

# Floodplain grazing marsh

## Current UK status and trends

Floodplain grazing marsh has declined significantly. In England and Wales the remaining wet grassland covers an area of approximately 220,000ha from a historical resource of 1.2 million ha. Losses over the last 60 years are typically 30-60% by area.

## Estimated current Northamptonshire resource

1072ha of floodplain grazing marsh, of all levels of quality, were reported in 2015.

## Progress towards BAP targets 2008–2015

285ha of floodplain grazing marsh brought into management under environmental stewardship, 162ha restored and 50ha created. Mineral planning consent was granted in 2009 on an area of land west of Earls Barton Quarry. The approved restoration proposals include the creation of an area of about 30ha of wet grassland as part of a larger mosaic of floodplain habitats. Extraction has not started (March 2015) so delivery of this new habitat is still years away.

## Lead partner

RSPB

## Target areas



## Habitat description



Floodplain grazing marsh (FPGM) is defined as periodically inundated pasture, or meadow with ditches that maintain the water levels, containing standing fresh water. The ditches may be especially rich in plants and invertebrates. Almost all areas are grazed and some are cut for hay or silage. Sites may contain seasonal water-filled hollows and permanent ponds with emergent swamp communities. In Northamptonshire grazing marsh includes the NVC communities MG9 – MG13.

Floodplain grasslands in the UK are predominantly semi-natural or planted habitats, strongly influenced by water management and farming practices. They form important habitats for wildlife, perform a vital flood storage function and play a significant role in traditional farming systems. Winter floods bring nutrients to the grasslands. Traditional farming systems recognised this benefit, so the productive meadow sward was grazed by cattle or cut for hay.

## Main issues and threats

- Agricultural intensification, leading to drainage and conversion to arable farmland
- Water abstraction

- River channel modifications (deepening, widening, and construction of flood defences) altering the frequency and duration of flooding
- Eutrophication of ditch systems and surface water features from diffuse pollution, mainly from agricultural runoff

## General strategy

- Use habitat opportunity mapping to identify the current resources and highest priorities for linkage by sympathetic management of degraded sites and establishment of new sites
- Sympathetically manage and restore existing sites, funded primarily through Countryside Stewardship (advice is available from the Wildlife Trust, RNRP or RSPB)
- Promote re-creation opportunities targeted at key areas of the floodplain, to be delivered primarily by restoration of mineral sites where physical characteristics permit
- Create a landscape-scale wetland complex, with floodplain grazing marsh as a major component

## Sites to focus on

- **Poor condition priority habitat:** Hydrological regime in place but site inappropriately managed *e.g.* water levels too low, insufficient or no wet surface features or flooding, inappropriate sward condition, incorrect hedge height, excessive scrub cover
- **Relict habitat:** Hydrological regime no longer in place but typical physical features of FPGM present (*e.g.* ditches reflecting previous management as wet grassland) and reflected in the existing land use and/or botanical communities present (*e.g.* intensively cultivated drained land)
- **Sites for new FPGM creation:** Generally agricultural land with no typical physical features of FPGM present, but with suitable topography, soil conditions and geographic location for habitat creation

## Targets

1. Maintain the current extent of BAP-defined floodplain grazing marsh (no loss of BAP habitat)
2. Bring into positive management 300ha of BAP standard floodplain grazing marsh
3. Restore 200ha of relict floodplain grazing marsh from degraded sites no longer meeting BAP definition (*e.g.* agriculturally improved or with poor hydrological regime) by 2020
4. Establish 50ha of BAP-defined floodplain grazing marsh (which is capable of supporting a diverse range of invertebrates, mammals and breeding waders) from arable land/quarries by 2020

## Actions

<b>A.</b> Identify the current extent of BAP-defined FPGM by 2020	Wildlife Trust NBRC
<b>B.</b> Provide management advice to landowners of current FPGM LWS to maintain condition	Wildlife Trust

<b>C.</b>	Respond to all planning applications and other proposals subject to a consenting scheme where these have the potential to damage or destroy the features of interest of FPGM designated as LWS or SSSI	Wildlife Trust Natural England RSPB Local authorities
<b>D.</b>	Work with landowners to restore degraded FPGM habitat in the Nene Valley currently not classed as LWS	Wildlife Trust
<b>E.</b>	Help landowners and mineral companies establish the right conditions to create BAP quality FPGM from arable land in the Earls Barton West area by 2020, following restoration of sand and gravel quarries	Wildlife Trust RSPB
<b>F.</b>	Advise planning authorities, landowners and mineral companies on creating FPGM as part of applications for mineral quarrying in the Earls Barton area, to contribute to an overall long-term target beyond 2020 of 100–200 hectares	RSPB Wildlife Trust Local authorities Environment Agency

## Flagship species



- Eurasian curlew (passing migrant)
- Flat-sedge
- Northern lapwing
- Pennyroyal

## Further information and management advice

- ▶ [Further habitat information from the Wildlife Trust](#)
- ▶ [Further habitat information from Natural England](#)
- ▶ [Wet Grassland Practical Manual: Breeding Waders](#) (from RSPB)
- ▶ [Advice for Farmers: Re-wetting grasslands](#) (from RSPB)
- ▶ [Management advice for invertebrates](#) (from Buglife)