

Vision for Essex Floodplain and Coastal Grazing Marsh

Safeguarded, improved and extended habitats appreciated for their wealth of wetland wildlife.

Water levels are managed to benefit wildlife at all seasons.

Populations of key national and Essex species have increased and are spread more widely throughout the county.



Floodplain and coastal grazing marsh

National Description

Grazing marsh is defined as periodically inundated pasture, or meadow with ditches which maintain the water levels, containing standing brackish or fresh water. The ditches are especially rich in plants and invertebrates. Almost all areas are grazed and some are cut for hay or silage. Sites may contain seasonal water-filled hollows and permanent ponds with emergent swamp communities, but not extensive areas of tall fen species like reeds; although they may abut with fen and reed swamp communities.

The exact extent of grazing marsh in the UK is not known but it is possible that there may be a total of 300,000 ha. England holds the largest proportion with an estimate in 1994 of 200,000 ha. However, only a small proportion of this grassland is semi-natural supporting a high diversity of native plant species (5,000 ha in England, an estimated 10,000 ha in the UK).

Grazing marshes are particularly important for the number of breeding waders such as snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and curlew *Numenius arquata* redshank *Titus erythropus* they support. Internationally important populations of wintering water birds also occur including Wigeon, teal and brent geese.

STATUS IN ESSEX

In Essex the main blocks of grazing marsh are found in coastal areas created from historically reclaimed saltmarsh. It is estimated that there is 6,500 hectares of grazing marsh in Essex today in all the coastal districts. This constitutes an estimated 5.5% of the national resource of coastal grazing marsh.

Coastal grazing marshes have declined in Essex by as much as 72% since the 1930s.

Particularly hard hit have been the areas along the Thames and around the Dengie peninsula where conversion to arable and urban use have been the main causes of loss.

Some other areas of grazing marsh have been protected from development and urbanisation as a result of their identification as SSSI, inclusion in green belt land and other 'safe zones' such as around refineries. The MOD own and control a large area of the habitat for safety zones around firing ranges, but these measures do not always protect the marshes from conversion to arable use, or the impact of large scale development such as road and rail schemes. It is estimated that approximately 1200 ha of grazing marsh lies outside the various schemes or protective measures and are thus vulnerable.

Targets

National Targets	Floodplain and coastal grazing marsh	target date
1	No net loss of C&FPGM current est. 230882ha	ongoing
2	Restore and improve 25000ha	ongoing
3	Re-establish 3200ha from appropriate land sources	ongoing

East of England Targets	Floodplain and coastal grazing marsh	target date
1	Restore 1900ha of relic habitat	2015
2	Re-establish 2500 ha of habitat of wildlife value from appropriate land sources (eg arable land)	2015
2500ha gross, 2000ha nett as it acknowledges that due to sea level rise some coastal grazing marsh will be lost		

Essex Targets	Floodplain and coastal grazing marsh	target date
1	No net loss of area covering 6500ha	2020
2	Undertake restoration on 5% of the existing habitat = 325ha	2020
3	Re-establish 250ha	2020