



Bedfordshire and Luton Habitat Action Plan: Floodplain Grazing Marsh

Updated January 2008





Floodplain Grazing Marsh

National lead organisation(s):
Natural England

County lead organisation(s):
Environment Agency

Grazing marsh is defined as periodically inundated pasture or meadow with ditches. Sites may contain ponds and seasonally water-filled hollows with swamp communities but not extensive areas of tall fen communities. The majority of sites are grazed although some are cut for hay or silage.

Current status

National status

The exact extent of this habitat type in the UK is not known but significant losses are thought to have occurred in the last 60 years. It is estimated that there is around 300,000 ha left in the UK. Only a small percentage of this is semi-natural supporting a high diversity of native plant species. Marshes are very important for breeding waders such as snipe, lapwing and curlew. Remaining sites are very sensitive to nutrient levels.

Local status

The largest areas of floodplain grassland are located in the Ouse, Ivel, Ouzel and Flit valleys. Whilst some areas, particularly in the Ivel and Flit valleys are of County Wildlife Site status most are now improved grasslands. Fenlake Meadow Local Nature Reserve in Bedford is a good example of floodplain grazing grassland which also contains some areas of marshy grassland.

Current factors affecting floodplain grazing marsh

- Embanked sections of river in the Ivel valley and deposits of dredgings reducing flooding opportunities
- Drainage of and creation of ponds in marshy areas
- Inappropriate management, lack of management of marshy sites, in part due to difficulty finding appropriate grazing stock
- Development pressures in general and in particular on the floodplain
- Lack of maintenance of structures (e.g., mills, weirs and bridges) on rivers and streams





Current action

Management, research and guidance

Bedfordshire's local countryside projects and the Wildlife Trust are actively creating and restoring areas of floodplain grazing marsh; these include Sandy Smith Nature Reserve, Marston Vale Forest Centre and Flitwick Moor.

The Wildlife Trust, Greensand Trust and Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity offer advice on a wide range of wetland and grassland management issues and are working to facilitate greater understanding and dialogue among a wide range of wetland users. Natural England's website "Coastal Habitat Restoration: towards good practice" provides extensive information on managing coastal and floodplain grazing marsh.

Action plan objectives and targets

Objectives

Maintain and where possible expand the range of floodplain grazing marsh in Bedfordshire and Luton

Maintain and where possible improve the condition of floodplain grazing marsh in Bedfordshire and Luton

Targets

- A. Maintain the 2007 extent (76.6 ha) of floodplain grazing marsh in Bedfordshire and Luton
- B. By 2015 achieve favourable condition of 66 ha of floodplain grazing marsh in Bedfordshire by implementing positive management regimes.
- C. Restore by 2015 70 ha of floodplain grazing marsh in Bedfordshire and Luton
- D. Create by 2015 20 ha of floodplain grazing marsh in Bedfordshire and Luton



Proposed action

Abbreviations

AWS	Anglian Water Services	FMV	Forest of Marston Vale
BBC	Bedford Borough Council	FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
BCC	Bedfordshire County Council	GST	The Greensand Trust
BRCC	Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity	IDB	Bedford Group of Internal Drainage Boards
BRMC	Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre	NE	Natural England
EA	Environment Agency	WT	Wildlife Trust

Action	Implemented by
Site safeguard and management	
1. Create by 2009 4 ha of floodplain grazing marsh at the Marston Vale Forest Centre	FMV
2. Create by 2030 12 ha of floodplain grazing marsh at Biddenham Loop; begin work by 2012	BBC
3. Ensure that the Bromham Water Meadow management plan is implemented when development begins (11.5 ha)	BBC
4. Liaise and seek to work closely with landowners and site managers to continue improving floodplain grazing marsh at Biggleswade Common, and to secure a new agreement when the current Countryside Stewardship Scheme expires in 2010. Attempt to include floodbank breaching to facilitate more frequent flooding of the site (54 ha)	BRCC, EA, FWAG
5. Produce by 2009 an overall management plan for Henlow Common and Langford Meadows LNR (10 ha). Include existing management actions: grazing, hard rush cutting and raking and bramble control. Attempt to enter Langford Meadows into Higher Level Stewardship.	BCC, FWAG
6. Attempt to agree and fund by 2009 a new management plan (e.g., through Higher Level Stewardship) for Hollington Basin (25 ha)	FWAG
7. By 2008 revise the management plan for Fenlake Meadows (19 ha)	BBC



8. By 2010 produce where necessary and implement management plans for Bromham Park Marshy Grassland (2.1 ha), Flitton Moor (3.5 ha), Sandy Smith NR (5 ha) and Lepards/South Mills Pits (0.5 ha)	BCC, BBC, BRCC, GST, WT
9. Investigate and recommend by 2008 measures to restore East Hyde Riverside (2.6 ha), Arlesey Old Moat and Glebe Meadows (4.2 ha), Priestley Farm (6 ha), Westoning Moor (2 ha) and Shefford Hardwick Farm (1.3 ha)	BCC, BBC, BRCC, GST, WT
10. By 2010 implement restoration recommendations for East Hyde Riverside, Arlesey Old Moat and Glebe Meadows, Priestley Farm, Westoning Moor and Shefford Hardwick Farm	BCC, BBC, BRCC, GST, WT

Future research and monitoring

11. Produce by 2010 a digitised map of floodplain grazing marsh in the county	BRMC
12. By 2008 develop a standard monitoring method and record sheet for floodplain grazing marsh	BRCC, GST
13. Establish and implement by 2008 a rolling monitoring programme to assess the condition of five County Wildlife Sites under 10 ha each year, using the lowland grassland assessment method, such that all sites are monitored every 5 years	BRCC, GST, WT
14. Establish and implement by 2008 a rolling monitoring programme to assess the condition of five non-County Wildlife Sites under 10 ha each year, using the lowland grassland assessment method, such that all sites are monitored every 5 years	BRCC, GST, WT
15. Monitor the condition of the 5 sites over 10 ha (Biggleswade Common, Bromham Water Meadows, Fenlake Meadows, Hollington Basin, Church Meadows Leighton Buzzard) every 5 years. Ensure that all sites are monitored before 2010.	BRCC, GST, WT

Communication and publicity

16. Produce individual factsheets/letters for landowners of floodplain grazing marsh to highlight the presence and importance of grazing marsh	BRCC, WT, FWAG, BCC, GST
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Monitoring the Action Plan

The Floodplain Grazing Marsh action plan will be reviewed every 5 years.

Complementary plans

A national action plan exists for coastal and floodplain grazing marsh.

Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire have also written action plans for floodplain grazing marsh.

This action plan links to other Bedfordshire and Luton habitat action plans, in particular those for reedbed, rivers and lowland meadow.

Acknowledgements

The Bedfordshire Waterways and Wetlands 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 working group include Environment Agency, Bedfordshire County Council, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, The Greensand Trust, Bedford Group of Internal Drainage Boards, Natural England and the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough.

References

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