



WWF-UK
Registered office
The Living Planet Centre
Rufford House, Brewery Road
Woking, Surrey GU21 4LL

Tel: +44 (0)1483 426444
info@wwf.org.uk
wwf.org.uk

Systemic Nature-Based Solutions

Making nature a climate hero

May 2021

SUMMARY

- We know that a global temperature rise of anything beyond 1.5 degrees will be catastrophic for people and for wildlife.
- Nature is our greatest ally in the fight against climate breakdown. We must champion and embrace nature's vital role in helping deliver a 1.5°C world.
- As COP26 hosts, the UK Government must use their leadership role to put land use, agriculture and nature-based solutions (NbS) at the forefront of global plans to address emissions and tackle the climate and nature crisis.
- In this crucial year for climate, nature, and food, it is critical to shift from a piecemeal to an integrated approach to NbS and sustainable agriculture. Focusing only on protecting and restoring natural habitats will fail if, at the same time, the pressures of unsustainable production and consumption are not addressed, especially in the food and agricultural sector.
- UK parliamentarians have the opportunity to make their influence felt on the world stage by pushing for the UK to support NbS in this integrated way.

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS: A TOOL TO ADDRESS THE CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY CRISES

Our relationship with nature is broken and our biodiversity targets are not being met.¹ Financial flows for biodiversity protection and restoration are dwarfed by the US\$4 to 6 trillion spent by governments every year on subsidies harmful to biodiversity.² Nature remains in freefall because the activities driving the loss of habitats and species have not been curtailed. The food and agriculture sector has a massive impact in fuelling this environmental crisis. Land-use has been identified as the first driver of biodiversity loss by IPBES³, and it is estimated that food systems are responsible for a third of our greenhouse gas emissions.⁴

Nature-based Solutions have recently attracted a growing interest. They are recognised as a key tool to address the climate crisis, if implemented in addition to an accelerated phase-out of fossil fuels and an urgent decarbonisation of our economies.⁵ NbS also have the potential to improve livelihoods and well-being for millions of people on all continents. However, to ensure they are successful and sustainable, NbS must abide by stringent definitions and standards to counter any attempt of 'greenwashing'. At the same time, any trade-offs between climate mitigation, biodiversity conservation and food security must be minimised.

We know that NbS are popular. The 2020 UK Climate Assembly, a group of ordinary citizens brought together by six select committees, showed near-unanimous support for use of solutions like afforestation to reduce the impact of climate change.⁶ A recent OnePoll survey commissioned by WWF also found that over three-quarters (76%) of Brits agree UK Government should introduce a legal target for nature's recovery by 2030.

¹ Global Biodiversity Outlook 5. Convention on Biological Diversity (2020)

² The Economics of Biodiversity: the Dasgupta Review. Partha Dasgupta (2021)

³ Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services. IPBES (2019)

⁴ Food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions. Crippa, M., Solazzo, E., Guizzardi, D. et al. Nature Food (2021)

⁵ Defined by IUCN as "actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural and modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits."

⁶ https://www.climateassembly.uk/documents/91/Chapter_9.pdf

CASE STUDY – PLANTING HOPE: SEAGRASS

Seagrass is a wonder-plant that lives in shallow, sheltered areas along our coast. It is vital to the health of our seas and can help address environmental problems, capturing carbon up to 35 times faster than tropical rainforests. Seagrass is an important nursery for endangered wildlife such as seahorses, and many of the fish we eat, including cod, plaice and pollock. In the UK, up to 92 per cent of our seagrass has disappeared in the last century. We've been working with Sky Ocean Rescue and Swansea University to bring these incredible underwater meadows back to life, by launching the biggest seagrass restoration project ever undertaken in the UK. We are calling on the Government to use this model to bring back these lush underwater meadows and to become a global leader in restoring ocean health and combating climate change.



‘SYSTEMIC NBS’: FROM A PIECEMEAL TO AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

The design and implementation of NbS have traditionally focused on specific projects in specific places. This spotlight on “project level” interventions is welcome to demonstrate what successful, sustainable NbS look like. However, boosting these conservation efforts alone will not be enough to effectively deliver benefits for climate, biodiversity and people over the long term. In fact, stand-alone investments in many different NbS projects can become inefficient if the pressures of unsustainable production and consumption are not addressed.

In order to maximise nature’s potential to respond to the interrelated crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, it is critical to eliminate a series of systemic barriers such as unsustainable supply chains, harmful agricultural subsidies and a lack of finance, while at the same time unlocking a series of systemic enablers. Those systemic enablers can be policy or business actions, which lead to systemic change that removes barriers holding back at-scale NbS or unlocks NbS at scale. Systemic NbS will be enabled through a series of responses happening in different systems, three of which are of critical importance: the **finance** system, the **market** system, and the **governance** system. High-impact, large-scale NbS will be effective only if actions are taken simultaneously within those systems, alongside efforts to protect and restore natural habitats. The infographic at the end of this briefing provides further information on the enablers and how WWF-UK is addressing them.

THE ‘SUPER YEAR FOR NATURE AND CLIMATE’: A MAJOR OPPORTUNITY FOR SYSTEMIC NBS

2021 must be the year of enabling systemic NbS, making them an essential part of a successful COP26 and a green recovery. On the road to COP26, the UK can become a world leader by sharing, refining and putting into action an integrated approach to NbS and sustainable agriculture. This can be achieved through the following actions:

- **Make the Environment Bill a gold standard legislation. Embed the excellent Leaders Pledge for Nature as a basis for legislation and begin to reverse the decline of English nature by 2030 as well as developing a legal framework to tackle UK’s global environmental footprint and ensure we don’t offshore our impact.** 139 countries now have overarching legal frameworks that have taken direct inspiration from the UK’s world-first Climate Change Act. The Environment Bill represents a fantastic opportunity to make another world-leading legislative step in 2021, by doing the same for nature. **The Bill should set out clear and robust goals and targets to set the UK on a pathway to nature’s recovery and abundance** – bringing forward specific initiatives for top-quality protection of land and sea, and targets for the restoration of peatlands and afforestation in England. The Bill must also tackle the drivers of loss through action on deforestation and sustainable supply chains by strengthening the **mandatory due diligence obligation included in the Environment Bill** and putting in place a legal framework to set the targets to reduce our environmental and ecological footprint.
- **Lead a global diplomatic effort on deforestation and conversion-free supply chains** in the run-up to COP26. The UK Government-initiated Forest, Agriculture & Commodity Trade (FACT) dialogue should announce an ambitious package of actions at COP26, including commitments from producer and consumer countries to introduce mandatory due diligence in their legislation.

- **Use the £3 bn of international climate finance recently pledged for nature and biodiversity to put in place the conditions for large-scale, long-term restoration of landscapes**, and spur the transition towards **sustainable agriculture models**, including fixing the system of harmful subsidies paid to farmers and landowners.
- **Commit to a holistic UK Ocean Recovery Strategy – building on the current Marine Strategy** - which will halt the devastating decline of ocean health, champion the potential of the ocean as a climate and nature hero and set our ocean on the path to recovery ahead of COP26. As part of this, coastal and marine NbS, such as seagrass and saltmarsh, will help restore nature, capture carbon and support coastal fisheries and local communities. Please join our network of MP Ocean Heroes and become a voice for our amazing seas in Parliament.
- **Publish a trade policy that embraces sustainability and core environmental standards**, which should underpin all of the trade deals the UK will be negotiating.
- **Promote this integrated approach to Nature-based Solutions and sustainable agriculture on the global stage**. As the Presidency of COP26 and G7, and leading force behind the Leaders’ Pledge for Nature, the Government can play an influential role to elevate systemic NbS on the global agenda. The G7, UN Food Systems Summit, CBD COP15 and COP26 are all opportunities to actively push a series of ambitious actions and commitments on sustainable production and consumption, global supply chains, food systems, subsidies harmful to nature, and a green recovery from Covid-19.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: MAKE NATURE A CLIMATE HERO IN PARLIAMENT

Please use this briefing to raise this important issue with the Government. In particular we would urge you to table a parliamentary question directly to the COP President, Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, and the Prime Minister, at COP Departmental Questions and PMQs, respectively, to ask how the government will ensure that nature plays its full role in helping our efforts to tackle climate change. Please don’t hesitate to get in touch with our Public Affairs Team who would be happy to advise on further wording and discuss how you can further champion this issue within Parliament.

Contact	Robin McGhee, Public Affairs Adviser	Monika Baunach, Public Affairs Adviser
Email/Tel	rmcgee@wwf.org.uk 01483412307	mbaunach@wwf.org.uk 01483 412551

“SYSTEMIC NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS”: a shift to landscape-level restoration and sustainable agriculture

