

Growing Nature to 2035

Our strategy for nature recovery



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The right thing to do...

1. Protect the best – take action to protect the valuable biodiversity that we have on our landholdings

2. Restore and enhance the rest – take action across our landholdings and assets to enhance biodiversity in the everyday management of our sites

3. Collaborate beyond our land – work in partnership with others across the region, taking a catchment approach, to deliver biodiversity enhancement and nature recovery



The right thing to do...

South West Water understands the importance of being part of the bigger picture when it comes to biodiversity and the environment, and that we need to work in partnership to have the greatest impact.

This Biodiversity Strategy is aligned with the **Pennon Group's Biodiversity Policy** which sets out

“a clear commitment to the protection, enhancement, sensitive management and stewardship of our landholdings and assets. It also has aims to deliver improvements across the range of landscapes and catchments in and adjacent to our operational areas, for the benefit of biodiversity and wider environmental outcomes”

National biodiversity strategies and legislation:

The Biodiversity Strategy is required to support South West Water's Biodiversity Duty as a Public Authority and ambition to deliver adaptive management plans that deliver good outcomes for wildlife and go above and beyond our statutory duties.

The strategy is informed by the legislative requirements set out in the Environment Act (2021), the subsequent Environmental Improvement Plan (2023) and the Plan for Water (2023).

The other relevant legislation to this strategy includes;

- Ramsar Convention (1975)
- Conservation of Habitats and Species Act (2018)
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)
- The Water Industry Act (1991)
- The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)

Proactively understanding the requirements and need to protect any of the wildlife that may be impacted during our operational activity; specifically, fish such as European Eel, mammals such as bats, birds, bees, butterflies and all reptiles and amphibians



Wimbleball SWW

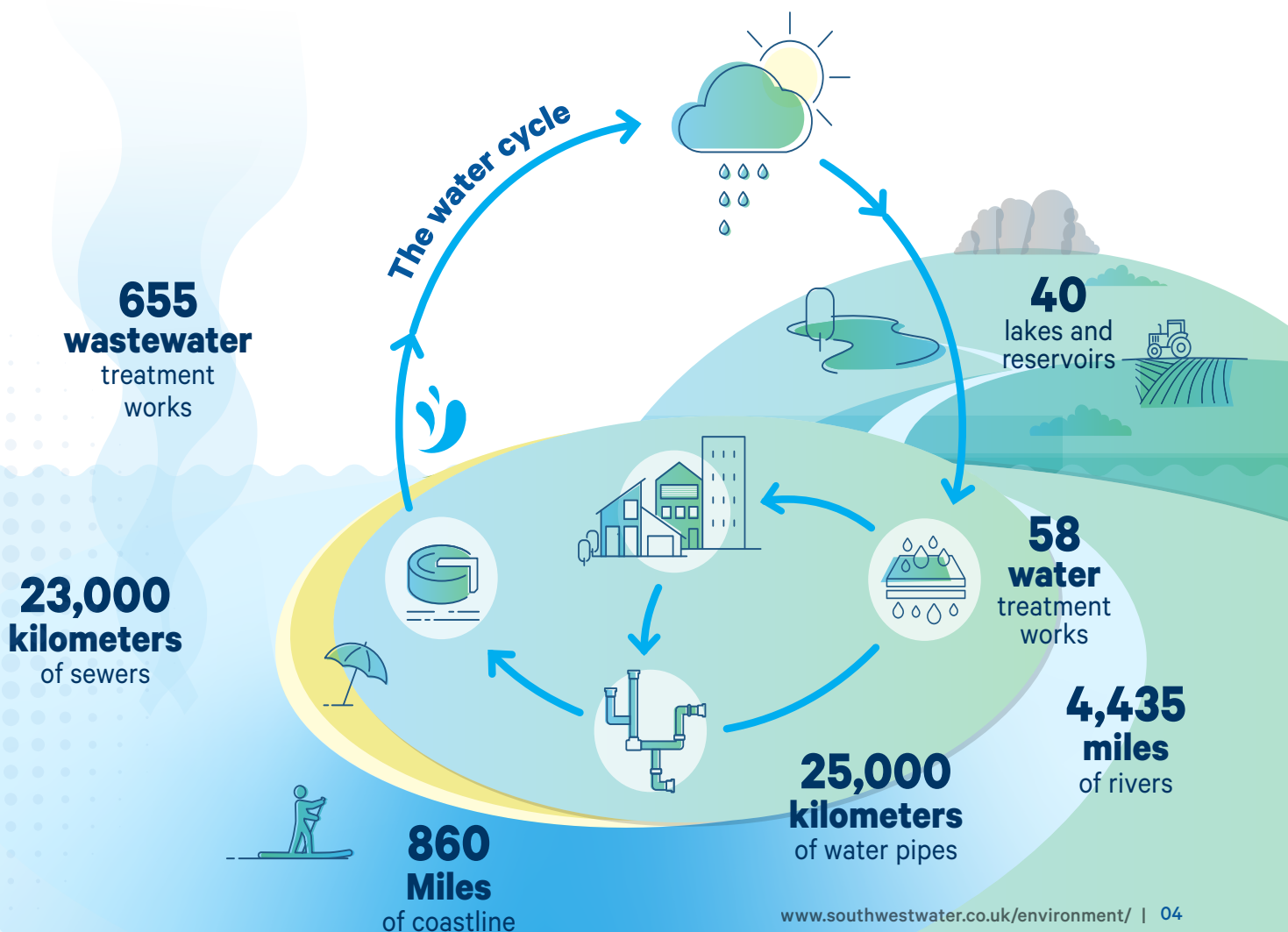
South West Water's Biodiversity Strategy to 2035

This Biodiversity Strategy sets out the key activities that South West Water will take to support nature recovery and biodiversity on our land, in our everyday operations and beyond.

We aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity across our land and region, continuing and expanding the partnership work we have already undertaken with public, private and third sector bodies, as we make our contribution to reversing the decline of nature.

We also plan to improve and recreate new habitat and biodiversity across the areas we serve.

Water is essential for human life – for all wildlife to survive and thrive. It is abstracted from the natural environment and, once used, is taken away to be treated and returned to the natural environment when it is safe to do so.



As well as sustaining human life, water is essential for sustaining biodiversity through the natural water cycle, our habitats, species and natural processes.

The beauty of the region's natural environment - our coasts, countryside and rivers - is internationally acknowledged and a key reason why 3.5 million residents choose to live and work here and a further 10 million people come to visit each year.

However, despite its beauty, nature here in the region, as in the rest of the UK, is in decline. In 2023, Sir David Attenborough warned that the UK remains one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world and urged us all to act now.

South West Water has worked with our regulators to build a programme of environmental compliance under the Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) which will be delivered between 2025 and 2035.

In recognition of the importance of the environment to the economic prosperity and social wellbeing of the areas we serve, South West Water is investing over and above the minimum required to support the Government target to reverse the decline in biodiversity.

¹<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/press-office/press-releases/natural-history-museum-reveals-the-world-has-crashed-through-the.html>



Images from top to bottom

Planting native tree saplings SWW

Wildflower Meadow at Roadford reservoir SWLT

Small pearl bordered fritillary at Newleycombe SWLT

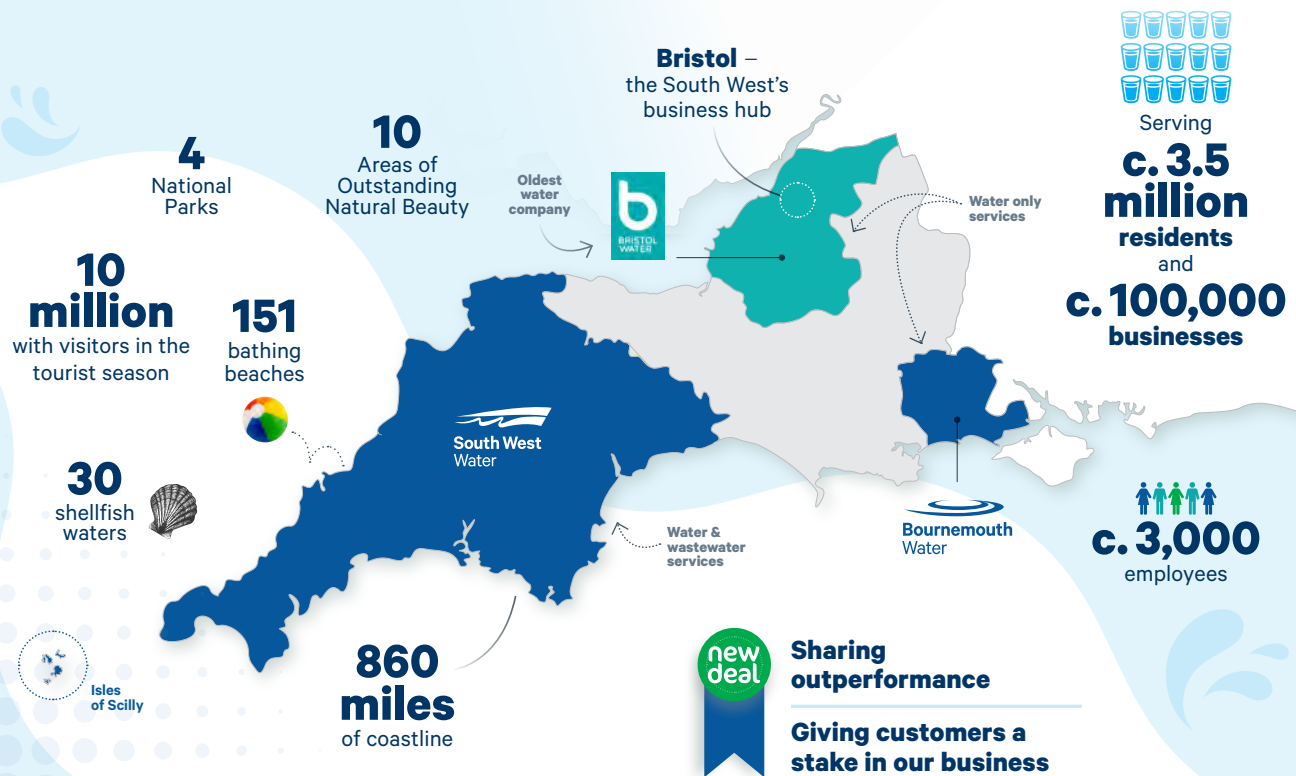


Sennen bee
SWW



Grizzled Skipper
SWW

The areas we serve...



The nature of South West Water

South West Water is the proud owner and manager of over 6,000 hectares of land across the areas we serve.

Our sites include reservoirs, moorlands, major operational sites, former clay pits, estuaries, farmland and forests, and small urban sites with pumping stations and pipework.

Many of our sites are already well established havens for wildlife, with some designated as Special Areas of Conservation, National Nature Reserves and County Wildlife Sites.

We own and manage 1251 hectares of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), of which 88.5% is in favourable condition and all but 9.5 hectares of the remainder is classed as in recovery.

The South West peninsula is surrounded by seas with 860 miles of coastline. The marine habitats of our coastal areas are special, with multiple designations of Marine Conservation Zones and Special Areas of Conservation.

The maritime peninsula of the South West means that we are on the front line of climate change. We are also at risk of invasive non-native species coming in with visitors to the region, and invasive non-native species coming over from the continent, especially marine and aquatic species. On land, new pests and diseases can have a more significant impact here in the South West than in other parts of the UK, a key example being Ash dieback which hit the South West first.

South West Water is particularly vulnerable to climate change, given its 860 miles of coastline, and adjacency to the western approaches of the Atlantic Ocean, exposing the area to impacts from rising sea levels and storm intensity.

The moorlands and peatland habitats of the South West are also vulnerable given their southerly position in the UK, especially the low altitude sites on Bodmin Moor and Exmoor.

We have over 4,000 miles of rivers - main rivers and major tributaries - in the areas we serve.

Current threats to nature

The biggest threats to biodiversity in the UK are loss of habitat, intensive agriculture, climate change, hydrological change such as drought, urbanisation, pollution, woodland management, and invasive non-native species.

Some of these pressures will have a particular impact directly on the land we own and manage, including some of our special sites.

Climate change

It is well documented that climate change is having a negative impact on biodiversity. As the weather in the South West becomes wetter and warmer, habitats are changing and becoming fragmented. Species can no longer move freely to adapt to the changing climate and for some species this could lead to extinction. The resilience of wildlife to climate change is vital to our very survival. Protecting our fragile ecosystems is key and this can be achieved through good habitat management, rewilding, rewetting and improving connectivity at a landscape or catchment scale.



Woodland regeneration at Venford Reservoir SWW

- This needs to be achieved while also protecting SWW assets from the direct impact of climate change such as sea level rises that might cause flooding. We will ensure delivery is achieved aligned to the Environment Agency's "Working with Natural Processes" guidance where possible.

Pollution

Agricultural run-off, industrial effluent, sewage, flooding and littering are all causes of pollution in our rivers and streams. Our landholding is affected by some of these such as possible agricultural impacts where the land is farmed, or litter from public access to sites. Alongside this our staff and asset operation on the land holding or in our service area may potentially have a pollution impact.



Clubmoss at Stannon Lake
Davies

SWW and agencies such as Defra, environmental organisations and landowners are working in partnership to significantly reduce the amount of pollution entering our watercourses. The quantity and quality of biodiversity is significantly increased when water quality is improved. South West Water's catchment management programme, Upstream Thinking, has evidenced this over the last decade.

Invasive non-native species (INNS)

INNS have a negative impact on the environment, human health and the economy. INNS are plants or animals (terrestrial, freshwater, or marine) that have been moved from their place of origin, accidentally or intentionally by humans. There are around 200 INNS in the UK, but this is increasing every year. INNS can thrive as they have no natural predators, competitors or diseases and impact on native species.



Japanese Knotweed

INNS can impact on all parts of our business: providing a good water supply, dealing with wastewater and sewage and our conservation, access and recreational duties. Some key species of concern for South West Water include plants such as Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and New Zealand pigmyweed, and animals such as American signal crayfish, invasive fish, and Zebra mussels. Aquatic INNS are particularly problematic to manage. Working in partnership with stakeholders at a local, county, regional and national level is vital to determine what INNS are present, what could arrive in the South West and to implement a range of biosecurity measures to prevent the spread of INNS within the region.

Further challenges for biodiversity come from population growth in the South West and the enduring popularity of the area with visitors and tourists, with an associated increase in development and urbanisation of the landscape and increased risk of visitors bringing invasive non-native species with them.

The pace of change with which wider investments made by the water company deliver improvements to biodiversity is also a factor, such as reductions in the amount of water taken from rivers, and reductions in the amounts of nutrients present after treatment when wastewater is returned to the environment.



American Signal Crayfish



Himalayan Balsam



Meldon Wildlife Fair



Biosecurity facilities at Roadford

Current opportunities for nature

Despite nature being under threat, there are many opportunities for water companies and others to work together to reverse the decline.

Environment Act 2021

Following the ascent of the Environment Act in 2021, the Government published new legally binding targets to halt the decline in species populations by 2030, and then to increase populations by at least 10% to exceed current levels by 2042. The Defra Environmental Improvement Plan and the Plan for Water further provides clear legislative drivers for water companies to respond to, alongside the Water Industry Strategic Environmental Requirements (WISER) guidance issued in 2022.

Like many others, South West Water has duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity to contribute to the overall effort to halt the decline of nature, and we are committed to ensuring that our operational activities – where we take water from the natural water cycle and return when it is safe to do so – support the natural environment helping our wildlife and habitats to survive and thrive.

South West Water must also have regard to the Local Authority led Local Nature Recovery Strategies which are currently in development across the areas we serve. South West Water will engage in the development and align future implementation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies will the interventions we initiate on our own landholdings and beyond. South West Water will, in accordance with Planning law, make the necessary plans as part of our infrastructure maintenance and improvement to deliver at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain where required.

South West Water has worked with our regulators to build a programme of environmental compliance under the Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) and recognising the importance of the environment to the economic prosperity and social wellbeing of the South West, we are investing over and above the minimum required to support the Government target to reverse the decline in biodiversity

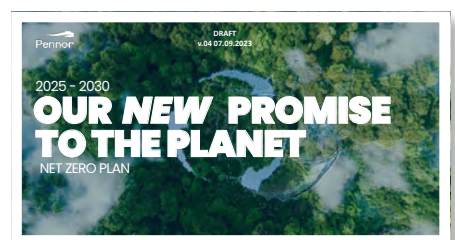
Lowering carbon emissions

By reducing emissions and switching to renewable sources of energy, the multiple programmes underway across the region in the public, private and voluntary sectors, will be reducing the potential speed and impact of climate change on the biodiversity of the region. Many of these programmes include scope for additional carbon sequestration to offset residual emissions, such as tree planting and peatland restoration, and so present an opportunity for South West Water to collaborate with others.

We will work to increase natural solutions for carbon storage on our land and within the catchments, through our ambitious programmes for tree planting, peatland restoration, improving soil quality, restoring and improving hedges, habitats and riverine landscapes.

Our work to improve rivers and bathing waters will not only lead to cleaner seas but also to more seagrass. Seagrass meadows provide homes for juvenile fish and protect creatures like seahorses and stalked jellyfish. They also play an integral role in stabilising the seabed, cleaning the surrounding seawater, and capturing and storing significant amounts of carbon. At least 44% of the UK's seagrass has been lost since 1936 so it is vital that our bathing water improvement work benefits seagrass along our shorelines across the region.

Where South West Water owns marginal land or estuaries, we will investigate how we can help to develop coastal salt marshes. Salt marshes are coastal wetlands that are flooded and drained by salt water brought in by the tides. They provide food, refuge, or nursery habitat for more than 75% of fish species, including shrimp, blue crab, and many finfish. Salt marshes also protect shorelines from erosion by buffering wave action and trapping sediments. They reduce flooding by slowing and absorbing rainwater and protect water quality by filtering run-off, and by metabolizing excess nutrients.



Nature-based solutions

As a water company, we have a unique relationship with rivers and other surface waters such as reservoirs, relying on them for 90% of drinking water supplies. We also discharge treated water back into these rivers. It is vital that we ensure that the impact of any of our operational activities protects and enhances biodiversity. So, we carefully monitor, survey and continue to learn about new ways of managing water, including ways which align with natural processes, including nature-based solutions.

The demand for nature-based solutions to play a key role in the operations of the water industry has increased dramatically. Nature-based solutions are included in Ofwat guidance as an alternative and also as a supplementary solution to traditional, hard engineered approaches. Nature-based solutions are often collaborative ways of achieving water management outcomes using natural processes.

Typical examples include:

- Planting trees and hedges to increase water absorption, catch rainfall and slow down surface water run-off
- Improving soil cover with plants to reduce water pollution and run-off
- Diverting high water flows and creating areas to store water
- Re-introduction of beavers creating leaky barriers to slow water flow in streams and ditches
- Restoring salt marshes, mudflats and peat bogs
- Creating reed beds to further clean treated water

Nature-based solutions also produce wider public benefits which can be quantified and measured. These include health and wellbeing, increased carbon sequestration, increased accessible green and blue space.

Whilst the evidence base for nature-based solutions is evolving, more work is needed to understand the certainty associated with interventions and to test and trial new approaches.

Green first framework

Our 'Green First' approach will look for the opportunities to work with nature, our stakeholders and communities to reduce the amount of water entering our drainage network by slowing the flow in our catchments. At least 10% of our activities will be nature-based (such as rain gardens) by 2030, more over time, and we'll develop our skills, understanding and capacity to deliver more nature-based solutions in the future.



Biodiversity Performance Commitment

From 2025, all water companies will set out their plans for delivering measurable biodiversity enhancement units as part of the new common Biodiversity Performance Commitment. The units are measured using the Defra Natural England biodiversity metric and will be achieved as a result of the actions that we will deliver under each of the sections of this strategy across the areas we serve.

For Devon, Cornwall, Bournemouth and the Isles of Scilly area, we have reviewed the habitat types that we manage and made some estimates as to the likely biodiversity units that we are like to create and the timing of when the units would be available. We have also looked at the impact of our Upstream Thinking catchment management programme and estimated how many biodiversity units that is likely to create. For the Bristol area we have considered thirteen sites and estimated how many units of biodiversity enhancements those sites are likely to create, based on our experience in delivery biodiversity improvements.

Initially, partly because the Biodiversity Performance Commitment is new for much of our area, we have been cautious in our modelling assumptions. However, as we gain confidence and understanding of the methodology and the approach, we are likely to appoint more land and raise our ambitions in terms of our contribution to biodiversity enhancement and ultimately, reversing the decline of nature.



Leaky dams on Burrator

1. **Protect the best** – take action to protect the valuable biodiversity that we have on our landholdings

Many of the natural catchments which South West Water own and manage fall within sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – a legal designation for areas of land that support rare or unusual examples of flora, fauna and geology. This distinction gives protection from damage and disturbance to the geological features and wildlife found within these valuable sites. Overall, we also own and manage 1251 hectares of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), of which 88.5% of is in favourable condition and all but 9.5 hectares of the remainder is classed as in recovery. It is our responsibility to shield and preserve all such items of cultural or ecological significance that sit within the boundaries of our land management portfolio.

Some sites are also designated as County Wildlife Sites, which were selected because of their high nature conservation value. Selection was based on distinctive, important or threatened species and habitats, in either a national, regional or local context and aimed to link and buffer other important areas for nature recovery, such as SSSIs.

South West Water is delivering management plans to enhance the biodiversity value of the County Wildlife Sites that we own and manage. We will continue to expand and enhance biodiversity investments made to date at a number of sites that we own across the areas we serve where we are currently working towards designation in recognition of their high biodiversity value.

In line with the Lawton Review in 2010, which called for “more bigger, better and joined” spaces for nature, we will work in partnership with neighbouring landowners to explore how we can work together, at a landscape scale, to deliver nature recovery priorities outlined in Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

What we will do:

1. We will baseline the biodiversity value of our priority habitats, including County Wildlife Sites and SSSIs
2. We will develop and deliver management plans to maintain and enhance biodiversity at priority habitat sites
3. We will work with neighbouring landowners to explore opportunities for managing these sites at a landscape scale and in line with Local Nature Recovery Strategy priorities



2. **Restore and enhance the rest** – take action across our landholdings and assets to enhance biodiversity in the everyday management of our sites

South West Water's operational infrastructure which enables the abstraction of water, testing, treatment and return of the natural environment, is distributed across a network of sites, connected by pipes, across the areas we serve. In many cases, the sites have some land around them, which presents an opportunity for enhancing the biodiversity value of our current operational estate. Tree planting, changes to mowing regimes, creating ponds, replacing non-native species with native species and other interventions will all help to increase the biodiversity value of our operational estate.

We will continue to survey, monitor and take action to control and limit the movement of invasive non-native species present in our operational infrastructure and will continue to share our knowledge and best practice in partnership with others. We will also continue to deliver schemes which help to naturalise rivers and waterways to help eels and fish to move without obstruction.

Where we need planning permission to maintain or enhance operational sites, we will ensure that we deliver at least a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain ideally on site, or close by.

In addition, as we implement our Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan and our Water Resources Management Plan, we have committed to using our "Green First Framework" which will increase the use of nature-based solutions to meet operational water management challenges. We will be looking to see whether new nature-based solutions can be accommodated with the operational estate, and if not, looking for opportunities in the catchments of drinking water and wastewater treatment works.

What we will do:

1. We will baseline the biodiversity of our operational estate
2. We will develop and deliver management plans to maintain and deliver measurable biodiversity enhancement across our operational estate
3. We will continue to identify opportunities to plant trees on our land for biodiversity and carbon
4. We will take action to naturalise our waterways to enable fish, eels and beavers to move with minimal risk and obstruction
5. We will survey, monitor and control invasive non-native species
6. We will increase the use of nature-based solutions in tackling water management challenges, adopting the "Green first" framework
7. Enhance access and educational opportunities for our 40 lakes and reservoirs and extend access to special sites for residents and visitors.



Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan



Draft Water Resources Management Plan

3. **Beyond our landholdings** – work in partnership with others across the region, taking a catchment approach, to deliver biodiversity enhancement and nature recovery

South West Water acknowledges that working in partnership to deliver our Biodiversity Strategy both now and in the future will achieve the greatest impact to the natural environment and provide the best value for money for customers.

South West Water will continue our award-winning “Upstream Thinking” programme of catchment management, working through delivery partners to support farmers and landowners to manage their land differently, in ways which improve water quality, enhance biodiversity and climate resilience. We will also work with partners to create and restore habitats across the areas we serve, including planting trees, aligning any additional support we can offer where possible with priorities set out in catchment plans and Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

Given the importance of partnership working, we will continue to invest time and resources to engage in the key environmental forums active across the areas we serve, including for example, the Local Nature Partnerships and the Catchment Partnerships and our own “Let’s talk Water” stakeholder forum.

We will also continue to research aspects of our work, including the effectiveness of catchment management, through our partnership with the University of Exeter, the Centre for resilience in Environment, Water and Waste (CREWW). We will complete the delivery of innovation projects, such as Water Net Gain and the Catchment Systems Thinking Cooperative, pursuing new ideas and opportunities to innovate in collaboration with others.

What we will do:

1. We will support farmers and landowners to farm in ways which enhance water quality and availability, biodiversity and other environmental benefits
2. We will create and restore terrestrial, marine and river habitats to enhance biodiversity, including peatland restoration
3. We will work in partnership and contribute to the delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, taking a catchment and coastal based approach
4. We will actively engage and lead environmental partnerships to align resources and identify collaboration opportunities
5. We will research innovative ways to tackle water management challenges and enhance biodiversity



1. **Protect the best** – take action to protect the valuable biodiversity that we have on our landholdings

We will baseline the biodiversity value of all priority habitats, including County Wildlife Sites and SSSIs	100% baseline surveys completed by 2030
We will develop and deliver management plans to maintain and enhance biodiversity at all priority habitat sites	50 Biodiversity Units created by 2030
We will work with neighbouring landowners to explore opportunities for managing these sites at a landscape scale and in line with Local Nature Recovery Strategy priorities	5 opportunities identified

2. **Restore and enhance the rest** – take action across our landholdings and assets to enhance biodiversity in the everyday management of our sites

We will baseline the biodiversity of our operational estate	100% by 2030
We will develop and deliver management plans to maintain and deliver measurable biodiversity enhancement across our operational estate	At least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain from relevant development
We will continue to identify opportunities to plant trees on our land for biodiversity and carbon	300,000 trees planted by 2030
We will take action to naturalise our waterways to enable fish, eels and beavers to move with minimal risk and obstruction	Deliver 7 screens and 9 passage solutions
We will survey, monitor and control invasive non-native species	Biosecurity measures at 300 sites and 5,000 people engaged
We will increase the use of nature-based solutions in tackling water management challenges, adopting the “Green first” framework	10% by 2030
Enhance access and educational opportunities for our 40 lakes and reservoirs and extend access to special sites for residents and visitors.	Develop and publish Access and Education Strategy by 2026

3. **Collaborate beyond our land** – work in partnership with others across the region, taking a catchment approach, to deliver biodiversity enhancement and nature recovery

We will support farmers and landowners to farm in ways which enhance water quality and availability, biodiversity and other environmental benefits	12,500 new hectares by 2030
We will create and restore terrestrial, marine and river habitats to enhance biodiversity, including peatland restoration	301 Biodiversity Units created by 2030
We will work in partnership and contribute to the delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, taking a catchment and coastal based approach	Engage with all Local Nature Partnerships across the region
We will actively engage and lead environmental partnerships to align resources and identify collaboration opportunities	4 meetings per year of Stakeholder Forum 3 meetings per year of Biodiversity Panel
We will research innovative ways to tackle water management challenges and enhance biodiversity	- Complete delivery of Water Net Gain Ofwat innovation project - Contribute to CaSTCo project

Partnership Working

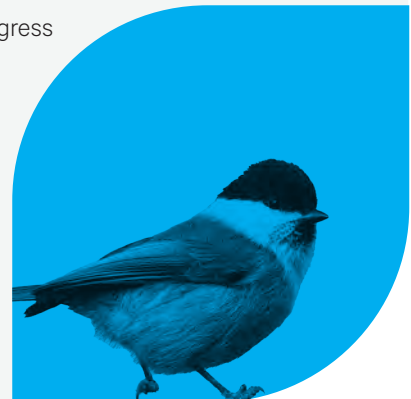
From our experience to date, South West Water knows that working in partnership to deliver our Biodiversity Strategy both now and in the future will achieve the greatest impact to the natural environment in the areas we serve and provide the best value for money to our customers.

We will continue to work in partnership with environmental organisations including Natural England, Catchment Partnerships and the Environment Agency, South West Lakes Trust, local Wildlife Trusts, regional Rivers Trusts, Local Authorities and Local Nature Partnerships and a wide range of other partners for example Invasive Non-Native Species Partnerships. We will also develop new partnerships (e.g working with recreational site users) and evolve our “Let’s talk water” Stakeholder Forum which will allow us to continue to develop nature recovery networks both on South West Water landholdings and in the wider landscape.

How will we monitor progress

We will monitor and report progress against the ambitions of the Biodiversity Strategy as part of our annual performance report. We will also consider progress being made in the implementation of other key plans which impact on the biodiversity of our land.

We will also report our progress to the new Environmental Advice Panel comprised of independent experts which, amongst other functions, will help to provide independent assurance of our overall environmental performance, including progress with the new Biodiversity Performance Commitment.



‘Let’s talk water’ South West Water’s Stakeholder Forum’s first meeting at Roadford, Devon in July 2022

