



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

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## **Landscape and Outdoor Recreation Evidence Plan**

**Policy portfolio: Rural Development Sustainable Communities and Crops**

**Policy area within portfolio: Landscape and Outdoor Recreation**

**Timeframe covered by Evidence Plan: 2013/14-17/18**

**Date of Evidence Plan: March 2013**

This evidence plan was correct at the time of publication (March 2013). However, Defra is currently undertaking a review of its policy priorities and in some areas the policy, and therefore evidence needs, will continue to develop and may change quite rapidly. If you have any queries about the evidence priorities covered in this plan, please contact [StrategicEvidence@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:StrategicEvidence@defra.gsi.gov.uk).

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# 1. Policy context

## What are the key policy outcomes for the policy programme/area?

Society values the natural environment, both for the natural beauty it provides and the experiences that people enjoy within it. The aim of the Landscape and Outdoor Recreation team is therefore to help preserve and enhance our valued landscapes and green space and help ensure people have access to the natural environment, thereby supporting and driving local economic growth through increasing visitor spend and developing new and emerging markets. Government intervenes in a number of ways to achieve this ranging from protecting landscapes and green spaces through designations such as National Parks and AONBs, to enabling access through open access and public of rights to way, to ensuring that our woodlands are resilient.

Evidence is required to assess the impact and design of policy interventions. The policy areas covered by Landscape and Outdoor Recreation are devolved and so evidence is generally for England only. However, where appropriate, work is carried out with the devolved administrations whose evidence is also used within Defra when designing English policy interventions.

The Landscape and Outdoor recreation team specifically covers the following areas and contributes to ministerial priorities of economic growth and environmental protection.

**Table 1: Landscape and Outdoor Team contributions**

Policy area	Contributes to ministerial priorities by....
<b>Forestry policy and sponsorship of Forestry Commission and the National Forest Company</b>	forestry policy supporting a strong and sustainable economy, enhancing the environment and biodiversity and increasing resilience to climate change. Policy in this area is encapsulated in the government's Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement.
<b>Protected landscape policy including National Park Authorities (NPAs) and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).</b>	negotiating and delivering improvements to the governance, sponsorship and efficiencies in use of resources for National Park Authorities and AONBs; and maintaining a balance between economic growth and conserving the special qualities of our protected landscapes.
<b>Town and Village Greens and Commons</b>	reforming the system of registering new Town and Village Greens, including by integrating it with the planning system, and enabling management of common land by local communities.
<b>Access</b>	simplifying and streamlining the system for recording, creating, diverting and extinguishing rights of way and improving integration with the planning system. Improving and establishing new coastal paths across England. Improving and establish new community paths across England. Encouraging Volunteer work on rights of way.

Policy area	Contributes to ministerial priorities by....
<b>Inland Waterways Sponsorship, Policy and Legislation</b>	placing the waterways in civil society on a long term sustainable footing.
<b>The Big Tree Plant (BTP)</b>	engaging communities in enhancement of local environment, planting 1m new trees as part of the Big Tree Plant.
<b>Green Infrastructure</b>	encouraging strategic management of natural assets that underpin ecosystem services; improving quality of life and economic and environmental resilience.

It should be noted that the Landscape and Outdoor Recreation team do not cover tree health; this is dealt with within the plant health team in Defra, by the Forestry Commission (at a Great Britain level) and by FERA.

The Landscape and Outdoor Recreation team works closely with a wide range of other policy areas within the department and as such there are close links between this evidence plan and the following evidence plans

- Ecosystems and Biodiversity
- Plant health
- Rural Communities Policy Unit / Rural Development Programme for England
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation

## 2. Current and near-term evidence objectives

**What are the current and near-term objectives for evidence and how do they align to policy outcomes?**

Over the next two years the key evidence priorities for the Landscape and Outdoor Recreation team are gathering evidence around forestry policy following the government's January 2013 Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement and assessing current policies for impact and value for money.

Beyond forestry, there will also be work to gather evidence around access, waterways, the impact of protected landscapes and the Big Tree Plant. These broader areas will therefore remain at least medium priorities for our evidence activities, reflecting the combination of policy needs and evidence requirements.

At the same time we envisage that evidence activities on Green Infrastructure will increasingly shift from the department to the broader public sector and civil society. Specifically as the Green Infrastructure Partnership (a partnership of about 280 organisations to take forward the Green Infrastructure agenda) develops we would expect it to play a bigger role in evidence gathering.

Chart 1 shows the distribution of the Landscape and Outdoor Recreation evidence spending across the policy areas for 2012/13 - some of these projects are delivered alone and some in partnership, for example with the Forestry Commission. It should be noted chart 1 only reflects direct Landscape and Outdoor Recreation R&D spending; other projects within this policy area have been funded from the central strategic evidence fund specifically on Green Infrastructure, the Big Tree Plant and Forestry. In addition Landscape and Outdoor Recreation also contributes in partnership with a range of other organisations to projects; these are also not reflected in the pie chart.

**Chart 1: Landscape and Outdoor Recreation spend 2012/13**

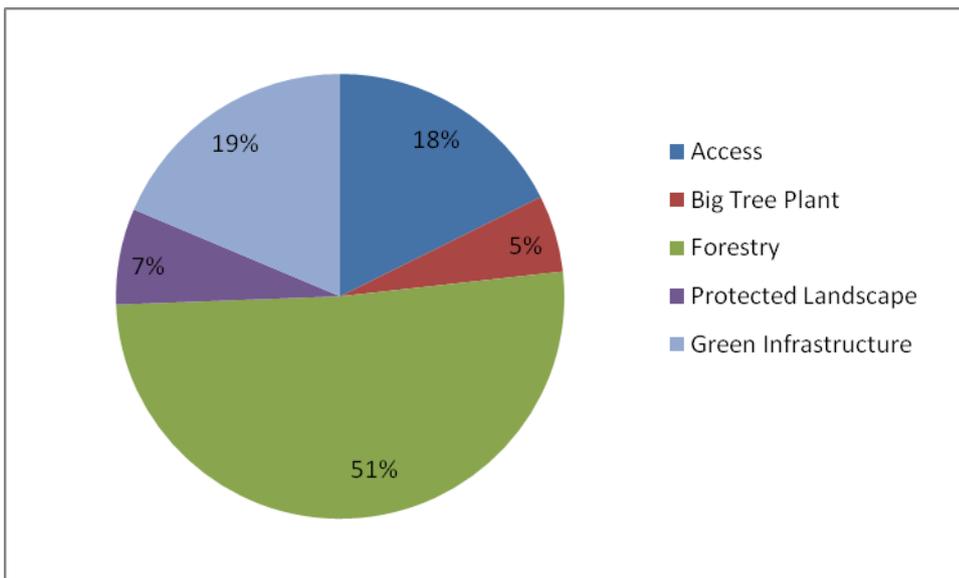


Chart 2 sets out the indicative allocation of evidence budget for 2013/14. This is based on the provisional allocation and therefore may change. It does however help to illustrate the relative priorities across the policy areas.

**Chart 2: Indicative Landscape and Outdoor Recreation spend 2013/14**

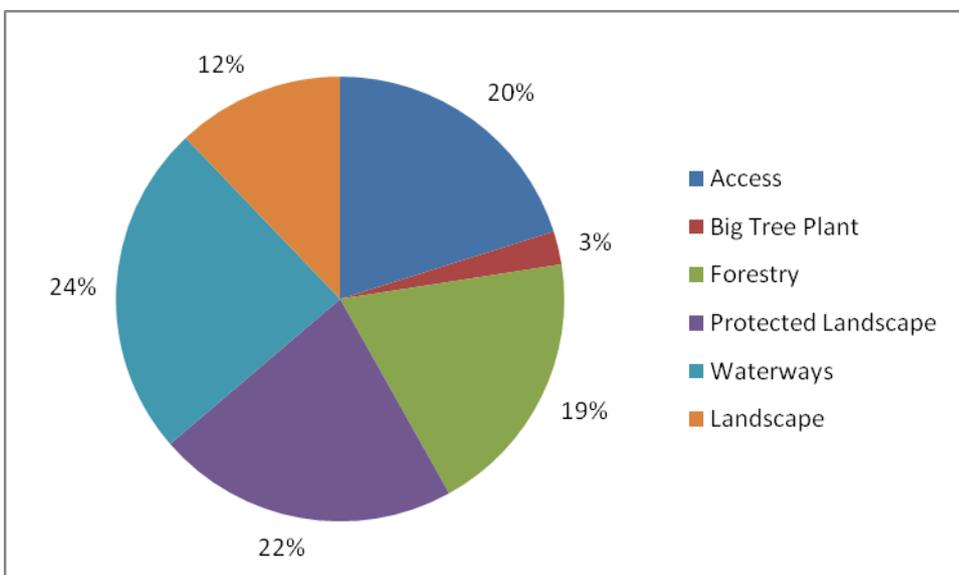


Table 2 sets out the specific areas of work that may be undertaken by Landscape and Outdoor Recreation over the next two years. This work covers both internal and external work. These are not mutually exclusive as often internal work is required to then be able to commission additional evidence externally. Evidence is from a range of disciplines, ranging from science to economics, to social science.

Although evidence is set out by policy area there are a number of cross cutting evidence needs where the teams work together, for example on access in woodlands, National Parks and areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and green infrastructure and urban forestry. Evidence will be developed internally, through externally let research projects, working in partnership with others and utilising others' evidence. Where appropriate, work is also undertaken jointly with the devolved administrations.

**Table 2: Landscape and Outdoor Recreation short term priorities**

Policy area	Work currently being undertaken	Further work anticipated
<b>Forestry policy and sponsorship of Forestry Commission and the National Forest Company</b>	<p>Management (and Creation) - woodland segmentation study – to understand the motivation of different landowners, evaluate the existing policy levers that currently work well and design new levers that should work better.</p> <p>Economic Growth - study to develop an evidence base for furthering the use of home-grown (English) wood products in a range of markets.</p> <p>Climate Change Mitigation - developing a Marginal Abatement Cost Curve (MACC) to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of carbon policy interventions based on wood (compared with other interventions).</p>	<p>Biodiversity - will be delivered primarily by, e.g. Forest Research, Biodiversity colleagues and Natural England.</p> <p>Urban Trees - research into iTree methodology to ensure it can be used with UK data (i-Tree is an economic valuation tool that has been developed in the US)</p> <p>Natural Capital - working with the ONS on establishing a set of natural capital accounts for forestry.</p>
<b>Protected landscape policy including National Park Authorities and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty</b>	<p>Establish an enhanced understanding of the economic contribution of protected landscapes and their role in stimulating rural economic growth.</p> <p>Collation of evidence into policy themed briefing packs and profiles.</p> <p>Updating protected landscapes settlement information using recent land use change statistics to determine areas of settlement development.</p>	<p>Assess and evaluate the role that protected landscapes can play in stimulating economic activity in local, rural communities.</p> <p>Consideration of the potential economic benefits beyond tourism. For many protected landscapes the greatest value of natural amenities and recreation opportunities often lies in the land's ability to attract and retain people – including entrepreneurs (and their businesses) and retirees.</p>
<b>Management of</b>		Work in this area will be primarily

Policy area	Work currently being undertaken	Further work anticipated
<b>common land</b>		focused on monitoring and evaluating the impact and effectiveness of (any) newly established Commons Councils.
<b>Access</b>	Establishing a robust evidence base for making and fine tuning rights of way reforms and for strengthening the Impact Assessments required for implementation.	<p>Undertaking evaluations to determine whether the <i>Paths for Communities scheme</i> and continuing the coastal access programme around the whole of the English coast will provide more and better access to the countryside for the purpose of outdoor recreation; and promote social inclusion and well-being. The evaluation will also consider how these schemes have contributed to local economic growth.</p> <p>Gathering evidence to highlight improved ways that volunteers and the public could work with local authorities on public rights of way.</p> <p>Continued support of Natural England's MENE survey in future years to help ensure a long term robust data source on recreation in the natural environment, provide evidence for future policy on health and educational access and to deliver data needed for cross-Departmental commitments on public health).</p>
<b>Green Infrastructure (GI)</b>	Evaluating GI as a catalyst to growth; evaluating GI assessment tools; roll out of toolkit for Local Economic Partnerships to help them assess their impact and reliance on the natural environment.	
<b>Inland Waterways Sponsorship, Policy and Legislation.</b>		Evidence is needed to better identify public benefit delivery by inland waterways to underpin the case for the planned transfer of Environment Agency (EA) navigations to the Canal & River Trust (CRT). In particular how additional resources affects usages of the waterways and associated public benefits.
<b>The Big Tree Plant.</b>	Project underway to evaluate impacts of the scheme on community groups and lessons for community engagement, this will continue into the next financial year.	

### 3. Future evidence needs

#### What are the longer-term evidence needs for the policy area/programme?

In the longer term it is anticipated that there will be a need for further analysis on how government can help markets to contribute to a resilient forestry resource and the consideration of synergies between areas such as access and landscape protection and development of the rural economy. Specific areas for further work are set out in table 3 - this evidence will be developed internally- by letting projects, in partnership and by utilising others' evidence.

**Table 3: Longer term evidence needs**

Policy Area	Future evidence need
Forestry policy and sponsorship of Forestry Commission and the National Forest Company	<p>Developing further evidence for the natural capital accounts for Forestry.</p> <p>Assessing the impact of markets on forestry.</p> <p>Consideration of the implications that changes in the arrangements for international accounting of carbon may have on forestry.</p>
Protected landscape policy including National Park Authorities and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty	<p>Examine the relationship between landscape protection and economic growth.</p> <p>Utilising new data - for example information from AONBs on their activity and environmental monitoring of protected landscapes.</p> <p>Possible practical exploration of future models.</p>
Access	<p>Evaluation to establish whether the rights of way reforms have sped up rights of way legal processes as envisaged.</p> <p>Use evaluation to build an evidence base of the benefits, impacts and costs of implementing coastal access; accumulating information and evidence from each stretch of the English coast where access rights are or have been implemented.</p> <p>Use evaluation to build an evidence base of the benefits of <i>Paths for Communities</i> scheme; accumulating information and evidence from the successful grant approvals.</p> <p>Build set of best practice working methods for volunteers and the public and local authorities.</p> <p>Support of Natural England's MENE survey - the longer this survey continues, the more value it delivers, because of the information it provides on trends in behaviours and attitudes.</p>
Green Infrastructure	<p>Most work is focused on the initial 2-year phase of the Green Infrastructure Partnership, but some more ambitious projects, such as the local economic partnership toolkits are likely to be multi-year.</p> <p>Key aims are to help develop or identify tools to assist decisions to invest in</p>

Policy Area	Future evidence need
	natural capital.
<b>Inland Waterways Sponsorship, Policy and Legislation</b>	The 15 year Grant Agreement between Defra and the Canal & River Trust recognises that the charity's challenge is a long-term one and that it will take time to develop new sources of income and finance. As part of the Grant Agreement, a review will take place in 2021/22 examining the continuing public benefit case for government funding beyond 2026/2027. This will involve an evidence-based evaluation of the extent to which Defra's investment objectives have been realised.
<b>The Big Tree Plant</b>	Potential for evaluation of BTP projects 3-5 years on for evidence of tree survival and community activity.
<b>RDPE Future</b>	Evaluate the impacts of RDPE funded initiatives on landscape and historic environment, forestry and access (for example the impact of catchment sensitive farming).

## 4. Meeting evidence needs

**What approach (es) will be taken to meeting evidence needs?**

### *Range of evidence*

Given the wide range of areas covered in the Landscape and Outdoor Recreation policy area, evidence needs range from evidence to develop and evaluate policies (for example how many trees should be planted) to evidence to make spending decisions (for example what should the National Park Authorities' budgets be) to evidence to influence others (for example evidence to demonstrate to local authorities that green infrastructure encourages economic growth).

The range of evidence can also vary by time for example Landscape and Outdoor Recreation utilises the MENE survey which is aiming to develop longitudinal data on outdoor recreation, as well as carrying out short term evaluations of policies (such as the big tree plant) to see if the processes currently in place can be improved.

### *Role of internal evidence and analysis*

As Landscape and Outdoor Recreation draws on a wide range of evidence from scientific to economic to social research, it frequently draws on a multi-disciplinary team of internal specialist support.

Landscape and Outdoor Recreation utilises not only its own specialists such as economists within the team but also draws on the expertise of relevant Defra social researchers and statisticians. Work of statisticians often includes the use of GIS to 'cut' data to specific areas such as the National Forest or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The team also draws on expertise from the wider Defra family - for example economists, statisticians and scientists in the Forestry Commission and Natural England. These experts are used to both develop evidence in house and also to help advise and steer

external research projects. Evidence is also used to help inform the bodies that we sponsor, for example National Park Authorities.

Where appropriate the team also draws on the expertise of leading academics, for example the members of the Natural Capital Committee.

### ***Identifying evidence needs***

Evidence needs are identified as part of the evidence planning cycle for both Defra and other relevant organisations (for example Forestry Commission). Evidence needs are identified by both policy and evidence specialists, drawing on inputs from external stakeholders and wider government reviews.

### ***Approach to prioritising R&D***

Within Landscape and Outdoor Recreation prioritisation is considered both over the short and long term, this is done at least once a year but sometime twice (for example the current year's needs may be reassessed mid year). The process for allocating funding to projects is proportionate and directly involves policy and evidence leads, who reflect discussions with stakeholders.

Short term: Each year's R&D spending projects are prioritised through a process which involves both policy and evidence leads proposing projects which are then prioritised using the following criteria:

1. High need and ready projects
2. Medium need or not ready projects
3. Not prioritised for this year

The prioritisation process itself is generally based on the three criteria listed below. For 2013/14 an additional criteria considering whether the evidence is required for the spending review (with an approximately 25% weighting) will be included:-

- **Policy usefulness** - what is the level of need for this project, and where does it sit in the policy cycle? How does the project align with Defra's SRP, Defra's Business Plan and Evidence Plan? (approximately 30% weight)
- **Internal resource availability** to manage the project - is there sufficient resource availability within the team to ensure effective delivery of the project? Achievability – is the project ready to start? (approximately 30% weight)
- **Delivery in partnership** – has the potential to undertake research in partnership (for instance, with Defra's agencies, other government departments, or external bodies) been explored? Have the opportunities for involvement of other analytical areas been considered? (approximately 15% weight)

Long term: evidence needs are considered against long term policy objectives and evidence needs, for example feeding into spending reviews.

### ***Collaboration and Partnerships***

Landscape and Outdoor Recreation works in partnership with a number of other organisations to draw upon their expertise and evidence and to work together to provide evidence. This is done by utilising expertise when carrying out internal work, co-funding projects and ensuring that the relevant experts are on steering groups for projects. The

method of collaboration will depend on the evidence need being met. Some examples of partnership working are:

- Evidence is often developed in partnership with the bodies that Landscape and Outdoor Recreation sponsors for example the National Park Authorities and the National Forest Company.
- Projects are often co-funded with Natural England or other areas of the department for example the MENE survey.
- Forest Research has a £7m budget and Defra works with Forestry Commission England to help influence the FR science and innovation strategy to ensure that England's policy evidence needs are considered.
- Work is undertaken in partnership as part of the Green Infrastructure Partnership.
- Landscape and Outdoor Recreation works with other areas within Defra where there is cross-over in interests, for example the Climate Change Adaptation team, the Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity teams.
- Landscape and Outdoor Recreation utilises other areas of ongoing research for example the work of the National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA) and the NEA follow on.
- In the longer term Landscape and Outdoor Recreation will be looking to forge closer links with research councils.

## 5. Evaluating value for money and impact

**What approach(es) will be taken to maximise and evaluate value for money and impact from evidence?**

### ***Quality assurance***

To ensure value for money, research that is commissioned by the Landscape and Outdoor Recreation team is commissioned in compliance with guidelines within the department's evidence handbook. Policy teams work closely with other teams within Defra and the Defra family to pull in relevant expertise, draw upon ongoing evidence and work collaboratively.

To ensure our evidence is of good quality and robust for the purpose intended, where appropriate we peer review our project proposals and may carry out an external peer review of a project's outputs. This ensures an independent perspective and helps us to deliver against our objectives.

### ***Evidence Impact Evaluation***

The Landscape and Outdoor Recreation team takes a proportionate approach to evaluating the impact of the evidence commissioned. This is primarily done through the annual allocation process where the impact of evidence on policy is a key factor in prioritisation; this is also considered as part of the evidence plan process.

To ensure maximum impact evidence is disseminated within the department, to the Defra family and also externally and any external contract would generally also require that the contractor undertake dissemination activity.

### ***Policy evaluation***

Policy evaluation is used in Landscape and Outdoor Recreation both to improve processes and also help develop the evidence base, thereby assisting policy development. Some key areas for policy evaluation are set out below. The exact nature of the evaluation will depend on a number of factors including the type of evaluation need as well as the internal resources and expertise available. Evaluations may be undertaken in-house or through externally let contracts and, where appropriate they are carried out in partnership.

- As part of the Canal & River Trust's Grant Agreement, a review will take place in 2021/22 to examine the continuing public benefit case for government funding beyond 2026/27. This will involve an evidence-based evaluation of the extent to which Defra's investment objectives have been realised.
- Evaluation of Big Tree Plant projects 3-5 years on for evidence of tree survival and community activity.
- Longer term evaluation of policies and projects, such as the coastal access and the Paths for Communities scheme will be undertaken over the next few years.
- Evaluation of Rural Development Plan on landscape and outdoor recreation priorities such as forestry, landscape, historic environment and access will need to be undertaken through the life of the next scheme.
- Evaluation of the impact of government spend to help contribute to spending review decisions (this is an ongoing area of evidence development).