

The Floodplain Meadows Partnership

A strategy for 2022-2027

www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk

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Introduction

In 2006, the Floodplain Meadows Partnership was formed with a mission to address the urgent need to promote and conserve Britain's floodplain meadows. We seek to demonstrate the value of functioning meadows, to increase public appreciation of them and to advocate for their restoration as a tool for tackling the climate and biodiversity emergencies.

The Partnership is composed of ten organisational members, each with an interest in the conservation and restoration of this special habitat. It seeks to promote its aims by supplying independent, scientific information to all stakeholders.

The Partnership conducts research on meadow sites across the UK, including both those managed by our members and those owned by private landowners, investigating how factors such as hydrology, soil fertility and vegetation management determine the composition of the plant community. We share all our findings through our network of practitioners, publications, newsletters, website, conferences and training programmes.

We undertake site visits to provide management advice and to run management trials. We collate and analyse data, to underpin evidence-based advice and training, which we supply to our delivery partners. We seek to empower practitioners to assess and manage their own sites.

A brief history of floodplain meadows

Floodplain meadows have evolved through a long-term interaction between humans and river-valley landscapes, exploiting the natural cycle of flooding to produce food, clothing and transport.

Britain lost 97% of its flower-rich grasslands during the twentieth century and the distinctive meadows of floodplains were particularly hard hit by agricultural intensification, urban development and mineral extraction. In response to this loss, the characteristic plant community of floodplain meadows was designated as a priority habitat under the EU Habitats Directive (1992).

Floodplain meadows remain at risk from both climate change and a lack of appropriate management. Each meadow can support a complex ecological system with up to 40 plant species per square metre, which in turn support a wide variety of invertebrate and bird life.

In addition to biodiversity, the meadows provide a range of other valuable ecosystem services. A notable one in the current climate crisis is their capacity to store carbon, facilitated by their deep alluvial soils. They also act to remove nutrients from river systems, via the uptake of nutrients in the hay crop, which results in improved water quality. Floodplain meadows provide a nature-based solution to another problem inherent in climate change – their ability to mitigate flood risk by providing space for surface water and offering well-structured soils that both transmit and store subsurface water.

Our Vision

A landscape in which traditionally-managed floodplain meadows deliver beauty and utility sustainably.

Our Values

- We see humans as part of (rather than separate from) the natural environment and aim to support all those managing the land sustainably.
- We recognise the biodiversity crisis and promote floodplain meadows as part of the process of building back sustainable and rich ecosystems.
- We encourage the engagement of citizens, stakeholders and other relevant agencies with our work, whether through promoting access to field sites or providing accessible and credible information. We aim to provide opportunities to become involved via volunteering, art and historical research.
- We value the social history of meadows and we celebrate the contribution of previous generations in producing and maintaining them. We respect our natural heritage and promote opportunities for people to engage with the history of their locality.
- We see meadows as an important and productive part of a farming system. We champion the consumption of sustainably-produced animal products and promote the benefits of pasture-based farming and regenerative management practices as the basis for soil health, and thereby for long-term sustainable production.
- We recognise the existential threat of climate change and see the conservation, management and restoration of floodplain meadows as a means of mitigating and adapting to the future challenges we face.

Strategic priorities

- A. To promote the benefits of floodplain meadows to relevant stakeholder groups, including policymakers, through effective partnership working.
- B. To facilitate the management and restoration of floodplain meadows, enabling them to deliver beauty and utility.

Strategic objectives (with the relevant priority in brackets):

1. To **coordinate** the efforts of organisations with a particular interest in the conservation, management and restoration of floodplain meadows (A).
2. To provide scientifically rigorous **evidence** to underpin best practice in the management of floodplain meadows (B).
3. To **support** private landowners in managing and restoring floodplain meadows (B).
4. To create **demonstration** sites at which people can observe best practice in meadow management (B).
5. To **influence** the policies of national and devolved governments such that they encourage the conservation and restoration of floodplain meadows (A).
6. To inform and **engage** citizens, stakeholders and other relevant agencies regarding the benefits (and challenges) of floodplain meadows (A).
7. To develop key **alliances** to create a shared vision of the countryside that promotes beauty, utility and sustainability (A).

1. Co-ordination

How this is delivered:

The Partnership is overseen by a Steering Group comprised of a representative from each of its member organisations. The Group actively directs the Partnership's priorities and research objectives, oversees its finances and ensures co-ordination across the UK regarding policies relating to floodplain meadows.

An annual meeting of the Steering Group formally reviews our annual reports and maintains a watching brief across our Terms of Reference, strategy and objectives. The Group meets more regularly online to coordinate the responses of our members to external opportunities and challenges relating to our strategic objectives. We also rely on the Steering Group members to disseminate our findings through their respective organisations.

How we measure success:

- Our ten constituent organisations maintain a consistent stance on how meadows should be valued and supported through public policy. This is assessed at Steering Group meetings through discussion of our respective policy stances, with a target of avoiding any conflict in our messaging.
- The membership of the partnership is reviewed at least every three years to ensure it includes or represents all organisations with a particular interest in the conservation of meadows.

2. Evidence

How this is delivered:

The Partnership employs a Research Manager to oversee our activities, including data collation and maintenance of the Partnership's Database. The role involves liaising with academics, supporting PhD studentships working on floodplain meadows and presenting evidence to scientists, citizen volunteers, stakeholders and other relevant agencies. Our current priorities are research into soil carbon, nutrients, meadow restoration techniques and the historic assessment of floodplain land-use. We will ensure our data are publicly available to scientists, for e.g. through the European Vegetation Archive, and to other interested parties via our website.

How we measure success:

- Recruitment, supervision and successful completion of three postgraduate research students' PhDs in the period 2022-2027.
- An average of three publications per year, at least one of which will be in an internationally peer-reviewed journal, in the period 2022-2027.
- Acknowledgement of our data provision by researchers outside the partnership at least annually in the period 2022-2027.

3. Support

How this is delivered:

The Partnership has a wide network of citizen volunteers, stakeholders and relevant agencies. This includes an active Farmer Network, with an online presence, to encourage and support restoration activity. We share information with farmers to highlight the distinctiveness of floodplain meadows and provide practical guidance on how to restore and manage them successfully.

We will adapt our website to be more farmer-friendly and to ensure the network has access to Partnership staff and our Ambassadors for advice and support.

How we measure success:

- We will establish an active Farmer Network, with >20 landowners joining as members each year.
- We aim to engage private landowners in restoring 2,000 ha in the period 2022-2027.

4. Demonstration

How this is delivered

The Partnership monitors a range of established floodplain meadows, organises management trials and assesses restoration projects. In collaboration with site owners, we will select a range of sites that demonstrate examples of good practice, to which we will invite practitioners and create online case studies.

How we measure success:

- At least three events will be hosted at demonstration sites in the period 2022-2027. All of them will be featured on the Partnership's website.
- Illustrative case studies will be made available for all sites where the Partnership has on-going monitoring activity and that these will be updated at least every third year.

5. Influence

How this is delivered:

The Partnership employs an Advocacy Officer who works with a range of organisations to share our key policy objectives*. We will engage with parliamentarians and civil servants and use our membership of NGO alliances, such as Wildlife and Countryside Link (WCL), to reinforce key messages about the benefits of floodplain meadows. We will use communication channels, including social media platforms and newsletters, to share information at key moments and to seek consultation with relevant stakeholders where this has the potential to enhance our work.

How we measure success:

- Government agencies accepting evidence that floodplain meadows can provide nature-based solutions.
- A restoration target of 70,000 ha in England and Wales being adopted by relevant statutory agencies in the period 2022-2027.

Key Policy Objectives

- To promote floodplain meadows as an effective, multifunctional and sustainable use of land. Meadows should be recognised as making floodplains more resilient, capable of mitigating and adapting to climate change.
- To ensure the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) Scheme recognises floodplains as a specific land type and prioritises habitat restoration of floodplain meadows as a key means of delivering resilient floodplains.
- To demonstrate that floodplain meadows can form part of a sustainable productive agricultural model.
- To illustrate the role species-rich grasslands can play in enhancing the landscape, such that they become recognised and supported within government policies.
- To share findings on soil-carbon sequestration and nutrient trapping within meadows in order to build relationships with the national carbon- and nutrient-trading schemes currently under development.

6. Engagement

How this is delivered:

We work locally, nationally and internationally to promote floodplain meadows as providing nature-based solutions to current challenges.

At the local level we support community groups encouraging sustained monitoring of sites, the study of historic land use locally and engagement with the arts. We also maintain a network of Partnership Ambassadors who provide information and advice locally. Nationally, and internationally, we sustain our links to flagship OU/BBC collaborations like Green Planet and Countryfile, our arts-and-crafts competition and our links to like-minded organisations overseas.

Partnership staff and local ambassadors support a network of farmers, practitioners, organisations, community groups and others to share information on floodplain meadows. This information is circulated via a twice-yearly newsletter, our website, training events and guided site visits.

How we measure success:

- One additional community group will be supported each year, adding to the 6 currently supported.
- Our newsletter circulation list will expand from a current readership of 1,400 to 2,000 by 2027.

7. Alliances

How this is delivered:

We will strengthen alliances with relevant bodies across the food, farming, nature and water sectors, to build a shared idea of the future of the countryside based around sustainable food production. Connections with organisations such as the Sustainable Soil Alliance, Wildlife and Countryside Link, Plantlife and the Nature-friendly Farming Network will be consolidated through collaborative activities and the sharing of information.

How we measure success:

- We will actively exchange knowledge with at least three new stakeholders or agencies in the period 2022-2027.
- Five shared events or joint activities (e.g. briefing papers, demonstration events, workshops, conference presentations) will be staged each year in the period 2022-2027.

Review

We will review our strategy every year with the Steering Group and we will aim to re-state our strategic objectives in 2027.

