

Wetland Biodiversity Integration Group Meeting

**Venue: Red Kite Room
Northminster House
Natural England Offices,
Peterborough**

**Date: Wednesday 26th August 2009
Time: 10:30– 15:30 hours**

Minutes

Present:

Alastair Burn (AB) NE-Chair
Iain Diack (ID) NE
Andy Brown (ABr) NE
Jen Heathcote (JH) EH
Megan Ellershaw (ME) NE
Catherine Weightman (CW) NE
Carrie Hume (CH) WWT and Wildlife Link
Anne Skinner –EA
Phil Burston - RSPB
Ben McCarthy (BM) NE
Margaret Street (MS) NE

Apologies:

Dawn Isaac (DI) Pond Conservation
Paul Wilkinson (PW) The Wildlife Trusts
Amanda Wright NE - on maternity leave
Ian Danby (Ida) BASC
Martin Fuller (MF) EA

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as an accurate record of that meeting.

1. Actions Carried Forward from Previous Meeting

The following action points were carried forward:

1. Action Point 9. AB to discuss involvement of the EA and other wetland vision partners, both with this project and with the other landscape scale proposals with Alastair Driver

The involvement of the Environment Agency in the landscape-scale Wetland Vision projects. There has been discussion regarding targets for flood risk management and habitat creation. Alastair Driver is currently working with selected individual organisations on separate MOAs to enable joint working to increase the biodiversity benefit of EA work (Action Point 9) – the Wetland Vision projects and the EA Habitat Replacement programmes area not yet completely joined up nor is the BIG or Wetland Vision steering group integrated into this EA

initiative. The regional targets for FRM are closely allied to Habitat Creation schemes. Currently, EBS is also trying to establish a more coherent work programme around landscape-level initiatives. The BIG agreed that we should look also at projects outside the Wetland Vision areas as areas for wetland habitat action, thought to ensure join up between EA activity and those of the Wetland Vision partners the focus should aim to remain within the main Wetland Vision areas. The EA Biodiversity Strategy is likely to be a high level strategy.

Action Point 1: AS to investigate EA Biodiversity Strategy further and its relevance to the Wetland BIG **Action: AS**

Action Point 2: AS to see if there are any quantitative targets for EAs larger scale work **Action: AS**

There is a need for the Wetland BIG to join up with other BIGS , notably Rivers and Lakes (led by EA – Geoff Phillips (lakes) and Mark Diamond (rivers) for Wetland Vision projects such as the River Till project. **Action AB**

Buglife Grazing Marsh Ditches Project: Stewart Clarke has now changed his role in Natural England and is no longer the contact for this project.

Action Point 3: ID to liaise with the project steering group, regarding the project and future proposals **Action: ID**

2. Composition of membership of the Wetland BIG Group: involvement of other wetland stakeholders; representation of species groups.

The discussion considered the feedback from the BIG subgroup which has considered additional organisations to be represented on the BIG. Land managers, NFU, CLA and water companies are already involved in EBG, though not (or not regularly) on W&W SIG. We agreed the need for wider species representation It was felt that is was more important to have a plants representative than an invertebrates representative. However, Plantlife are likely to have capacity issues and would be best approached on a project by project basis.

Wildlife LINK now includes Amphibian and Reptiles Conservation (ARC) who would like to input to the Wetland BIG.

AGREED: Regular species reps will be Andy Brown (birds) and Carrie Hume (Wildlife Link) with input from other species groups on an as needed basis.

It was decided the final composition of the group should be as follows:

Table to show Proposed Composition of Wetland BIG:

Organisation	Number of Staff
Natural England	4
Environment Agency	2
English Heritage	1
DEFRA	1
RSPB	1
WWT	1
Wildlife Trusts	1
CEH	1 to provide additional tech expertise – on occasion
National Trust	1 invite to one meeting, and seek more regular contact
Plantlife	1
IDB via ADA	1 important industry and delivery link
Regional Biodiversity Coordinators	2
BIG Landscape Leads	4 (not regular group members)

Action Point 4: AB to discuss the composition of the group with Pete Brotherton

Action: AB

Action Point 5: BM to circulate a list of LINK reps for other BIGs

Action: BM

Action Point 6: CH to discuss with species taxon groups about her representation on the BIG on behalf of W Link, the input they want to the Wetland BIG and how they want to go about it.

Action: CH

Action Point 7: CH and BM to liaise over main species issues and representation on W BIG (post meeting note – that discussion should involve also Helen Moggridge)

Action: CH and BM

Suggestion of wider meeting of species groups with Wetland BIG e.g. World Wetlands Day

Action Point 8: AB to contact Plantlife, National Trust, IDB (ADA) and CEH regarding the possibility of their engagement with the Wetland BIG

Action: AB

3. Update on Work Programme

The following broad categories agreed:

- Communications
- Reporting

- Research and Information
- Guiding and Assisting Delivery
- Funding

New Biodiversity Integration Leader posts will help the BIGs to develop a work programme to deliver the 2015 targets. The posts will be thematically based and allocated a number of BIGs to support plus working with taxon groups. The Wetland BIG will have a third of a post which will involve communications, reporting and research areas of the work plan as well as guiding and assisting delivery. There will be a small budget of for workshops, websites etc.

Two people have been in post for 9 months and two others will start at the beginning of September. [Post meeting note – Helen Moggridge has been appointed as biodiversity integration leader rep for wetlands (and other freshwater habitats). Now in post.

BIG leads for work-plan areas were **AGREED** as follows:

- Guiding and Assisting Delivery: Catherine Weightman with Ruth Wearing
- Communications: Jen Heathcote and Megan Ellershaw (with input from AB and the Environment Agency (Mark Everard))
- Reporting: Margaret Street and Megan Ellershaw
- Interpreting Information: Iain Diack (species work – ID to work with CH, inventories – ID to work with AS.
- Funding – includes Wetland Vision – to be led by Phil Burston A short discussion was held on role of BIG in work on funding sources. A clear need for a more coordinated approach to funding was identified e.g. it was noted the HLF landscape-scale pot is undersubscribed -last year there was only £7m worth of bids for landscape schemes.

Sources of funding could also include the insurance industry (with its role in flood defence), wetland mitigation and habitat banking. The group suggested that the discussions held on this issue at the launch of Wetland Vision could form a useful basis for developing this area of work.

Group **AGREED** there is an advisory role for the group in terms providing guidance on areas that funding bids should target in order to increased their chances of success e.g. to SITA, BIFFA etc.

Others who could input to the funding workstream:

Paul Wilkinson (The Wildlife Trusts) could input to this group
Phil Denham (NE) – member of External Funding Network

Action Point 9: Phil Burston to follow up discussion with these contacts on this issue

Action: PB

Action Point 10: All work area leads to be prepared to report back at next W BIG meeting

Action: All Work Area Leads

4. Regional Targets

i) Wetland Vision Schemes

£6m worth of funding was announced in July 2008

During Year 1 2008-09 £2m spent on 15 schemes

Action Point 11: AB to circulate breakdown of spend (roughly 75% on land management and purchase with remainder on project development, research and hydrological studies). Action: AB

In 2009 -2010 and 2010-2011, £2m will be allocated per year with the majority being spent on the four key project areas agreed by the W BIG and Wetland Vision Steering Group: Humberhead levels, The Fens, Midlands Meres and Mosses, Morecambe bay wetlands, with additional schemes supported in Somerset levels, R Till (Northumbria) and ecosystem services in SW (R Fal) (see previously circulated handout).

The following priorities were identified for the large-scale Wetland Vision projects:

1. Join-up of project partners - the join-up of project partners within these areas is good in some areas but less consistent in others. Ensure that projects deliver on habitats, species and other aspects such as ecosystem services.
2. Identify sources of ongoing funding for project areas beyond the NE funding period (2011)
3. Work out how to work together on other large scale projects set up by other BIGs and also look at progress outside the main project areas
4. Need to represent aspects of partner landscape projects e.g. Futurescapes, Living Landscapes, EA large-scale projects
5. Regional coordinators could comment on Wetland Vision bids in terms of their contribution to wetland delivery and there-by act a cross check for Wetland BIG decisions
6. Go beyond four key project areas – a part of the Wetland BIG research work could produce a short list of projects we would endorse, and possibly a phased longer list of plans

We AGREED that a focus on a few key areas is essential even if it is at the cost of projects elsewhere.

Action point 12: AB to send JH a list of the projects that didn't quite achieve funding from the Wetland BIG Action: AB

Action point 13: AB and ID to discuss potential list of project areas (as per point 6 above) and circulate for agreement by group Action: AB and ID

5. BIG priorities: discussion on immediate requirements of BIGs made by EBG

There is aspiration to pull together all landscape proposals for all BIGs for all habitats, by Christmas, to enable overall priority landscapes and species to be identified. Currently BAP targets cover only 1.5% of England.

Priorities in terms of projects that cut across all the BIGs:

- Identify national priority areas that have so far not been funded – therefore we need an exhaustive list of priority areas.
- Provide “best practice” advice in developing landscape scale projects. Criteria for choosing projects could include area plus qualitative factors
- Need to make sure that all the priority habitats for an area are picked up – e.g. Breckland – includes grassland and heathland as well as wetlands

Integration of species work with wetlands. (Ben McCarthy)

BM showed slides of the EBS framework as set out in the Natural England ‘Securing Biodiversity’, available on-line at:

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/framework.aspx>

Species delivery has been divided into 3 groups:

1. Broad-scale delivery – e.g. ELS for widespread species such as lapwing
2. Targeted delivery – e.g. HLS, WLMPs etc for species with restricted distribution. This group will be targeted for landscape delivery. Habitat networks (as per Roger Catchpole) will be overlaid by National Character Areas (NCAs). The NCAs will be split into component BIGs. The Wetland BIG needs to identify where activity should be targeted i.e. national priorities for wetlands.
3. Targeted species recovery – for very localised species

The BIGs and the regions need to agree regional delivery plan.

Action Point 14: AB and ID to circulate current priority areas to BIG to advise on whether other priority areas should be promoted **Action: AB & ID**

Action Point 15: AB to talk to Pete Brotherton about species aspects of this work and the problems regarding availability of data and derivation of priority landscape schemes for species work **Action: AB**

Action Point 16: BM to circulate update on progress within the EBS taxonomic groups **Action: BM**

Regional Targets:

The BAP targets have been set at regional level but BIGs have not yet commented on these targets.

The Biodiversity Management Group, which meets in September 2009, will instruct the BIGs on the division of work amongst the regions. The challenge remains to bring together species, regional targets, priority areas etc.

It was suggested that the Wetland BIG should keep the regions more informed, especially with regard to priority areas in their region.

Action Point 17: AB, ID and CW to discuss BIG working at regional level and advise the group on any further input needed on confirming regional breakdown of habitat maintenance, restoration etc targets.

Action: AB, ID and CW

6. Progress with wetland BAP: Conclusions from BAP reporting round.

A draft report is being produced on UK response to 18 biodiversity indicators in Europe. Gavin Measures (GM) is currently undertaking an analysis of progress against indicators in England (this is available on the DEFRA website). GM is also working on integrating the BIGs and species work, based on Jon Webb's work on change matrices.

Action Point 18: AB and ID to discuss the above work with GM

Action: ID

The results will be published in the autumn – they should be sent to the BIGs prior to publication

Action point 19: Megan to advise group on proposals for future reporting requirements

Action: ME

7. Wetland BIG Website

The Wetland HAP pages have been removed from the NE website. It was noted that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have biodiversity strategy websites.

The UK BAP website is going to be hosted by the JNCC as part of a plan to reduce the number of government websites.

Possibilities for hosting the Wetland BIG website:

- England Biodiversity Website –this would be hard to justify and would need resources for development and maintenance
- NE Website – this has a predetermined structure and is currently being reviewed by DEFRA
- BARS – this site is for reporting only
- Wetland Vision website –this may be the best option

Action Point 20: Communications Group to look at how the Wetland BIG website could be developed on the Wetland Vision website and come back with proposals

Action: JH, ME

Action Point 21: All Wetland BIG members to think about website content and be prepared to comment on proposals and links to their own organisations' BAP information.

Action: ALL

8. Wetlands in River Basin Management Plans

Action Point 22: AS to do a briefing for the group on the Wetland Framework Directive – how far are River Basin Management Plans picking up wetland – for discussion at next meeting

Action: AS

9. Research Projects

1. DEFRA Peat Reduction Project -report by Roger Meade's report on likely benefits for biodiversity of a 90% reduction on use of peat for horticultural purposes by 2010.

The final version of the report produced by Roger Meade was due out in September. However, there is still some debate over evidence that continued exploitation for horticulture of certain types of agricultural peat may be beneficial for biodiversity.

Contact AB or ID for further information.

2. Defra project on wetland disease vectors / nuisance insects

The tenders are now back for this project. It is planned that the project will report in mid 2010.

3. EA project on climate change and wetlands

This project will review published information on likely changes to wetlands as a consequence of climate change and will look in detail at specific sites, as well as producing a toolkit for land managers [post meeting note – all Wetland Vision partners plus WWT have committed funds to support this work . Now out to tender.

10. Updating of Wetland Inventory

NE is currently undertaking a collation exercise of data collected over the past 10-15 years. Currently there are no outputs but the project is likely to reveal big gaps in coverage, which a new strategy will attempt to fill. The programme will be seeking funding for the next 3 years.

Questions remain over the inclusion of very small sites (less than 0.5ha²).

Data collection should be finished by the end of the current financial year. Over the next 2-3 years the project aims to cover all the regions and will include ground sites for new sites in specific areas plus ground-truthing.

The overall aim is to have a usable inventory on three and a half years time.

Action Point 23: ID to send out information on remote sensing to JH

Action: ID

Action point 24: ID to liaise with Richard Alexander and issue note to BIG setting out NE inventory work on wetlands that (a) has been completed and (b) is planned.

Action: ID

The JNCC is currently undertaking a pilot project looking at inventories of grazing marsh.

Action point 25: ID maintain watching brief on this project and report to BIG

Action: ID

11. UK Habitat groups and relationship to Wetland BIG

ID will represent the Wetland BIG on the group, which will meet for the first time on November 25th 2009

12. Discussion re future of World Wetlands Day

This will be held on February 2nd and 3rd 2009. The venue is likely to be Peterborough with sessions on research, policy and practice and a new practical emphasis looking at new projects and the aim of engaging the aggregate industry.

Action point 26: CH to keep DEFRA and LINK informed about World Wetlands Day

Action: CH

Action Point 27: JH to circulate Bob Earle's proposals for the WWD to BIG

Action: JH

Action Point 28: Wetland BIG communications teams to look at the possibility of show-casing on the Wetland Vision landscape projects at WWD

Action: JH, ME

13. Any Other Business

1. Planning fees – costs of planning fees are now proportionate to the area of land proposed in the planning application. This could mean that large scale habitat creation schemes could incur fees of several thousand pounds.

Some local authorities have interpreted this reasonably but this needs to be addressed by the England Biodiversity Group.

Action Point 29: All to sound out practitioners and feedback on their experiences to the BIG and from there to the EBG and DEFRA.

Action: ALL

2. Future Countryside Website

This website is an open forum on countryside issues, with a conservation strand, which may be of interest to BIG members.

3. Funding for work on Invasive and Non-native Species

Funding is available for this work from the DEFRA Water Framework Directive pot, for removal of Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and carp (up to £250-£300K).

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held in December with a visit to the Wetland Vision project at Goole/Humberhead Levels

Action point 30: MS to trawl for dates in December

Action: MS

Action point 31: MS to contact Sue Plaxton, project officer at the Humberhead Levels regarding a visit for the Wetland BIG, accommodation etc

Action: MS