildlife and Countryside Link (not able to support all of the proposals)
- Richard Young, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust & IUCN SSC Small Mammal Specialist Group
- Rosie Woodroffe and Alison Debney, Zoological Society of London (ZSL)
- Sara Lom, The Tree Council
- Toby Aykroyd, The European Nature Trust & Wild Europe

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