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Research into monuments at risk in England’s wetlands commissioned by English Heritage from the University of Exeter shows:

- at least 50% of the original extent of lowland peatland has been lost in the last 50 years, and
- an estimated 10,450 wetland monuments have been destroyed or damaged during the same period;
- the key causes of this widespread destruction of an invaluable and irreplaceable cultural resource are drainage, water abstraction, conversion of pasture into arable, peat wastage, peat erosion, peat extraction, and urban and industrial development, but
- 72% of local authorities have no policy on the identification, assessment, preservation, or management of wetland archaeology.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Wetlands are precious, and extremely fragile, bio-diverse environments with unique natural habitat and cultural heritage properties. The particular significance of wetland archaeology lies in two main areas. The excellent preservation of organic materials within waterlogged deposits preserves much more evidence of the material culture of past societies than that surviving on dry-land sites. Wetlands also contain enormously valuable palaeoenvironmental information which can provide indications of the impact of past climatic changes and human activity on the environment. All this can be placed within a firmly dated framework providing detailed context for the past, whilst informing research into future environmental change.

All wetlands were valuable resources and retreats for human populations, and carry the continuous record of human activity throughout the ages. A human presence of some sort should therefore be assumed in any and all wetlands, whether it is easily identifiable or not. The cultural heritage value of wetlands sits alongside parallel nature conservation values and there are important links between the conservation and management of the cultural heritage of wetlands and the conservation and management of the biodiversity of wetlands. Today both disciplines recognise the need for the active protection of wetlands, and for their active (rather than passive) management. Both disciplines will increasingly have to work closely together if they are to achieve their common objectives.

Over the past 30 years English Heritage has commissioned survey and research of the main lowland wetland areas of England (the Somerset Levels, the Fens, North-West England, and the Humberside Levels). The primary purpose of this protracted campaign of field survey and associated research was to identify the archaeological component of England’s major wetlands and to use this information as a firm basis for the future management of this important resource. With the completion of the Humber Wetland Project this year, this long-term initiative has now come to a close. The outstanding
results of all the wetland surveys, published in 45 monographs, provide a solid foundation for English Heritage to turn its attention to the development of a forward strategy for the conservation, protection, and management of the archaeology of England’s wetlands.

In order to inform this process, English Heritage in August 2000 commissioned the University of Exeter to carry out a desk-based assessment of Monuments at Risk in England’s Wetlands (MAREW). The main part of the project was completed in February 2001 and the report containing the results of the assessment is attached as Annex A.

The draft outline strategy presented here has been developed in close collaboration with Robert van de Noort of Exeter University (MAREW Project Director). This sets out a high-level framework for a conservation management strategy for England’s wetlands. This is intended to support the continued development of specific policies for wetland protection and to underpin at all levels improved decision-making that affects wetlands.

The strategy does not at this stage include specific, detailed, and costed outcomes. Elements of the strategy can be implemented with appropriate national and international partners in a variety of ways, and using different mechanisms. Some actions can be initiated immediately; others will require more detailed consideration and resourcing.

It is our intention to assign a dedicated member of staff to the Archaeology and Survey Department Policy Unit to be responsible for the co-ordination, continued development, and implementation of this strategy.

2. STRATEGY FOR THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF MONUMENTS AT RISK IN ENGLAND'S WETLANDS

This strategy for the heritage management of wetlands is based on four main principles.

- **Management**
  Promoting practical mechanisms to conserve and protect the cultural heritage by developing guidance and best practice for the integration of cultural heritage and nature conservation in wetland management.

- **Outreach**
  Promoting and disseminating understanding and appreciation of the cultural heritage of wetlands by making the results of wetland research easily accessible to the general public, to landowners and managers, and to professional interests.

- **Policy**
  Promoting the cultural heritage interests of wetlands in the work of local authorities, national, international, and intergovernmental agencies.
• **Research**
  Continuing with programmes of survey and excavation as an essential pre-condition for the development of successful management practices and promoting applied research to underpin good management of wetlands and to inform future policy development

2.1 **Management strategies**

2.1.1 Waterlogged sites can only be preserved in situ if their associated hydrology can be controlled. The protection of whole wetlands rather than ‘monument islands’ must therefore be the basis for future action. This must be done in co-operation with all other agencies involved in wetland management (especially English Nature and the Environment Agency). The landowner or land-owning organisation responsible for the day to day management of wetland sites will play a pivotal role in wetland preservation projects. Conservation management strategies should therefore be aimed at providing a wide-range of cross-disciplinary benefits including in-situ preservation and archaeological research, nature conservation, recreation, access, and local co-operation and ownership.

*English Heritage will develop site-specific conservation management strategies for the most important wetland monuments at risk, and co-operate in the development of wetland landscape conservation management strategies with other relevant agencies.*

2.2 **Outreach and education**

2.2.1 The cultural heritage is one of the core attributes of wetlands, but has received less attention from the conservation community, environmental scientists, and strategic resource planners than natural and ecological attributes. The challenge that faces English Heritage in developing a strategy and associated policies for the preservation and management of wetlands is to ensure that cultural heritage attributes and values are integrated with and embedded in all other considerations. The forging of co-operation with agencies involved in wetland management and other interested groups is a matter of the highest priority.

*English Heritage will develop specific contacts with organisations in England and beyond (e.g. Internal Drainage Boards, the Wildlife Trusts, English Nature, the Environment Agency, the Countryside Agency, the National Trust, the RSPB, MAFF, the Ramsar Bureau, the Europae Archaeologiae Consilium etc) to explore the development of joint policies related to the conservation and preservation of wetlands.*

2.2.2 The development of strong institutional links must be assisted and supported by a concerted campaign to raise awareness of the values of wetland archaeology to national, regional, and local interests, and to the public at large. We must find a way to connect our concerns for the cultural heritage of wetlands with the stronger public traditions and value systems more readily associated with the care of the natural environment.
English Heritage will enhance the profile of wetland archaeology through education and other appropriate mechanisms, and will promote the interdependence of cultural and natural values in wetland landscapes.

English Heritage will disseminate the successful results of research over the past 30 years, and promote the fundamental role that wetland archaeology can play in developing an integrated approach to the cultural heritage and extending concern for the natural heritage to the cultural heritage.

2.3 Procedure and policy

2.3.1 Despite the increasing volume of evidence from wetland research in the last 30 years, and great advances in environmental assessment during the same period, there are still very few wetland-specific policies embedded within the planning process. This severely restricts opportunities to address important issues relevant to wetland management in a rigorous, proactive, and consistent manner. Such issues include the assessment of hydrological impacts of nearby and adjacent developments on wetland landscapes and the adequate assessment of archaeological potential through the development of new methods and techniques to identify deeply buried sites that cannot be assessed by conventional means.

English Heritage will provide support to local authorities to help them address the issues of wetland archaeology in the planning process more effectively.

2.3.2 Wetlands are also seriously affected by changes in land management and land-use which lie outside the planning process.

English Heritage will seek to develop policies in partnership with other organisations (including the DETR Peat Working Group, the International Peat Society and the International Mires Conservation Group) to address wetland cultural heritage issues that fall outside the planning process (paying particular regard to the peat extraction industry).

English Heritage will strive to enhance the protection of the cultural heritage of wetlands (including significant anthropogenic deposits which cannot currently be scheduled as Ancient Monuments) through national and international legislation and conventions. This will involve consideration (in co-operation with other agencies) of policy and planning regulations and guidance at all levels.

2.4 Research and data

2.4.1 Research over the past 30 years has created an unparalleled body of evidence both for human exploitation of the lowland wetlands of England, and for the complex and interactive relationship through the ages between people and their environment. However, many other aspects of the cultural heritage of the wetlands, especially in regard to management issues, remain woefully under-developed.
2.4.2 Wetland environments are under severe pressure from a wide range of direct and indirect threats. These are unlikely to diminish, but may become even more severe in the future. New pressures include the impact of potentially far-reaching land management changes as well as changes in farming practice which will almost certainly take place in the aftermath of the current crisis in the countryside (including the long-term consequences of the foot and mouth epidemic).

*English Heritage will develop a coherent research strategy to enhance understanding of monuments at risk in England’s wetlands and the pressures acting upon them; this will focus, as a priority, on upland peatlands and lowland landscapes deeply buried beneath peat and alluvium.*

*English Heritage will seek to develop, with appropriate partners, wetland-specific prospection techniques and to advance studies on in-situ preservation in wetlands.*

3. IMPLEMENTATION

The strategy outlined here focuses on emerging and new initiatives (for direct action or as external commissions) to be developed both internally by the Archaeology and Survey Department, working together with the Department of Conservation Management, and the Regional Teams, and externally with partner organisations with cognate interests in wetlands. Implementation will be co-ordinated by the staff of the Archaeology and Survey Department Policy Unit.

3.1 Management strategies

3.1.1 *Produce an inventory of the most important wetland monuments in England, and design and implement, where possible, site-specific conservation management strategies.*

- A provisional inventory is being compiled by Exeter University. This includes less well known and well known sites, eg: Star Carr, Sweet Track, Butterbump barrow cemetery (Lincolnshire), Flag Fen, Shinewater, Harter’s Hill stake alignment (Somerset), Melton - Humber foreshore trackways (East Yorkshire), Glastonbury Lake Village, Meare lake villages, Sutton Common, Kelk settlement with bronze production (East Yorkshire), Scaftworth bridge (Nottinghamshire), Rossington bridge and potteries (South Yorkshire), Adlingfleet settlement (North Lincolnshire) and decommissioned peat workings (Cumbria).

3.1.2 *Explore the potential, and develop the mechanisms, for some of these sites to be used as a pilot platform for interagency co-operation (‘beacon sites’).*

3.1.3 *Develop conservation management strategies for wetland landscapes in partnership with other agencies.*

- Assist the Europae Archaeologiae Consilium in formulating guidance to the Ramsar Contracting Parties for the inclusion of cultural heritage interests in the conservation
and wise use of wetlands. This will be achieved through the preparation of best practice guidelines.

- Play an active role in the EVALUET project (European valuation and assessment tools supporting wetland ecosystem legislation) which is aimed at improving the management of wetlands within Europe by helping managers protect wetlands as part of the sustainable management of entire catchments.

- Develop appropriate procedures to monitor and maintain the environmental status of wetlands and to monitor illegal or accidental damage to the wetland cultural heritage.

- Contribute to the development of a manual (in the form of model site management plans) for the conservation and enhancement of the cultural heritage of wetlands. This will include practical conservation solutions which identify and minimise possible conflicts of interest at an early stage in the management cycle. Such a manual could be included in management planning guidelines used by local and national authorities and other organisations.

3.2 **Outreach and Education**

3.2.1 *Assign a full-time member of its staff to co-ordinate implementation of the strategy, and to develop effective liaison and co-operation between English Heritage and other local, regional, and national organisations involved in wetland management.*

- Participate in the next Conference of Parties to the Ramsar Convention (Valencia, 2002) which will include a technical session that will focus attention on cultural issues.

- Contribute to appropriate events to raise the profile of cultural heritage issues in wetland management.

3.2.2 *Extend public access to wetland archaeology and disseminate information through the popular media, including television, radio, and web-based resources.*

- Play an active part in World Wetlands Day (February 2nd every year)

- Support public participation in wetland research during fieldwork through ‘open days’ and the dissemination of appropriate publicity.

- Develop (with European partners including the EAC and its constituent membership) a major European travelling exhibition on cultural heritage and wetlands.

- Explore funding possibilities with the European Union, the Council of Europe, and the EAC.
3.3 Procedure and policy

3.3.1 Develop, in consultation with ALGAO, a GIS-based resource for curatorial authorities to be used in the planning process.

- There is an urgent need for base-line information about the extent of the various types of wetland landscape within each planning authority. This resource will comprise geographical information about the extent of wetland types linked to an assessment of their archaeological potential, and will need to cross-reference to model planning conditions and mitigation policies.

- Hold joint discussions with ALGAO, the Peat Producers Association (PPA), and the DETR Peat Working Group to develop and implement an agreed and consistent archaeological policy in areas where peat is being extracted commercially.

- Develop in partnership with ALGAO, PPA and other interested parties, draft planning conditions and supplementary planning guidance related to wetland archaeology.

- Develop and provide training opportunities aimed particularly at local authority archaeologists and nature conservation managers.

- Development control officers need to acquire a better understanding of the specialised context of wetland archaeology. In particular, greater knowledge and understanding of hydrological issues in an archaeological context will support the more effective implementation and application of PPG-16 to wetland environments than is possible or practicable at present.

- Nature conservation managers in local authorities and national agencies need to acquire a better understanding to the cultural heritage component of wetlands. This will lead to the more effective management of all wetland sites, and help avoid the potentially negative impact of some nature conservation measures on archaeological deposits.

- English Heritage will develop a model course/workshop aimed specifically at development control archaeologists and nature conservation managers working in a wetland context.

- Produce ‘best practice’ guidance on the cultural heritage for use by the peat industry, conservation bodies, landowners, and farming and wildlife groups.

- Guidance will be based on case studies on the management of wetland cultural heritage, and will be promulgated by the development of a series of information/fact sheets.
3.3.2 Continue to press for changes in legislation, policy, and planning regulations in a national, regional, and local authority context, to ensure that appropriate mechanisms exist to conserve and protect our most significant wetland sites, monuments, and landscapes.

3.4 Research and data

3.4.1 Continue with a programme to identify monuments at risk in England’s wetlands and to understand and quantify the different threats posed to those monuments.

- Commission pilot surveys of the upland peatlands in England, linked to an assessment of the erosion of upland peat.

- Carry out a desk-based assessment of waterlogged urban deposits and develop a complementary strategy which can be integrated with the results of the current programme of extensive and intensive urban surveys.

- Carry out a desk-based assessment of inter-tidal deposits, and develop a complementary strategy which can be integrated with the results of the current programme of coastal survey.

- Support research into techniques to provide qualitative assessment of the archaeological potential of wetlands including sites and monuments that remain deeply buried by extensive peat and alluvial deposits.

- Support research into the development of wetland-specific remote sensing and prospection techniques and predictive modelling (e.g., of alluvial sediments).

- Consider the need for a relatively modest stage of additional work to valorise the results and methodology of the four English Heritage sponsored wetland surveys.

3.4.2 Develop a coherent research strategy to underpin the more effective management of the cultural heritage of wetlands.

- Recent and current problems with animal husbandry (BSE, swine fever, foot and mouth) mean that in some areas it is becoming increasingly difficult to find suitable animals to graze wetlands. This could have a serious effect on hitherto beneficial management regimes. An urgent review is necessary to establish how serious this problem actually is, and to explore the viability of remedial measures. Co-operation with nature conservation agencies is likely to benefit the long-term preservation of archaeological remains.

- Commission research into best practice farming regimes in wetlands.

- Continue and extend research into the quantification of threats to monuments in wetlands.
• Develop research into the impact of statutory designations on the conservation of archaeological sites and monuments in wetlands.

• Develop research into the causes of peat wastage.

• Develop research into the preservation of archaeological remains in situ, including the effect of chemical oxidants on wetlands under pasture, the effect of bioturbation of different wetland tree- and plant species and the dynamics of hydrology in various wetland landscapes and its impact on in situ preservation.

• Seek to develop research into hydrological management in partnership with the Environment Agency.

• Support research into alternative approaches to conserving wetland units with a high archaeological potential.

• Carry out a survey of conservation facilities and policy for waterlogged archaeological objects to ascertain whether provision of such facilities is adequate, or requires further review.