



***A vision for***  
the return of •  
**beavers**  
to England and Wales

**Beaver  
Vision**



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**The Wildlife Trusts believe that beavers can bring benefit to major river catchments in England and Wales.**

**By working in partnership we'll support communities to live alongside these industrious mammals, which will play a crucial role in wetland wildlife recovery.**

# Why are **beavers** so important?

**B**eavers are a **keystone species**. They play a unique role in creating new habitats that an abundance of species benefit from. This makes them important to reintroduce, irrespective of the wealth of benefits they provide for society.

We face the inevitability of many species becoming extinct in the UK over the coming decades. Ensuring that native keystone species are returned, where their future population health can be secured, is critical if we are to avoid the certainty of biodiversity loss.

Many of the species that beaver-created habitat can support are under threat. For example, new wetlands can provide perfect habitats for thriving water vole populations.

Beavers are nature's aquatic engineers and provide an unrivalled range of nature based solutions, which support:

- **Biodiversity:** an overwhelming body of evidence reveals that beavers create diverse, dynamic, wetland habitats, as well as natural riverine channel structure, benefitting flowering plants, amphibians, fish, birds, bats, and insects.
- **Hydrology:** beavers naturally reconnect rivers with their floodplains. By storing more water upstream their damming activity slows the flow, reducing damaging flood peaks, and increasing water levels in times of drought.
- **Water quality:** beaver dams and wetlands act as natural water filters removing excess nutrients and pollutants.
- **Communities and local economies:** evidence shows that beavers bring significant benefits in terms of increased tourism (visitor) spend. With a rise in feelings of 'eco-anxiety' related to the twin nature and climate crises, they also give hope and inspiration by providing a conservation success story.

Beavers provide a cost-effective natural alternative to help tackle our most pressing water resource challenges such as flood and drought.

## DEFINITION

### **Keystone species**

are species that play a disproportionately large role in the prevalence and population levels of other species within their ecosystems or community.  
(Ref: Nature)

# Wild releases and enclosures

DEFINITION

## Wild releases

enable beavers to naturally colonise a river catchment. Wild releases must comply to species reintroduction guidelines, and beaver management groups should be established in the catchment.

Despite a Defra consultation seeing strong support, wild releases in England are not currently being licensed.

DEFINITION

## Enclosures

are where beavers are released into securely fenced wetlands with abundant suitable habitat, under licence. Enclosures are often relatively small in size, typically 2-5 hectares.

**The Wildlife Trusts believe that now is the time to be granting licences to reintroduce more beavers into the wild** in preference to fenced enclosures. This would enable beavers to become part of our native ecology, providing our beleaguered wetlands with the most powerful natural restoration tool, and a host of benefits to society.

Enclosures have played a crucial role in testing assumptions and in research, and will continue to play an important role where benefits are site specific e.g. upstream of flood prone towns and villages, or where wild release is not yet feasible. They also continue to play an important role in enabling communities to see first-hand the benefits beavers provide, as a step toward wild release.

**The Wildlife Trusts are committed to working with communities and authorities at catchment scale ensuring robust feasibility and consultation to support successful wild beaver releases across England and Wales.**

This commitment will support national plans to protect 30% of land for nature by 2030. The Wildlife Trusts are also committed to working in collaboration with a range of partners and stakeholders. This includes ensuring Beaver Management Groups can support communities to live alongside beavers.

# Returning beavers

## to the wild

The Wildlife Trusts are calling on the UK and Welsh Governments and their agencies to adopt a bold approach to beaver reintroduction in England and Wales – recognising the scale of the challenge to restore the health of our rivers and wetlands. This must consider the host of potential benefits, in balance with the risks. Decisions on licences should be based on the evidence and net benefits. In weighing up decisions on licence applications, governments should take a balanced view on public opinion, giving equal merit to all stakeholders and sectors.

Targeted reintroduction projects should be encouraged where:

- There is an abundance of suitable habitat to ensure a healthy beaver population can develop.
- There are clear benefits to natural river and wetland hydrology and ecology from the presence of beavers.
- Natural recolonisation is likely to take a long time due to isolation from existing populations.
- There is a strong partnership and an organisation committed to lead a catchment-based Beaver Management Group.

The Wildlife Trusts acknowledge that great care will be needed when considering the reintroduction of beavers in areas of heavily modified hydrology, such as the fenlands, heavily drained farmed landscapes, and inland waterways.

A collaborative approach to understanding the management required in different landscapes with stakeholders living and working along the rivers will offer insight and opportunities for their return. We are committed to adopting a catchment-based approach to assessing the feasibility of beaver reintroduction and management solutions.

Where an individual population in the wild is small, the population should be enhanced by reintroduction of individuals carefully selected to increase genetic diversity. This will help ensure we have resilient and healthy beaver populations long into the future.



# Managing beavers

Beaver landscapes often need active management to ensure their potential benefits are maximised and potential problems minimised. For every beaver population in the wild there must be adequately resourced management systems established to ensure the provision of advice and support to communities, landowners and businesses to enable co-existence with beavers. This should involve the establishment of a suitably resourced management group involving a broad range of stakeholders

If active management is required, it must be based on a clear hierarchy. The first step is to provide expert advice and support to avoid and minimise localised problems. Low level interventions such as tree protection and small dam removal should be the next port of call.

In extreme cases, where it is not possible to find a way for local stakeholders and beavers to live side by side and their activities are causing significant problems, trapping and relocation of beavers should be considered. Licencing authorities must only consider culling as a very last resort. In England and Wales, given the exceptionally low numbers of wild beavers, culling should not be considered for the foreseeable future.

Beavers are a protected species in England and many management activities need to be carried out under licence. The provision of high quality advice and support, to help stakeholders understand what options are available, and the sharing of knowledge and experience, is essential to help coexistence with beavers.



# Areas of **concern** and how to manage them

The Wildlife Trusts acknowledge that in some specific situations there are areas of concern, in particular:

- **Fisheries** (especially game fishing): in specific situations beaver dams can affect fish migration and some argue that the changes they make to watercourses will impact vulnerable salmonid populations.
- **Landscape and trees:** some argue that coppicing of trees has a damaging impact on the landscape and creates mess and disorder in river corridors.
- **Burrowing and bank collapse:** in some cases beaver activity can cause problems to land adjacent to watercourses through collapse of beaver burrows, or where water is embanked (e.g. in canals).
- **Access and flooding:** some dams can increase the localised risk of flooding if they are blocking culverts, or cause access problems if key routes are flooded.

The Wildlife Trusts believe the most effective way to avoid or resolve such conflicts where they occur in the wild are:

- **Taking an evidence-based approach:** ensure science and data are the key drivers for decision-making and problem-solving.
- **Rapid response team:** trained individuals who can help solve practical problems as and when they arise.
- **Partnership and engagement:** ongoing work with other stakeholders and community representatives to help increase understanding and normalise beaver activity.
- **Incentives:** financial incentives are crucial to help land managers earn a living whilst working alongside beavers and the wetlands they create, and the wealth of benefits provided for wildlife and society.

The Wildlife Trusts believe that access to financial support to make more space for water will eliminate the majority of conflicts. Payments for nature based solutions are often the most cost effective and sustainable ways to solve the chronic problems of water quality, flood and drought.







# Science and evidence

The Wildlife Trusts and partner organisations have built up an impressive body of independent evidence relating to beaver and their impacts. Our collaborations with the University of Exeter have generated 24 peer reviewed scientific papers. As well as research in the UK, there are further studies in continental Europe and decades of research in North America.

The Wildlife Trusts will continue to work with leading academic institutions to develop our knowledge in specific areas, including:

- Exploring potential beaver dam capacity and habitat suitability in Britain's rivers to focus reintroduction and management efforts by beaver groups.
- Impacts of beavers in areas with different hydrology from south west England, such as the fenlands.
- Impacts of beavers on other threatened wildlife such as migratory fish populations, or internationally important habitats such as chalk streams.
- Remote sensing of beaver influenced landscapes.



# What do we need from UK and Welsh Governments?

We are calling for urgent action from UK and Welsh Governments to:

- Publish an ambitious reintroduction strategy that considers major river catchments in England and Wales.
- Provide financial support for land managers who make more space for water and the wealth of benefits beavers provide for society. The Wildlife Trusts believe financial support must be made available through agri-environment schemes such as Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMs) and Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS), alongside private green finance.
- Agree funding support for Beaver Management Groups in England and Wales to provide expert advice and support to communities, maximising the benefits and minimising potential conflicts.
- Urgently confirm that all wild beaver populations in England and Wales can remain and population genetic health be actively enhanced. These populations must be allowed to spread naturally.
- Recognise beavers as a native species in Wales and provide them with full legal protection.



# What **role** will **The Wildlife Trusts** play?

The Wildlife Trusts have been at the forefront of beaver reintroduction successes for decades. We have:

- An unrivalled history in the UK as a lead partner in the first beaver enclosure and in the only two wild releases (Knapdale and Devon).
- Built strong partnerships including with eNGO's, scientists, UK and devolved governments and their agencies, landowners, rural businesses and fisheries organisations.

- A strong presence on the ground, which gives us excellent knowledge of local conditions and links into communities.

The Wildlife Trusts are ideally placed to play a leading role in ensuring an ambitious strategy for beaver reintroduction can be successfully delivered in partnership with all those who have a stake in the future health of our wetlands.





# Let's bring beavers back...

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## Our top asks of the UK and Welsh Governments:

- Publish an ambitious reintroduction strategy that considers all appropriate major river catchments
- Provide financial support for land managers who make more space for water and the wealth of benefits beavers provide
- Agree funding support for Beaver Management Groups in England and Wales
- Urgently confirm that all wild beaver populations can remain in England and Wales
- Recognise beavers as a native species in Wales and provide them with full legal protection

**Find out more about The Wildlife Trusts'  
beaver reintroduction projects**

**[wildlifetrusts.org/on-land/beavers](https://wildlifetrusts.org/on-land/beavers)**



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