



THE WILDLIFE TRUSTS' INTERIM POLICY STATEMENT

RESPONDING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

1. Introduction

Climate change is almost certainly the most significant challenge facing nature conservation today, with the potential to have significant impacts on the future of UK and global biodiversity.

Although wildlife has had to adapt to naturally driven climatic fluctuations in the past, the scale and rate of predicted change over the next century will place much greater pressures on habitats and species. More importantly, human activities have removed the large areas of natural habitat that acted as buffers against change, replacing them with small and fragmented patches, in many cases already under threat from agriculture and development.

This policy statement updates The Wildlife Trusts' previous position paper, produced in 1999, which focuses almost entirely on adaptation – actions that The Wildlife Trusts will take to increase the ability of habitats and species to survive climate change. It has been updated to take account of the latest scientific thinking. In particular, this suggests that we also need to engage in reducing the levels of climate change, so that our work to help wildlife adapt is not undermined by changes too great for it to cope with. This brings us into line with the expectations of our members and recognises our key role in advocacy and public engagement.

2. A New Policy Framework

The implications of climate change are far-reaching. To address them all in a single policy would result in a large and unwieldy document, reducing flexibility to respond to changing events. Instead, The Wildlife Trusts have adopted a more flexible 'modular' approach.

A **core policy statement** sets out the basic principles that The Wildlife Trusts will apply as we develop our work in responding to climate change. **Supplementary policy statements** translate these principles into detail, addressing specific issues such as wind farms, planning and UK energy policy.

This document sets out The Wildlife Trusts' **core policy on climate change** together with a discussion of the basic principles that underlie the policy choices we have made. A list of supplementary policy statements, together with a draft timetable for their development, will be published in due course.

An earlier version of this document was presented to Forum in September 2005 and approved in principle, pending some minor alterations. This version, which incorporates these modifications will be presented to Forum in January 2006. Until then it should be treated as an interim policy document only.

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3. Core Policy Statement

- 3.1 The Wildlife Trusts accept the current scientific opinion that human activity in the form of increased greenhouse gas emissions will have an effect on the Earth's future climate.
- 3.2 We also recognise that historical increases in greenhouse gas emissions are causing changes to the current climate, that these changes are already having an effect on UK wildlife and that these changes would continue even if emissions were brought under control immediately.
- 3.3 The Wildlife Trusts accept current predictions of rises in average global temperatures in excess of 6°C by 2100; this despite some uncertainty about the pace and extent of future changes, especially on a local scale. We acknowledge the need to restrict the rise in average global temperatures to less than 2°C over the same time period if significant change in UK biodiversity, including loss of some species, is to be avoided.
- 3.4 We believe that the need to respond to the challenge of climate change, and the issues it raises, is critical to our vision of **'an environment richer in wildlife for everyone'**.
- 3.5 The Wildlife Trusts recognise the need for a three-track approach to climate change:
- **Adaptation** – with the aim of increasing the ability of natural systems, habitats and species to react and adapt to climate change
 - **Mitigation** – with the aim of addressing the cause of climate change through reducing greenhouse gas emissions and providing carbon sinks
 - **Communication** – with the aim of encouraging others to take action.
- 3.6 The Wildlife Trusts will integrate climate change response into all areas of work. We will act at local, regional and country levels throughout the UK, develop a common approach to actions and agree key messages for wider awareness work. Where appropriate we will work in partnership with others, but will also add value to the wider effort by identifying areas where we can bring unique skills and expertise to bear.
- 3.7 The Wildlife Trusts believe that climate change is a major obstacle to the achievement of an environmentally sustainable future. We believe that society needs to set itself the goal of becoming carbon neutral, reducing our impact on the future needs of wildlife. The Wildlife Trusts will work towards this goal, both in the operation of our own businesses and through our awareness and advocacy work.
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4. Basic Principles

4.1 Climate change – a threat to wildlife

At a recent workshop on the impacts of climate change on wildlife, a plenary session succinctly set forth the options for the future of biodiversity on this planet:

“If we manage to contain global warming to 2°C, there will be some species loss but there are conceivable management options for the conservation of global biodiversity. At 4°C global average temperature rise, there will be many species lost, few management options and enormous financial cost. At the uppermost predictions of around 6°C temperature rise, the outlook is dire.”¹

2°C is around the lower end of current scientific predictions for global temperature rise by the end of the century. Climate change is a significant threat to the future of UK wildlife.

The Wildlife Trusts have a huge part to play in taking and advocating action on climate change. Our Climate Change Policy sets out the basic approach that we will take in responding to climate change. It provides a context, highlighting the potential impact of climate change on UK biodiversity and the need for action.

Our response to climate change focuses on three main areas:

- Adaptation increasing the ability of habitats and species to adapt
- Mitigation working to reduce levels of future climate change
- Communication working to promote action in a range of audiences

and the full policy framework will set out how, and to what extent, The Wildlife Trusts will engage with these areas, remembering that our prime concern is the future of UK wildlife.

4.2 Adaptation – habitat and species work on the ground

A major focus of our climate change work at a local level will be in the area of adaptation. The extent of our own nature reserves, our experience of working with partners on the ground, and the developing landscape-scale approach to conservation; all of these suggest that practical work to increase the robustness of habitats and species will remain an important part of our climate change response. Local efforts will continue to be supported by policy work at regional, national and UK levels and enhanced by a common approach, increased joint working and the dissemination of best practice throughout the partnership.

4.3 Mitigation – a co-ordinated approach

There are limits to what can be achieved for wildlife if we rely on adaptation measures alone. We must engage in reducing society’s carbon footprint, and therefore future levels of climate change, so that our work to help wildlife adapt is not undermined by changes too great for it to cope with. There is a need for co-ordination at all levels.

¹ Rhys E. Green, Mike Harley, Lera Miles, Jörn Scharlemann, Andrew Watkinson and Olly Watts (eds.) 2003. Global Climate Change and Biodiversity, Published by RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL

On the **local** scene there are increasing numbers of planning applications for renewable energy projects demanding a response. These are often developed in the absence of strategic assessments, which are best carried out at a sub-regional or county level. The policy will provide guidance for local Wildlife Trusts as they engage in this process, addressing issues of balance between the need to reduce CO₂ emissions and minimise impacts on local biodiversity.

There is a need to work at a **regional** level to ensure environmental sustainability and climate change response is factored into key strategies. Too often discussions centre on where development should take place, not how much is environmentally sustainable. The policy will provide a steer on how regional Wildlife Trusts partnerships can engage in these discussions and what we should be setting out to achieve.

Measures to reduce future climate change are also needed at a **national** and **international** level. The policy will guide the way we engage politicians and other decision makers, and how we work with others, setting criteria that we use to judge when we should work in partnership and when we need to take a more independent approach.

4.4 Communication

Communication and working with others is critical to the success of any response to climate change. There can be no change without action, and this will not be forthcoming unless the views and behaviour of individuals can be changed.

The Wildlife Trusts are well placed to develop and deliver a communications strategy in response to climate change. We have local and national publications reaching more than 600,000 members, well developed links with local media and experience of working with individuals and communities on the ground developing examples of good practice.

The policy will set out the key messages that we will impart. More importantly, however, it will discuss how high profile our media stance should be on climate change and how much we will engage in the key debates.

4.5 Climate change response – a tall order?

Climate change is a significant threat to the future of UK wildlife and the Climate Change Policy is the most significant statement of intent made by The Wildlife Trusts for a generation.

We need to incorporate climate change response into all aspects of our day-to-day work; creating robust large areas to allow wildlife to respond to climate change, facing the challenges of reducing carbon emissions in today's society to reduce future impacts, and working with people to change individual behaviour. Ambitious maybe, but The Wildlife Trusts are well up to the task, and nothing less will do.