



# Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust

## POSITION STATEMENT

JUNE 2021

### THE HABIMAP SURVEY PROGRAM: RECORDING THE NATURAL CAPITAL BASELINE ACROSS GLOUCESTERSHIRE THROUGH HABITAT SURVEY

This position statement is targeted at farmers and landowners who GWT and other partners will be approaching, for permission to access their land to carry out habitat mapping through the Habimap survey programme, or to ask permission to include existing habitat/natural capital data in the county wide habitat map, and explains:

- [What is the Habimap survey programme.](#)
- [What we are asking for from farmers and landowners.](#)
- [What is data is recorded and how it is held and used.](#)
- [The benefits of accurate habitat data and some Q & A.](#)
- [The why – The bigger picture.](#)

#### Position statement summary

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) aims to survey Gloucestershire's habitats on a rolling 10-year programme, called the Habimap Programme, to produce an accurate habitat map for Gloucestershire. Access to up-to-date, accurate habitat maps are vital to build opportunities for the future as the funding environment changes, e.g. through new Environmental Land Management schemes, legislated biodiversity net gain in local authority planning systems and new environmental investment opportunities such as carbon offsetting.

The county's habitat data is currently of variable reliability and is in places out-of-date. Accurate habitat (natural capital) maps will help farmers and landowners to access emerging funding sources to maintain the delivery of public goods on existing good quality habitats or to enhance the delivery of public goods on other land, alongside food production.

We are asking farmers and landowners for permission to access their land for habitat surveys; or to allow the use of habitat data collected through other partners or programmes such as ELM; or to share their own knowledge about habitats on their land.

This will help to create a complete habitat map for Gloucestershire, improving environmental decision making, identifying opportunities for investment in public goods and supporting nature's recovery.

## **The what**

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) has brought together best available national and local habitat data sets to create a complete cover habitat map for the county. Essentially this habitat map is a record of our natural capital assets and GWT has used it to produce a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) map for Gloucestershire. It has also enabled the Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership (GLNP) to produce Ecosystem Services map outlining opportunities to deliver public goods.

Both the Gloucestershire NRN and Ecosystem Services mapping derived from this habitat map is publicly available (<https://naturalcapital.gcerdata.com/>) and can be used as guidance for habitat creation and restoration to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem service delivery (the delivery of public goods).

Local authority planning departments, agricultural schemes such as the proposed ELM, and carbon investment schemes increasingly need good quality habitat mapping, and the derived NRN and Ecosystem Service mapping, to make decisions about investment in land management to deliver public goods.

Accurate habitat data will help landowners and farmers build opportunities for future access to funding sources, as the funding environment changes, to maintain the delivery of public goods on existing good quality habitats or to enhance the delivery of public goods from other land, alongside food production.

However, a large part of the current county habitat map comes from interpretation of satellite imagery which can only determine broad habitat type and some of the more detailed on the ground survey data is up to 30 years old so may no longer be correct. The better the quality of the habitat map, the better the quality of interpretation into the NRN and Ecosystem Service mapping.

## **The ask**

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust has an ambition to verify the complete habitat map of Gloucestershire by field surveys within a 10-year rolling initiative called the Habimap Programme. This will enable GWT to update the NRN and inform updates of the GLNP ecosystem service maps.

We are asking for permission for trained volunteer surveyors to access land to carry out habitat survey. Or, if habitat data has already been collected by other partners or the farmer/landowner themselves, for permission to use that data in the county habitat map.

## **What is recorded and how it is held and used.**

Habitat data is recorded by volunteers doing a walkover of accessible land. It is recorded using the UK Habitat Classification System, which uses a series of codes to describe different types of habitat.

The data is used to create a digital county habitat map held by the Gloucestershire Local Environmental Record Centre (GCER), part of GWT. Members of the Gloucestershire LNP are able to access the county habitat map under licenced arrangement.

No personal information is recorded in this map, however, to comply with GDPR requirements we will need to securely store evidence of your permission for survey access together with any access restrictions you specify.

The county habitat data is used to update Gloucestershire's Nature Recovery Network and Ecosystem Service maps, which are available through the Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership's website (<https://naturalcapital.gcerdata.com/>). These derived maps are openly available to the public, however, **the underlying habitat data is not.**

We would like to ensure a two-way flow of data so that farmers and are able to access the data from surveys on their land. Currently GWT will be able to provide pdf maps of the survey data to the farmer or landowner.

The GLNP are working with partners to explore the best mechanism to enable the data to be shared digitally with the farmer or landowner in the future.

Wherever possible, requests to farmers and landowners, for access permission, will be made through people or organisations they have existing relationships with. This aims to prevent multiple requests being made.

**The following sets out some of the benefits and concerns that may arise from farmers and landowners:**

What are the benefits to farmers and landowners of accurate and up to date habitat data (natural capital map)?

- Providing information that could help access agri-environment funding such as the future Environmental Land Management payments for public goods, which, is based on maintaining/increasing the ecosystem services we benefit from.
- Identifying opportunities to access stacked funding (multiple sources) for delivering different ecosystem services on land.
- Creating opportunities to participate in funded environmental projects, such as delivering biodiversity net gain for developers.
- Potential for increased knowledge of the wildlife on your land.

Will recording poor quality habitat on your land mean you cannot access funding sources?

No:

- Land with a current low value for biodiversity may still be in a location which is important for nature recovery network connectivity and therefore a high priority for nature recovery work.

- Land with a current low biodiversity value may be a key location to improve the delivery of particular ecosystem service such as flood alleviation and could therefore be a priority for habitat restoration or creation to improve ecosystem services.
- There may be future opportunities to secure income for carbon or water storage and the creation of habitats that can deliver this is an opportunity rather than a barrier.

Will recording high quality habitat on your land mean you cannot access funding sources?

No:

- It is important to maintain the biodiversity value and ecosystem service delivery on good quality habitat and we hope that elements of future Environmental Land Management schemes will reflect this.
- There may be future opportunities to invest in carbon storage, and maintenance of habitats currently storing high levels of carbon will be part of this.
- Having high quality habitats may open up opportunities to participate in landscape scale nature recovery projects that fund habitat enhancements.
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Does recording high quality habitat mean I have less control over what I can do on my land?

No:

- It helps to build opportunities for the future as the funding environment changes and provides opportunities to participate in nature and environmental recovery projects, but what you choose to do on your land is up to you.
- Developers already have a responsibility to ensure that they are fully aware of the ecology on a site, any land proposed for development must already submit a thorough ecological survey.
- Changing land use is already regulated by the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations for land that is uncultivated or semi-natural.

### **The why – the bigger picture**

We are facing a biodiversity and climate emergency, the aspirations of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan calls for 'net gain' for wildlife, leaving the environment in a better state than it is now. The Environment Bill when enacted will put Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Biodiversity Net Gain into legislation.

Following the new Agricultural Act, the government is developing a new environmental land management scheme (ELM) to replace the current Countryside Stewardship and Basic Payment Schemes.

The new scheme will focus on managing land to support the delivery of public goods. The country is also working towards significant reductions in carbon emissions and an increase in the quantity of carbon stored in the landscape.

Farmers and landowner have an important role to play and we, together with other members of the GLNP, want to work with them to identify suitable opportunities to deliver environmental enhancements alongside food production.

Knowing the current state of the environment is key to being able to work together to build increased ecosystem service delivery into our landscape.