

Floodplain Grazing Marsh



Description

These wet grasslands are periodically inundated pastures or meadows in river floodplain areas, usually criss-crossed by ditches that maintain a high water level. Most sites also have an important role in flood defence.

The combination of grasslands and wetland margins or ditches promotes a richness of plants and invertebrates. They are generally grazed or cut for hay or silage.

Grazing Marshes are particularly important for the number of breeding waders such as Snipe, and they also support Lapwing and important populations of wintering Wigeon. The sites are also important for Eels and Grass Snake and can contain a rich mosaic of plant communities, including some regionally-scarce species such as Pepper Saxifrage and Great Burnet.

National Status

The exact extent of Grazing Marsh in England was estimated in 1994 at 200,000ha. However, only a small proportion (5,000ha) of this grassland is semi-natural, supporting a high diversity of native plant species.

Losses in the whole of the UK have been significant in the last 60 years. Some of the last remaining unimproved grasslands are highly sensitive to increased nutrient loadings. Unless conservation measures to retain this habitat type are in place, with particular emphasis on the maintenance of water levels, flooding regimes and appropriate grazing or cutting, most sites will deteriorate.

Local Status

There are a number of important sites of this type, all found in the Dearne Valley, totalling 13 sites. Many of them have some sort of protection as nature reserves and many are owned by the Environment Agency and managed for flood storage; some of these have been converted to arable.

The RSPB do manage some of these important sites in the Dearne Valley. Six are listed as Natural Heritage Sites (NHS) – Wilthorpe Marsh, Carlton Marsh, Edderthorpe Ings, Broomhill Flash, Wombwell Ings and RSPB Old Moor which includes the site formerly known as Wath Ings.

Legal Status

Sites included in the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) as NHS sites have a presumption against development, but have no protection against operations which do not require planning consent. Carlton Marsh is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and has a measure of statutory protection.

Many of the sites fall within statutory washland designation and are owned by the Environment Agency.

In carrying out their functions, the Environment Agency, Water Companies, Internal Drainage Boards and Local Authorities in England and Wales have a statutory duty to further conservation where consistent with purposes of enactments relating to their functions. These are set out in the Water Resources Act, 1991, and the Land Drainage Act, 1991. The DEFRA Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations may apply.

Links with other Action Plans

SAP3	Water Vole
SAP8	Little Ringed Plover
SAP9	Lapwing
SAP10	Barn Owl
SAP11	Skylark
SAP14	Great Crested Newt

Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Ecologically insensitive flood defence works constructed in the past.
- Agricultural improvements, including land drainage, use of herbicides and fertiliser.
- Neglect in the form of a decline in traditional management i.e. cutting and grazing.
- Enrichment caused by overstocking with animals and supplementary feeding.
- Loss of sites to development and highway improvement.
- Ground water abstraction causing site to dry out.
- Pollution of ground water or surface water.
- Mineral extraction causing loss of sites and alteration to ground water levels.

Current Local Action

- Five of the sites are currently managed as nature reserves – Carlton Marsh, Park Hill Brickworks, Doveside, Wombwell Ings and Wath Ings – although ideal management practices are not currently in place on any of these.
- Edderthorpe Ings is partially secure but suffering from split ownership. Wilthorpe Marsh has deteriorated seriously and has been threatened with opencast coal working.
- RSPB Old Moor includes new and modified areas of this type.
- A report has been produced by the Environment Agency examining the feasibility of restoring the nature conservation value to washland areas in the Dearne Valley.
- One site, Broomhill Flash, has been marketed by the owners and attempts to secure its future as a nature reserve are not certain.
- FRCA/DEFRA have identified the area around Wombwell Ings as the key area of likely habitat. This is, perhaps, the most important site in Barnsley.

Proposed Local Action

- Collate all the species records available on Wilthorpe Marsh and produce a fully-costed management plan for the site.
- Create new areas of Grazing Marsh on suitable sites in the Dearne Valley in partnership with EA and RSPB, including any that may occur from new flood defence works.
- Encourage participation among farmers in Environmental Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship Schemes.
- Survey Floodplain Grazing Marsh for the presence of Eel and Grass Snake and advise appropriate management.
- Extract information from the *Barnsley Bird Study Group Breeding Bird Survey* to provide populations and mapping of breeding Little Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Skylark, Yellow Wagtail, Grasshopper Warbler and Reed Bunting.

BMBC Planning Policy Actions

- Encourage the creation of new habitat through the requirement made under Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 9, to incorporate biodiversity enhancements into development wherever possible.

BMBC Land Ownership and Management Actions

- Seek to formalise grazing and subsidies on Carlton Marsh Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Floodplain Grazing Marsh habitat.