

## 22. Agricultural and forest area in environmental management schemes

**Type:** Response indicator

### Indicator short description

The first part of this indicator shows the area of land under agri-environment scheme agreements. Agri-environment schemes require land managers, including farmers, to implement environmentally beneficial management and to demonstrate good environmental practice on their land. The higher-level or targeted schemes promote environmental management aimed to: conserve wildlife; maintain and enhance landscape quality and character; protect the historic environment and natural resources; and promote public access and understanding of the countryside. The entry-level type schemes aim to encourage large numbers of land managers, to implement simple and effective environmental management on their land.

### 22a. Area of land in agri-environment schemes

Between 2005 and the end of 2014, agri-environment activities were promoted through Environmental Stewardship (ES). This scheme had 2 strands; Entry Level Schemes (ELS) and Higher Level Schemes (HLS). Whilst ELS encouraged farmers and other land managers to undertake a broad range of activities to provide environmental benefits, HLS was a more targeted scheme. ELS agreements last for 5 years, whereas HLS agreements are 10 years in duration.

The ES scheme closed to new agreements in December 2014. Existing agreements continue to be honoured until they expire. Between the end of 2015 and the end of 2020, the number of ES agreements fell from 38,000 to 10,000. This decline was largely associated with ELS only agreements.

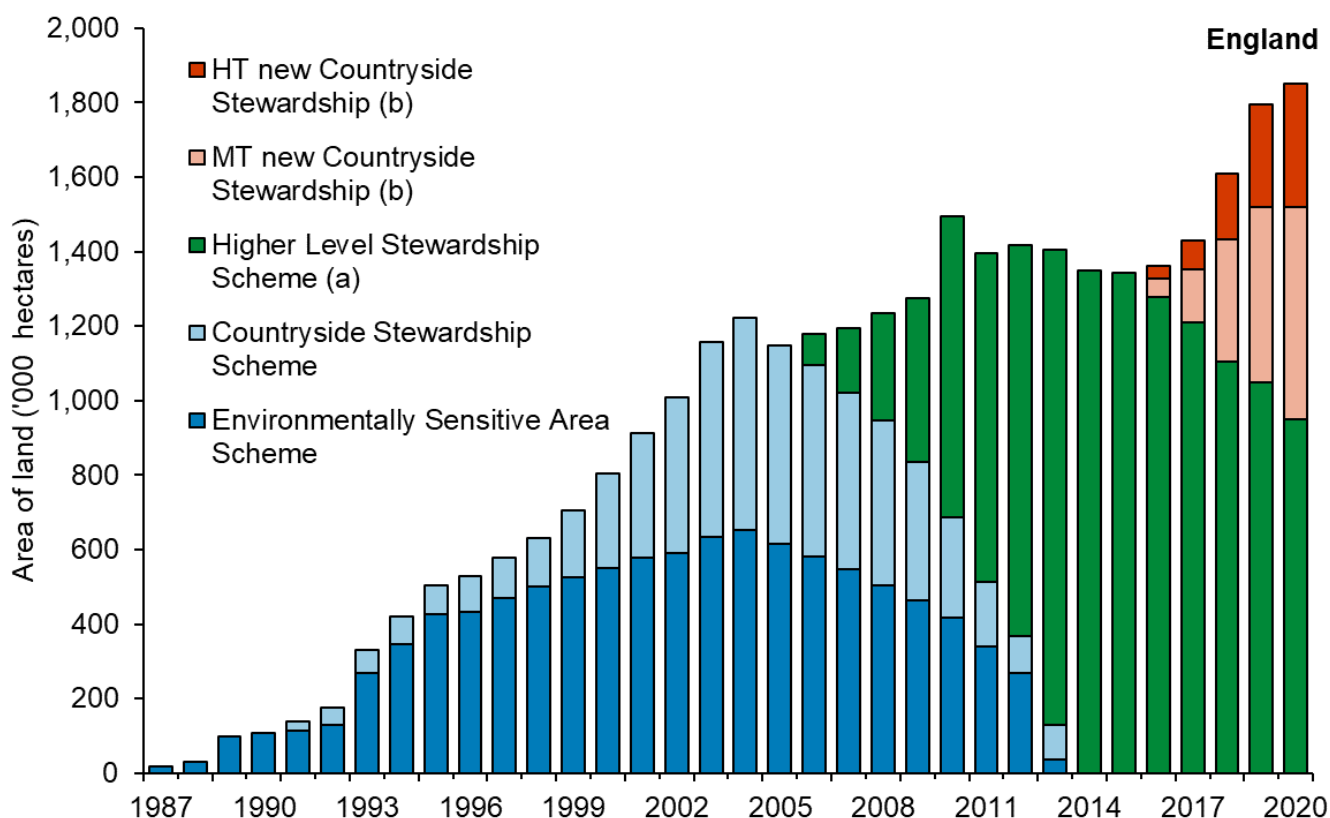
In 2015, a new agri-environment scheme, new Countryside Stewardship, was launched. The first agreements went live in 2016. This is a more targeted and competitive scheme. The strands of the scheme reported here are Mid-Tier and Higher-Tier. At the end of 2020, uptake of Countryside Stewardship had increased with almost 18,000 agreements managing just over 900,000 hectares of land. The areas quoted exclude co-located supplementary options. If these were included, the total area in Countryside Stewardship would be falsely inflated.

Fluctuations in areas of land under agri-environment agreements over time can occur as a result of the introduction of new schemes and the ending of previous scheme agreements. Existing agreements will continue to be honoured until they expire.

### Higher level or targeted agri-environment schemes

In 2020, the total area of land in all higher-level or targeted agri-environment agreements operating in England was 1.9 million hectares. Figure 22.1 shows the area of land under the previous higher-level, targeted schemes and the new Countryside Stewardship schemes. The expiring schemes include the HLS strand of ES and the 'Classic' schemes, namely Environmentally Sensitive Areas and the previous Countryside Stewardship Scheme. The chart shows that the area under targeted agri-environment schemes has gradually increased over time.

**Figure 22.1: Area of land under expiring and new targeted agri-environment scheme agreements in England, 1987 to 2020**



**Notes:**

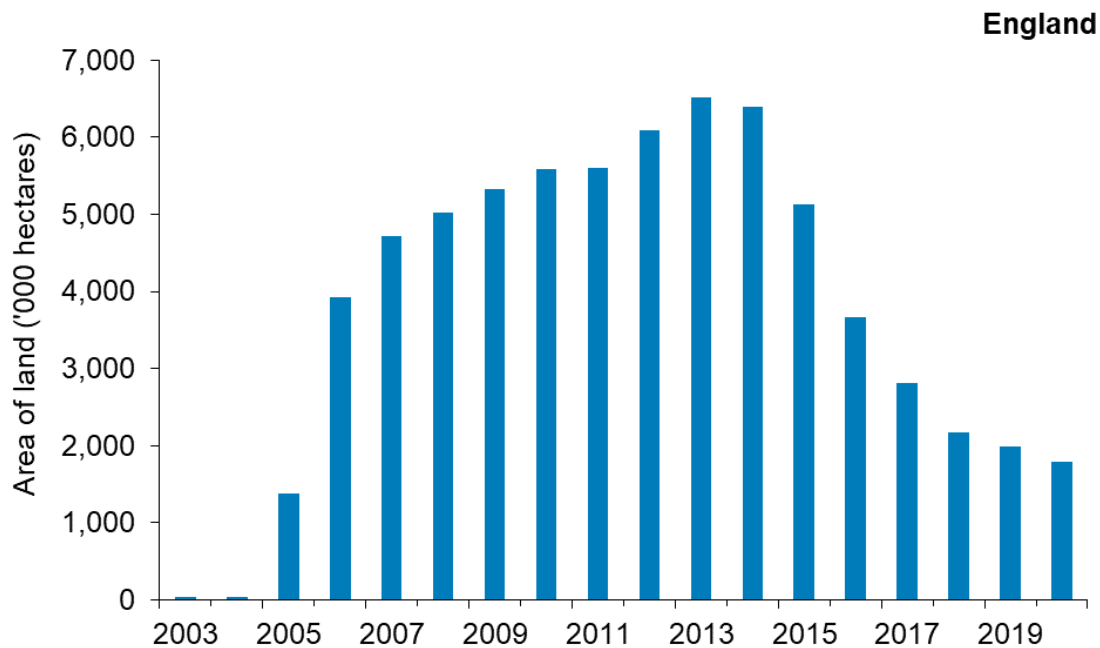
1. Schemes are not directly comparable as they have different reporting requirements and different objectives.
2. Systematic data collection started in 1992; areas from 1987 to 1991 are estimated. Uptake figures are the cumulative area assessed in December of year shown.
3. (a) includes Freestanding HLS and HLS linked to ELS.
4. (b) new Countryside Stewardship schemes (HT, Higher-Tier; MT, Mid-Tier) – for 2016 only, co-located options are included. Taking account of co-location gives an actual area of 76,498 hectares.

**Source:** Defra, Natural England.

**Entry level agri-environment schemes**

In 2020, the total area of farms with entry level agreements was 1.8 million hectares. Figure 22.2 shows the area under ELS. The area of land in ELS has shown a significant increase since pilot schemes were introduced in 2003/04, reaching around 6.5 million hectares in 2013. Existing agreements will continue to be honoured until they expire.

**Figure 22.2: Area of land under the expiring Entry Level Stewardship Scheme, 2003 to 2020**



**Notes:**

1. Uptake figures are the cumulative area assessed in December of year shown.
2. The area under ELS includes ELS, Organic Entry Level Stewardship (OELS), Uplands Entry Level Stewardship (UELS) from 2010, and HLS linked to ELS.

**Source:** Defra, Natural England.

**22b. Area of forestry land under certified sustainable management schemes (National Statistics)**

**Indicator short description**

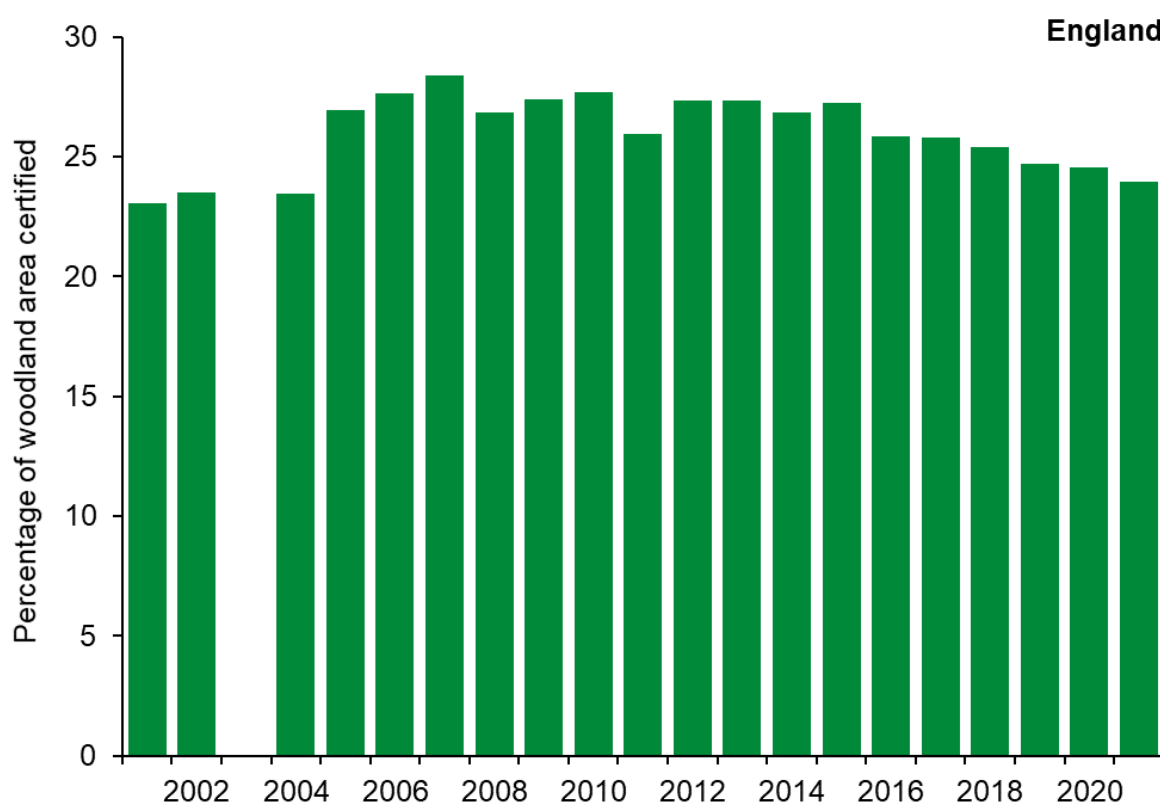
The second part of this indicator shows the percentage of the woodland area in England that is certified against agreed environmental standards. Woodland certification schemes promote good forest practice and are used to demonstrate that wood or wood products come from well-managed forests.

In March 2021, there were 316,000 hectares of certified woodland across England, representing 24% of the total woodland area. The proportion of woodland certified as sustainably managed has remained between 24% and 28% since 2005.

Certification of woodlands promotes responsible forest management to safeguard forests' natural heritage and protect threatened species. Since 2001, the percentage of woodland certified as sustainably managed in England has increased from 23% to 24% in 2021.

The total area certified can change if new woodlands are certified, if existing certificate holders decide not to renew, or if there is a delay in renewal of an existing certificate.

**Figure 22.3: Percentage of woodland in England certified as sustainably managed, 2001 to 2021**



**Notes:**

1. This indicator is taken from the Forest Research National Statistics publication "[Provisional Woodland Statistics](#)".
2. All figures relate to data at 31 March, apart from 2001 (31 December) and 2002 (30 September), with regular data collection from 2004.

**Source:** Forest Research.

### Indicator assessment

#### Assessment of change in the area of land under environmental management schemes and the area of sustainably managed woodland

**Area of land under higher level or targeted agri-environment schemes:**

**Long term (1987 to 2020):** Improving; **Short term (2015 to 2020):** Improving; **Latest year (2020):** Increased.

**Percentage of woodland certified as sustainably managed (National Statistic):**

**Long term (2001 to 2021):** Little/no overall change; **Short term (2016 to 2021):** Deteriorating; **Latest year (2021):** No change.

**Notes:**

1. Assessment of the individual measures is based on a 3-year average from the baseline, using the 3 earliest consecutive years available. See [Assessing Indicators](#).
2. An assessment of ELS is not included as this scheme has closed. The new Countryside Stewardship scheme does not contain a similar strand for such an

assessment to be continued in the future. As a result, it is appropriate to only provide an assessment of the higher level agri-environment schemes.

## Relevance

The indicator shows progress with commitments to improve the status of our wildlife and habitats. It is relevant to outcome 1 in [Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services](#) (see Annex A) and it is directly relevant to the following priority actions in the strategy:

**Priority action 3.1:** Improve the delivery of environmental outcomes from agricultural land management practices, whilst increasing food production.

**Priority action 3.3:** Bring a greater proportion of our existing woodlands into sustainable management and expand the area of woodland.

The indicator is also relevant to international goals and targets (see Annex B of the aforementioned publication).

## Background

### Agri-environment schemes

Agri-environment schemes require farmers and land managers to implement environmentally-beneficial management and demonstrate good environmental practice on their farm; they have existed since the mid-1980s.

In 1992, there were 175,000 hectares of land in England in Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) and the previous Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS). These were higher level agreements or targeted schemes. At their peak, in 2004, there was around 1.2 million hectares in these schemes.

In 2005, Environmental Stewardship (ES) was launched replacing CSS and ESAs. There were 2 strands; Entry Level Scheme (ELS) and Higher Level Scheme (HLS). ELS was a non-competitive scheme which aimed for a high level of uptake across the Country<sup>1</sup> (**Footnote:** Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) was designed to deliver simple environmental benefits across a significant proportion of the farmed landscape. In 2008, a review of Environmental Stewardship recognised shortfalls in this approach and concluded that the environmental performance of ELS would be improved if "... a significantly enhanced, geographically differentiated, programme of advice..." was provided. This is now in place in the form of the Environmental Stewardship Training and Information Programme (ETIP)).

ELS required simple and effective environmental management, designed to address environmental issues across the wider countryside such as diffuse pollution, loss of biodiversity and deterioration of landscape character and were designed to cover the majority of farmland. HLS had an increased focus on environmental outcomes, particularly for priority habitats (see indicator 4). HLS targeted environmental management to conserve wildlife, maintain and enhance landscape quality and character, promote public

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access and understanding of the countryside, and protect the historic environment and natural resources.

At the end of 2014, when ES closed to new applicants, there were more than 49,000 agri-environment scheme agreements covering in excess of 6.5 million hectares in England.

From 2015, a new agri-environment scheme, Countryside Stewardship, was introduced, replacing ES. The first agreements went live in 2016. Countryside Stewardship brings together many schemes including catchment-sensitive farming and woodland grants and includes Mid-Tier and Higher-Tier strands. These are more targeted; the applicant is expected to ensure the options they take address the priorities for their land. ES and CS are reported differently. ES is measured as the total area of holdings which have agreements, whereas CS is measured in terms of the total area under management options, that is, the area of land being actively managed for environmental benefits. As a result, the schemes are not comparable. A breakdown of the area and number of agreements by scheme type is given below.

### Overall agri-environment scheme coverage in England, December 2020

Entry Level Stewardship (including Organic ELS, Uplands ELS and ELS plus HLS agreements):

Number of agreements: 8,900; Area: 1,788,000 hectares (Notes 1 and 2)

Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) including freestanding HLS and HLS linked to ELS:

Number of agreements: 10,100; Area: 951,000 hectares

Environmental Stewardship (ES) including ELS, ELS-HLS, HLS, ELS pilot and organic equivalents:

Number of agreements: 10,100; Area: 1,888,000 hectares

New Countryside Stewardship (mid-tier):

Number of agreements: 14,900; Area: 567,000 hectares

New Countryside Stewardship (higher-tier):

Number of agreements: 2,900; Area: 334,000 hectares

#### Notes:

1. This includes 739,424 hectares of Severely Disadvantaged Area.
2. The majority of HLS agreements are underpinned by an ELS agreement. As a result, the areas for ELS and HLS cannot simply be aggregated to provide the total area under ES.

**Source:** Defra, Natural England.

### Sustainable woodland management

The indicator shows the percentage of the woodland area in the UK that is certified against agreed environmental standards, derived from the areas reported on certificates and more detailed assessment of selected certificate holders.

Certification in the UK began in 1996, with data collation starting in 2001 and becoming a regular annual collation in 2004. All certified woodland in 2020 is certified under the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) scheme or the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) scheme, with many woodlands certified under both schemes. A breakdown for England of the area of woodland under certified management is given below. Certified woodland areas are often used as an indicator of sustainable

management, however, it should be noted that woodland that is not certified may also be managed sustainably. New certificates may relate to existing woodland that was not previously certified or to newly planted areas.

In order for products made from timber to achieve certification, both forest management practices and the Chain of Custody, which tracks timber from forest to retail outlet, must be assessed.

### **Area of woodland owned and certified as sustainably managed in England, March 2021**

Forestry Commission: 214,000 hectares

Private sector: 103,000 hectares

Total woodland area certified: 316,000 hectares

#### **Notes:**

Where possible, calculations have used the total woodland area certified, rather than the total land area certified.

The total may not match the sum of figures in the rows above due to rounding.

**Source:** Forest Research.

#### **Web links for further information**

Forestry Commission: [The UK Forestry Standard \(UKFS\)](#)

Forest Stewardship Council: [FSC Certified Forest Certificate List](#)

Forest Research – Provisional Woodland Statistics: 2021 Edition: [Forest Research Provisional Woodland Statistics](#)

Natural England: [Environmental Stewardship; New Countryside Stewardship](#)

Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC): [International Forest Sustainability](#)

**Last updated:** October 2021

#### **Latest data available:**

22a agri-environment schemes – December 2020;

22b certified woodland – March 2021