



Floodplain Grazing Marsh



This plan is in need of review and will be reviewed during 2009.

Floodplain grazing marsh is grassland that is periodically inundated and is often referred to as 'wet grassland'. The winter flooding of grazing marsh provides excellent habitat for wintering wildfowl and waders. During the spring as the floods recede, wet grassland becomes ideal for breeding waders such as lapwing, snipe and redshank. Traditionally the grasslands are grazed, and some areas are cut in late summer for hay, and then cattle graze the fields again until the winter floods return. The floodwaters bring nutrients that replenish the land, and the cycle continues.

River valley floodplains provide a variety of important functions: they act as water storage areas during times of flood; they provide hay and grazing for livestock; and they are important areas for wildlife.

1. Objectives and Targets

1.1 Objectives

- A. To quantify the amount of floodplain grazing marsh in the county and assess its conservation condition.
- B. To bring areas of low quality floodplain grazing marsh into favourable management regimes and to create new areas through reverting arable or intensive grassland back to extensively managed grazing marsh
- C. To raise awareness of the value of floodplain grazing marsh for biodiversity and flood-water retention amongst the farming community and the relevant organisations, local authorities and agencies.

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1.2 Targets

2 Current Status

2.1 Importance

Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh is a priority habitat in the UK Biodiversity Programme. Grazing marsh is a distinctive land use system that includes habitats from several UK broad habitat categories.

Grazing marshes are particularly important as they support large numbers of breeding waders such as lapwing, snipe and redshank, as well as wintering wildfowl.

2.2 Trends

There have been significant losses of wet grassland in the UK over the last 60 years, with some areas losing over 60% of the habitat. Floodplain grazing marsh once covered large areas of Shropshire's major river valleys, but a recent English Nature report on the extent of lowland wet grassland suggests almost a 20% decline in Shropshire since 1979.

2.3 Current Area / Extent

The exact extent of this habitat in the UK is not known. The estimate for coastal and floodplain grazing marsh in England was estimated to be 200,000 hectares in 1994. The full extent in Shropshire is unclear, but it has been estimated that there are seven blocks of grazing marsh each with fewer than 500 hectares, giving a total of 3,500 hectares or less. However, only a small proportion of this grassland is likely to be still in a semi-natural state, and therefore of high value for biodiversity. Most is likely to be under cultivation for arable crops or intensively grazed. Some sites may now be lost to development.

Dr. Tom Dargie, an ecological consultant working for English Nature estimated that there was 654ha of wet grassland in Shropshire in his report Lowland Wet Grassland In England Distribution of the Resource Vol 1, 1993 (Project Report Contract No F72-08-17). Project Report Contract No F72-08-17. Although there was little qualitative information about these sites this information could form the basis of an inventory of this resource in the county.

2.4 Current Distribution

Most floodplain grazing marsh in Shropshire can be found around the Severn-Vyrnwy confluence, along the Severn Valley as it flows south through Shropshire into Worcestershire. Other sites exist in tributary river valleys around the county, for example along the River Tern and River Roden in the north east of the county, and the River Perry and its floodplain to the North West. Areas for potential restoration include River Strine, Pipe Strine and Strine Brook, also in the north east of Shropshire.

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3 Current Factors Affecting the Habitat

- Agricultural improvement including intensified sward and grazing management or conversion to arable.
- Drainage and flood prevention schemes leading to reduced water levels, e.g. pump drainage schemes
- Lowering of water tables through river and groundwater abstractions.
- Fragmentation and isolation of remaining areas of habitat due to development and agricultural improvement.
- Eutrophication and pollution from drift of fertilisers and other agricultural chemicals from surrounding land or from industrialisation and urbanisation.
- Inappropriate or lack of management leading to changes in habitats.

4 Current Action

4.1 Policy and Protection

- A UK costed habitat action plan for coastal and floodplain grazing marsh was published in 1995.
- There is one Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in Shropshire for this habitat (Ruewood Pastures) covering 2.4 ha.
- Over 650 sites are designated as County Wildlife Sites but the exact extent of wet grassland is not known.

4.2 Management, Research and Survey

- 654 ha of wet grassland in the county was identified as part of a scoping report prepared for English Nature in the mid 1990s
- English Nature's Grassland Inventory for Shropshire was published in 1995. Information on other sites, especially possible habitat restoration or creation sites is held by other organisations such as RSPB or the Shropshire Wildlife Trust, FWAG or Shropshire County Council countryside projects such as Shropshire Hills AONB unit and North Shropshire Countryside Project
- Environmental Stewardship schemes provide payments for the management of wet grassland and Natural England staff and other environmental organisations are promoting funding for this habitat.

5 Benefits of Conserving Floodplain Grazing Marsh

- Conservation of biologically important habitat mosaics that support a diversity of flora and fauna.
- Enhancement of the landscape.
- Effective and low cost flood defence from using wet grassland to store floodwaters.

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6 Key Species

Birds	Barn Owl, Curlew, Lapwing, Snipe, Redshank, Yellow Wagtail, Skylark, and Reed Bunting plus wintering waterfowl such as Teal, Wigeon, Shoveler.
Reptiles	Grass Snake
Butterflies	Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary
Other Invertebrates	various true flies such as soldier flies, crane flies and hoverflies
Plants	Black Poplar, Meadowsweet, Ragged Robin, Lady's Smock

7 Complimentary Plans

- UK Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh HAP
- UK Floating Water-plantain SAP
- Shropshire Reedbeds HAP
- Shropshire Rivers and Streams HAP
- Shropshire Lapwing SAP
- Shropshire Snipe SAP
- Shropshire Floating Water-plantain SAP

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8. Targets

Habitat /species name	Target Type	Target Text	Units	2005 Baseline	2010 Target	2015 Target	Target description	Monitoring	Comments
Floodplain grazing marsh	Survey	Compile GIS map/database of floodplain grazing marsh sites identified in original EN inventory of 1993	ha	654 ha in mid 1990s	All sites located on map		Review existing survey data	No of sites mapped onto GIS.	Information held by NE
Floodplain grazing marsh	Survey	Add new sites to GIS/database known to be in Environmental Stewardship schemes or identified by other survey work	ha		All sites located on map		Re-survey as necessary and locate new sites.	No of additional sites mapped on GIS.	Need to assess conservation condition of sites and agree criteria
Floodplain grazing marsh	Survey	Identify areas of poor quality floodplain grazing marsh which may be suitable for restoration schemes	ha		All sites located on map			No of potential sites mapped on GIS	
Floodplain grazing marsh	Achieve condition	Ensure known key floodplain grazing marsh sites are managed appropriately	ha		All sites in ES schemes or under favourable management		Co-ordinate action by convening working group to discuss priorities and reviewing progress	No of meetings held	Use GIS database to identify key sites

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Floodplain grazing marsh	Achieve condition	Ensure any SSSI floodplain grazing marsh sites are in favourable condition	ha		90% of sites in favourable condition		Part of ongoing PSA target work	Report back to UK Govt. on progress	Natural England have reported that they are unable to report on this target locally.
Floodplain grazing marsh	Achieve condition	Achieve condition of non-statutory sites by appropriate management and by providing advice to landowners	ha						Sites could be identified by the Lapwing Project and through SOS and SBS survey work
Floodplain grazing marsh	Maintain extent	Ensure no net loss of known floodplain grazing marsh through flood defence or planning applications	ha				Agencies and local authorities made aware of location of key sites		
Floodplain grazing marsh	Restoration	Increase the extent of floodplain grazing marsh to bring poor quality sites into favourable condition	ha		50ha	100ha	Through changes in management regimes and providing incentives		
Floodplain grazing marsh	Expansion	Create buffer zones around vulnerable floodplain grazing marsh sites.	ha						

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9 Actions

Habitat/ Species	Action code	Action text	Location of action	Start date	End date	Lead	Assisting
Floodplain Grazing Marsh	SHR FGM AP 01	Convene working group to discuss ideas, exchange information and co-ordinate action on floodplain grazing marsh (could be incorporated into Grasslands Group). To meet once per year as necessary	Shropshire	2007	2010	SWT	SC
Floodplain Grazing Marsh	SHR FGM CA 02	Promote links between floodplain grazing marsh and the ability to buffer the effects of climate change by holding an appropriate training event/seminar	Shropshire	2008	2008	SWT	
Floodplain Grazing Marsh	SHR FGM CP 01	Promote the biodiversity value of floodplain grazing marsh through promotional events and articles in the press	Shropshire	2008	2010	SWT	SC
Floodplain Grazing Marsh	SHR FGM FI 01	Investigate marketing of cattle and other livestock on floodplain grazing marsh to provide incentive to landowners to manage land appropriately.	Shropshire	2008	2010	SWT	
Floodplain Grazing Marsh	SHR FGM HS 03	Investigate opportunities for restoring natural floodplain systems and review maintenance of argaes and other man-made flood defence systems, for example the proposed Wet Washlands project on the River Severn upstream of Shrewsbury	Shropshire	2006	2010	EA	RSPB, SWT
Floodplain Grazing Marsh	SHR FGM ID 01	Compile database of known floodplain grazing marsh sites starting with original EN inventory	Shropshire	2006	2010	SC, EA, SWT	
Floodplain Grazing Marsh	SHR FGM ID 03	Circulate database to SBAP partners to input any additional floodplain grazing marsh sites	Shropshire	2006	2010	SWT	
Floodplain Grazing Marsh	SHR FGM PL 01	Ensure planning authorities have access to information and advice on the location of floodplain grazing marsh sites – both good quality sites and those with potential for enhancement – whilst preparing LDFs and assessing individual planning applications	Shropshire	2007	2010	SC, SWT, EA	
Floodplain Grazing Marsh	SHR FGM PL 02	Ensure planning authorities are aware of the requirements of the Water Framework Directive when considering planning applications which are likely to have an adverse impact on floodplain grazing marsh sites	Shropshire	2007	2010	SC, SWT	EA,

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Floodplain Grazing Marsh	SHR FGM RE 01	Evaluate the biodiversity value of a good quality floodplain grazing marsh site to produce a list of typical indicator species for this type of habitat in Shropshire	Shropshire	2007	2010	SC SWT	SBS, EA SOS
Floodplain Grazing Marsh	SHR FGM SP 02	Ensure that any areas of floodplain grazing marsh meeting the criteria for designation as a County Wildlife Site are notified	Shropshire	2006	2010	SWT	

Key to organisations

NE	Natural England
NT	National Trust
SC	Shropshire Council
SWT	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
SBS	Shropshire Botanical Society
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SOS	Shropshire Ornithological Society

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