

Making Even More Space for Nature

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GWCT & NE Farmer Clusters Conference

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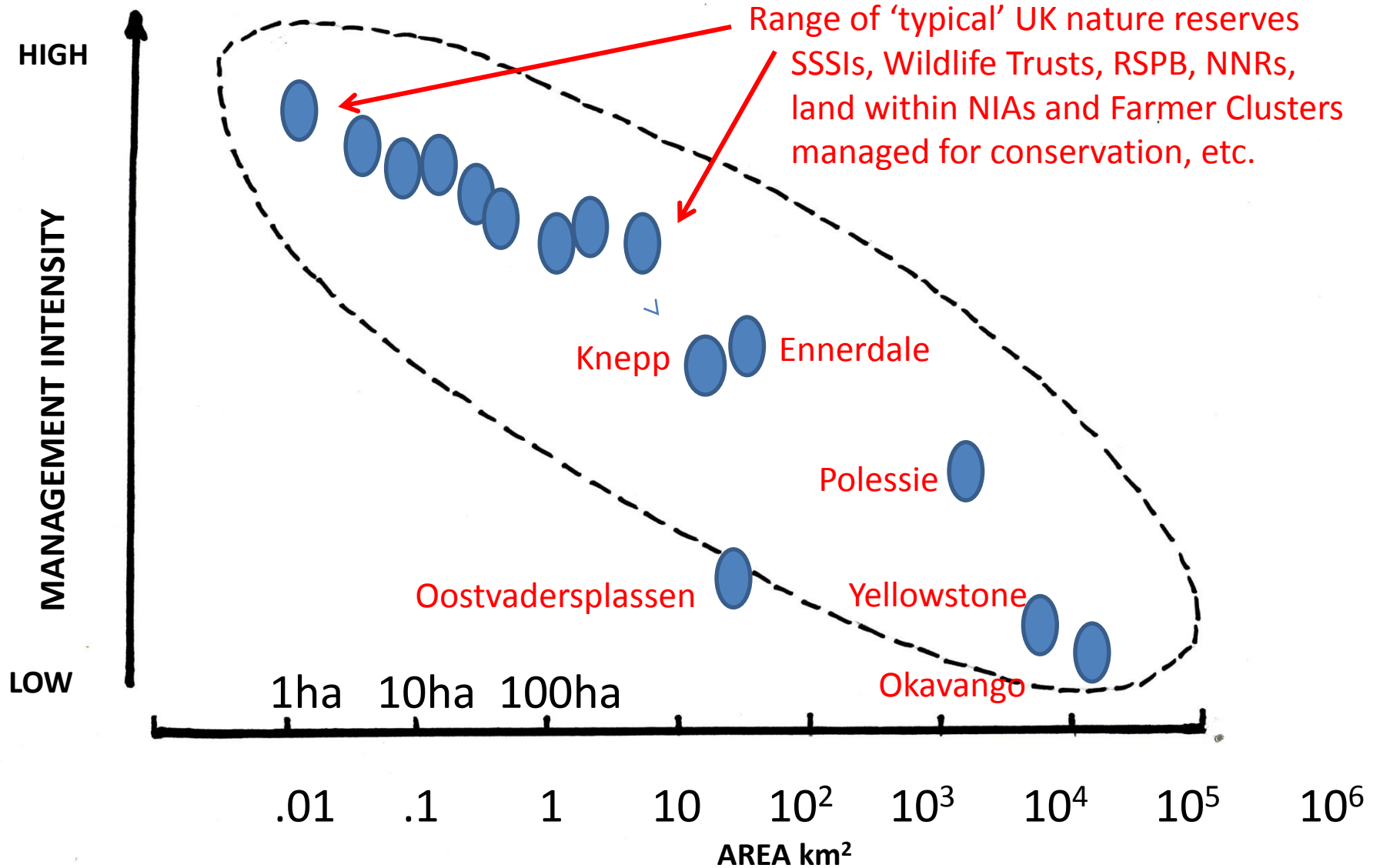


A great deal happening in landscape-level conservation in UK

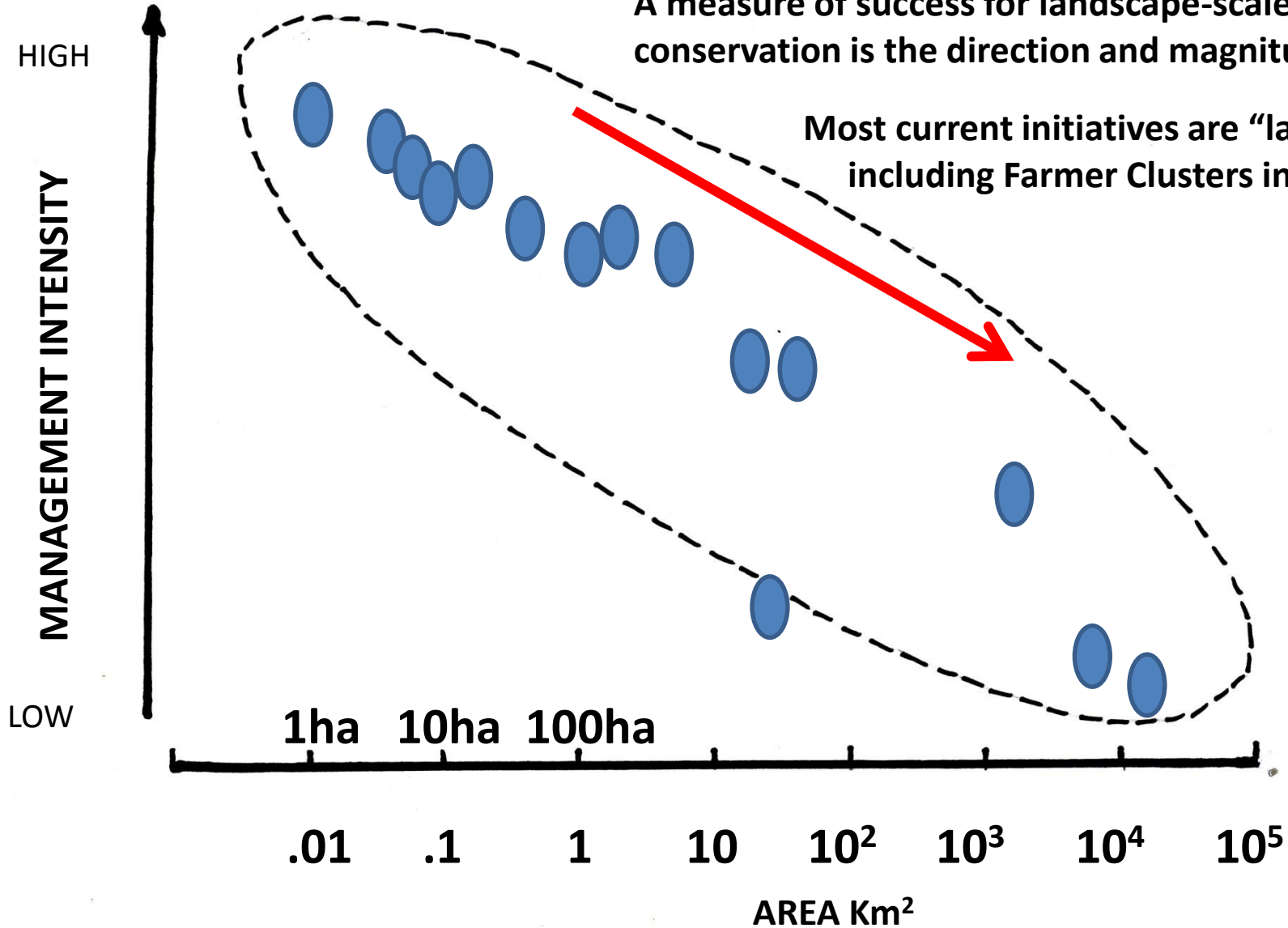
- Simple theoretical framework
- Set the Farmer Clusters initiative in context
- Brief mention of some (of several possible) other examples
- Land-sharing vs Land-sparing
- And let's get away from the 'S' word



'Cartoon' spectrum of protected areas scaled by size and by a qualitative indication of management intensity



Currently a great deal of interest in moving conservation from the top left of this diagram towards the bottom right. A measure of success for landscape-scale conservation is the direction and magnitude of travel.



What's happening in the UK and Europe right now is exciting

Going roughly from smaller to larger areas, initiatives planned or in train include:

- **GWCT/NE Farmer Clusters initiative**
- **Nature Improvement Areas**
- **National Trust Priority Habitats initiative**
- **Wildlife Trusts Living Landscapes**
- **RSPB Futurescapes**
- **HLF Landscape Partnerships**
- **Rewilding Britain**
- **CCI Endangered Landscapes Programme (Europe-wide re-wilding)**

As well as site-specific initiatives (both private and consortia) e.g.

- **Hagge Wood Trust**
- **The Great Fen**
- **Knepp**
- **Wild Ennerdale**



Nature Improvement Areas

In 2010 a panel I chaired produced a report for the UK Government entitled *Making Space for Nature: a review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network* (just England's terrestrial, coastal and freshwater habitats)

One of its 24 recommendations was to establish (via a national competition) what came to be called *Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs)*

Entirely voluntary 'consortia of the willing' – local authorities and communities, land-owners and managers, conservation NGOs, local businesses, statutory agencies (EA, NE, FC), utility companies, National Parks, AONBs etc.



The 'guiding mantra' was (and remains):

More, Bigger, Better and Joined

More Designate and/or create new sites

Bigger Increase the size of current wildlife sites

Better Improve the quality of current sites by better habitat management

Joined Enhance connections between, or join up, sites, either through physical corridors, or through 'stepping stones'

And where possible Reduce the pressures on wildlife by improving the wider environment, including through buffering wildlife sites

And do all this at a scale that creates a step-change in conservation gains

The Farmer Clusters initiative has exactly the same goals



Nature Improvement Areas

- 1 Birmingham and the Black Country
- 2 Dark Peak
- 3 Dearne Valley Green Heart
- 4 Greater Thames Marshes
- 5 Humberhead Levels
- 6 Marlborough Downs
- 7 Meres and Mosses
- 8 Morecambe Bay Limestones and Wetlands
- 9 Nene Valley
- 10 Northern Devon
- 11 South Downs Way Ahead
- 12 Wild Purbeck

The 12 winners

1. Birmingham and Black Country
2. Dark Peak
3. Dearne Valley
4. Greater Thames Marshes
5. Humberhead Levels
6. **Marlborough Downs**
7. Meres and Mosses of the Marches
8. Morecambe Bay Limestone and Wetlands
9. Nene Valley
10. North Devon
11. South Downs Way Ahead
12. Wild Purbeck

Modal size ca 50,000 ha, or 500 km² with a range between 100–700 km²
But only part of each NIA makes space for nature
It's classic *Land-Sharing*

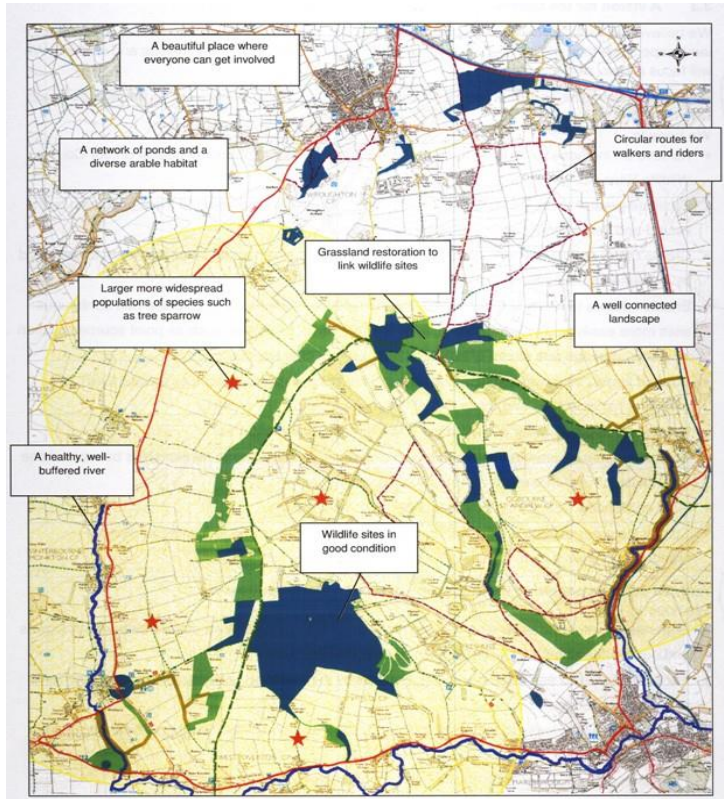


Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust/Natural England Farmer Clusters initiative

Modelled on the Marlborough Downs NIA, the only farmer-led NIA in the country. Helps groups of farmers work together, to collectively deliver greater benefits for soil, water and wildlife at a landscape scale.

Start life at a bottom-up, farmer level. You devise your own conservation plans. Although the work is often supplemented by existing agri-environment schemes, several Clusters have set up with no funding.

Five Clusters established across southern England as part of a pilot scheme (2013-15) now grown to 49, covering over 2000km² and nearly 1000 farmers.



Farmer Clusters are, again, classic **'Land-sharing'**, with conservation sites woven through a working, farmed, landscape:

- Increases potential for farming to also provide goods and services society wants, under a single set of land-use policies for the benefit of nature, farming and people
- Arguably more resilient to climate change

Alternative approach is **'Land-sparing'**, in which high-intensity farming (with no thought for wildlife) 'frees up' land set aside solely for wildlife conservation. To a degree we already have some of this in classic 'nature reserve' approach, but in a more extreme form *Making Space for Nature* explicitly argued against this model:

- Segregates more people from contact with nature
- Requires two sets of land-use policies
- Potentially very damaging environmentally



Land sharing vs. re-wilding

Currently both contentious and exciting

- **Worry that we will get into pointless and divisive arguments**
- **Since there are no surviving natural (i.e. unaffected by human activity) habitats in UK, virtually all our wildlife exists in semi-natural habitats, influenced and shaped over millennia by human actions**
- **So making more space for nature in ‘working landscapes’ (land-sharing) is important (moving as far as possible from the ‘top left’ to the ‘bottom right’ in my first and second slides)**
- **But where there are opportunities to really re-wild lets seize them!!**
- **We need more Oostvadersplassen, Knepps and Ennerdales (none of which, incidentally, are entirely free of human intervention). When we make even more space for nature it responds dramatically**



- Well aware that some Farmer Clusters receive no public “subsidy”
- But making space for nature in land-sharing projects in England predominantly involves Agri-Environment payments to farmers and landowners
- We all too casually often refer to these as “subsidies”
- The word is not helpful with BREXIT looming (or even without BREXIT!)
- Simply paying farmers and landowners ‘by the acre’ (Basic Payment Scheme) is (in my view) unsustainable (that really is a subsidy)
- Instead we should be **paying** (NOT “subsidising”) farmers and land managers to deliver goods and services that society wants and needs (as well as them growing food). For example:
 1. Making space for nature
 2. Soil conservation
 3. Carbon storage
 4. Giving people access to the countryside (with proven health and wellbeing benefits)
 5. Natural Flood Management (NFM)
 6. Clean, healthy water coursesetc., etc. (add your own)
- What we must not do however is pay farmers to stop bad behaviours that damage the environment and would not be tolerated in other industries



Yorkshire
Wildlife Trust

By way of example, YWT is working with Leeds CC on the potential for a major NFM scheme

- Restoring the upland sponge by blocking grips and drains
- Greatly reduce or eliminate grazing in critical upland catchments to restore vegetation
- Strategically plant trees
- Restore river meanders and put natural blockages back in the rivers (the exact opposite of canalisation and dredging!) to slow flows
- Replace arable with pasture
- Create new wetlands to hold water that will otherwise end up in Leeds and other northern cities

My vision is that if we could pay farmers to deliver some of these benefits, it would make even more space for nature, for the benefit of people, wildlife and farmers





The future of landscape-scale conservation, if we aim to be truly ambitious lies not just (or in some cases even) with a step change in “more, bigger, better and joined” reserves, but in also winning hearts, minds and politics to make even more space for nature in a crowded world outside strictly protected landscapes. That is, to reconnect people with nature, without them feeling threatened. It can be done. It won’t be easy. But it will be worth it.

That’s why the Farmer Clusters initiative is so brilliant! It isn’t the only thing we should be doing (and as we have seen it isn’t). But it’s exactly what we should be doing over swathes of the landscape, land-sharing for the benefit of people, wildlife, farmers and land-owners.

Thank you
Any questions?

