



Bedfordshire and Luton Habitat Action Plan: Wet Woodland

Updated May 2007



Wet Woodland

National lead organisation(s):
Forestry Commission Wales

County lead organisation(s):
Bedfordshire Wet Woodland Working Group

Wet woodlands are found on poorly drained or seasonally wet soils, usually with alder, birch and willow as predominant species. In drier riparian areas they sometimes include ash, oak, pine and beech.

Current status

National status

Wet woodlands occur on a range of soil types, often as part of a mosaic with other woodland types of drier ground and with open habitats such as fens. Many alder woods are ancient and have a long history of coppice management that may have impeded succession to drier woodland types.

A crude estimate of wet woodland in the UK is 50-70,000 ha. The UK is thought to host a large proportion of the fen surviving in Europe, on which wet woodland can exist. The extent of wet woodland has probably declined throughout the country with the ever increasing draining and improvement of neighbouring arable fields and grassland. Wet woodlands can support a rich, varied and unique community of species including plants, mosses, lichens and invertebrates.

Local status

Wet woodlands occur less frequently, are smaller in size and are more isolated here than in other parts of the UK. There are approximately 320 ha of wet woodland in Bedfordshire, of which approximately 180 ha appear to be in good condition. The remaining 140 ha are in a less favourable condition. In addition to the extant wet woodland there are 73 ha of relict habitat that could be restored. Although wet woodland is one of the rarest habitats in the county, Bedfordshire is home to one of the most important such sites in south east England: Flitwick Moor Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Other wet woodland in the county is fragmented, mainly along the River Flit, but notable woods are also found at Sutton Fen and one or two sites on the River Great Ouse. Southill Wood is a wet woodland SSSI, specifically designated as a wet valley alderwood.

Much wet woodland exists as part of other larger blocks of woodland and past surveys have not differentiated this type of woodland from the predominant woodland type. In Bedfordshire wet woodlands are found in two main areas: the floodplains of the major river valleys, and spring-fed locations on the Greensand Ridge.





Current factors affecting wet woodland

- Land drainage, flood prevention measures and water abstraction have lowered the water table and led to the woodlands drying out.
- Water quality, in particular in the Flit Valley. Nutrients from sewage treatment works and other sources change the character of wet woodlands and encourage coarse species such as nettle to dominate at the expense of more interesting plant species and communities.
- Some of the more recently established wet woodland has developed on former open wetland. This can raise conflict between the conservation interests of these two habitat types.
- Lack of management, particularly in formerly coppiced sites may encourage succession to drier woodland types
- Invasive species such as Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* alter vegetation composition and out-compete native plant communities. Diseases such as *Phytophthora* root disease of alder could also lead to large-scale tree die-off, which would greatly alter the characteristics of currently heavily shaded and humid sites such as many of the spring-fed alder woods on the Greensand Ridge.
- climate, seasonal variations

Current action

Management, research and guidance

A three year Bedfordshire Wet Woodland Project was established in 2003. This was a partnership project between the Forestry Commission (the main funder), the Environment Agency, English Nature, Bedfordshire County Council, Mid Bedfordshire District Council, the Greensand Trust, the Bedfordshire Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group and the Ivel and Ouse Countryside Project.

The Project

- surveyed through a desk-based research study the distribution and range of the existing wet woodland resource in the county
- assessed the opportunities for further wet woodland creation using opportunity mapping and working directly with individual landowners
- assessed and surveyed wet woodland indicator species
- produced a preliminary education strategy to raise public awareness about the importance of wet woodland
- developed a series of strategic objectives, targets and actions relating to the wet woodland resource in the county.

A site register of wet woodland has been created as part of this work and a GIS layer produced. Additional information, such as its status and whether or not it is in a conservation grant scheme or woodland grant scheme, is included. The site register identifies 174 wet woodland locations that also include a number of spring-fed sites on the Buckinghamshire





section of the Greensand Ridge. The site register is available as an appendix to the Bedfordshire Wet Woodland Strategy, available at www.bedslife.org.uk/publications.

Action plan objectives and targets

Objectives

Maintain and where possible expand the range of wet woodland in Bedfordshire

Maintain and where possible improve the condition of wet woodland in Bedfordshire

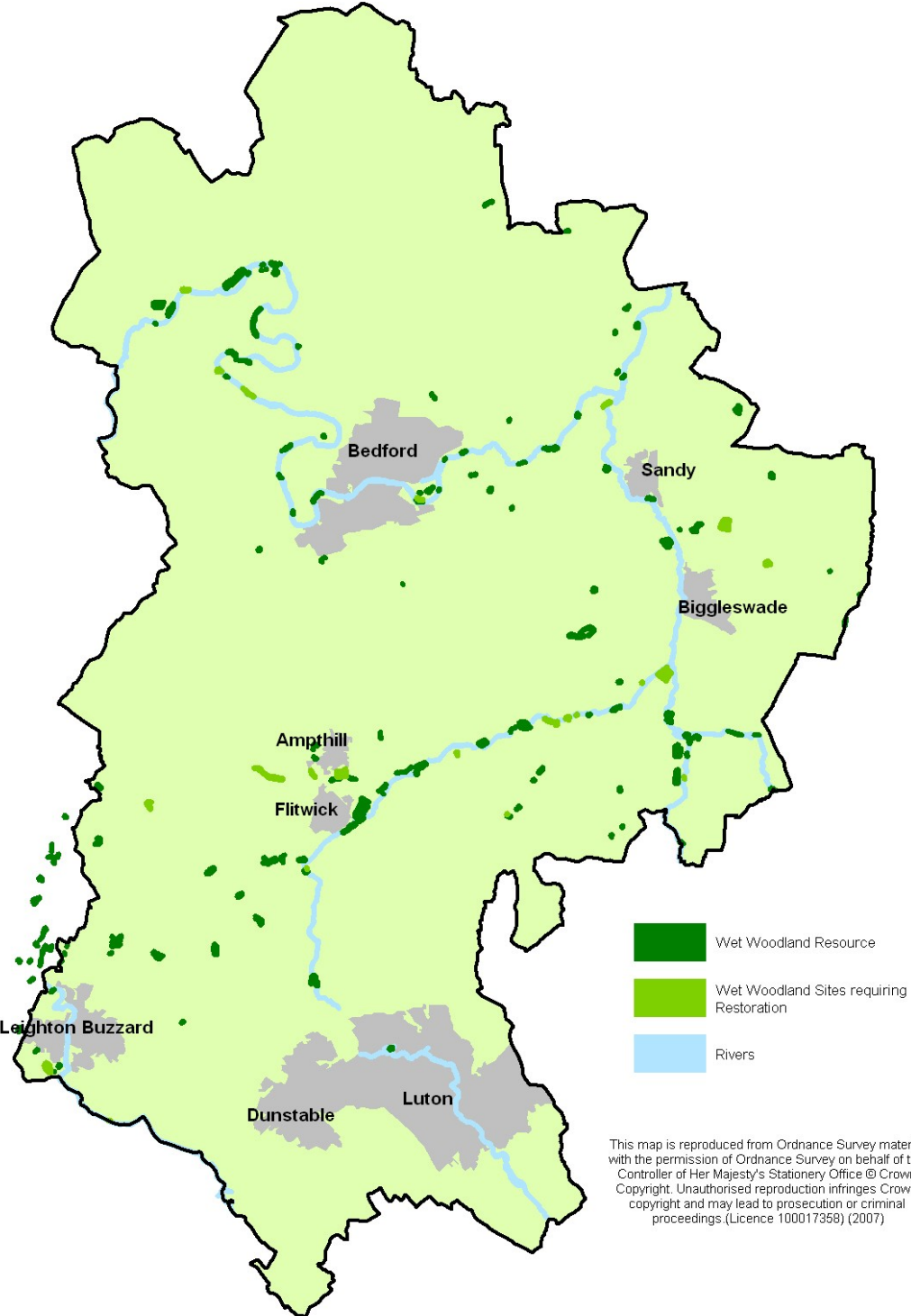
Targets

- A. Maintain the 2005 extent (320 ha) and condition of wet woodland in Bedfordshire and Luton (Fig. 1)
- B. Bring 40 ha of wet woodland into positive management by 2010, with a view to achieving favourable condition by 2030.
- C. Restore by 2020 20 ha of currently degraded or relict wet woodland
- D. Create by natural colonisation or planting 150 ha of wet woodland or floodplain forest by 2030.
- E. Implement a package of activities to raise awareness and encourage a broader understanding of wet woodlands





Fig. 1 **Location of wet woodlands in Bedfordshire**



Proposed action

Abbreviations

BCC	Bedfordshire County Council	FC	Forestry Commission
BRCC	Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity	FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
IDB	Bedford Group of Internal Drainage Boards	GST	The Greensand Trust
EA	Environment Agency	NE	Natural England
FMV	Forest of Marston Vale	WT	Wildlife Trust

Action	Implemented by
Site safeguard and management	
1. Pursue acquisition of Pennyfather's Moor (7 ha)	
2. Pursue acquisition and expansion of Upper Alders CWS/Sandy Smith Nature Reserve (11 ha)	WT
3. Implement agreed management plans for Westoning Moor, Pennyfathers Moor and Clophill Fullers Earth Works (12.7 ha total)	
4. Implement agreed water level and habitat management plans for Flitwick Moor (31 ha)	
5. Manage poplar plantations north of the Flitwick Sewage Works to encourage development of semi-natural wet woodland communities (10 ha).	
6. Raise water levels at Sutton Fen and Lower Alders, to restore wet woodland habitats (14 ha)	
7. Achieve favourable condition of Upper Alders CWS/Sandy Smith Nature Reserve, through a combination of conifer felling and water level adjustment (11 ha)	GST
8. By 2010 create 3 ha of new wet woodland adjacent to existing wet woodland at Upper Alders CWS/Sandy Smith Nature Reserve, to link existing copses with the main woodland	
9. By 2030 create through mineral restoration schemes new wet woodland at Coronation Clay Pit (34 ha), Black Cat (33 ha) and Broom Quarry (10 ha).	
10. Pursue floodplain forest proposals in the Bedford River Valley Park	FMV



Advisory

11. Ensure that by 2020 proposals for wet woodland creation and management are incorporated into restoration plans for disused quarries in the Ouse, Ivel and Ouzel Valleys, in the Marston Vale Clay Pits, and at Clophill Fullers Earth Works	
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Future research and monitoring

12. Monitor all spring fed wet woodlands every 2 years	
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Communication and publicity

13. Implement a package of awareness raising activities, as outlined in the Wet Woodland Education Strategy	
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Monitoring the Action Plan

The Wet woodland action plan will be reviewed every 5 years.

Complementary plans

A national action plan exists for wet woodland.

Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Hertfordshire have also written action plans for wet woodland.

This action plan links to other Bedfordshire and Luton habitat action plans, in particular those for lowland mixed deciduous woodland, and fens, reedbeds and purple moor-grass and rush pasture.

Acknowledgements

The Bedfordshire Wet Woodlands Working Group has compiled this action plan. For more information please contact the Biodiversity Partnership Coordinator; details are available at www.bedslife.org.uk. Members of the steering group that delivered the wet woodland strategy for Bedfordshire include: Forestry Commission, Environment Agency, Natural England, Bedfordshire County Council, Wildlife Trust, The Greensand Trust, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, Bedford Group of Internal Drainage Boards, Bedfordshire Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.

References

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