

Biodiversity South West - Biodiversity Information and Reporting Group

19/06/07

Present:

Ray Perrins (SWO), Naomi Brookes (BSW), Tim Corner (BRERC), Craig Dixon (DCC), Bill Butcher (SERC), Matt Hamilton (Avon LBAP), Charlie Taylor (DWT).

Apologies:

Vicky Breeze (SCC), Imogen Davenport (DWT), Roger Covey (NE), Basil Greenwood (NE), Lyn Jenkins (EA), Sarah Wilkinson (WWT), Carolyn Steele (DERC).

Notes:

1. Notes from meeting of 21/03/07 and Annual Monitoring Report indicators

Following the previous meeting on Local Authority biodiversity information issues, the subject of Annual Monitoring Reports was discussed again. RP and NB reported that the planned workshop would go ahead later in year, but it was a matter of deciding correct audience.

SERC circulated a draft document with their proposals for guidance on how biodiversity information can be used to report on National Core Output Indicator 8: biodiversity. They proposed the use of three regionally agreed indicators centred on bats, great crested newts and BAP habitat. Ideally these would be monitored and reported on by each Local Planning Authority. These were chosen as they have reasonable datasets available, are affected by development and have a high nature conservation importance. The group asked if it was a desirable objective to use a standard indicator? Positives would be that if these could be used consistently then they could be aggregated up to the region.

CT pointed out that all LDFs involve statutory consultation i.e. Natural England and the Environment Agency and therefore monitoring depends on what standard they set. Regional Assembly should also have a view on this. RP to take to SIP.

DEFRA and WT co-ordinating a biodiversity indicator linked to local sites for LAAs.

TC mentioned that Bristol City Council are using SSSI-style "condition status" to assess their parks for wildlife benefits but expressed concerns about criteria – maybe leave this out as you have anyway!.

With regard to species monitoring in LDFs there are issues on continuing measuring population trends and how this relates to planning and development issues. Any trend in a species population would have to be interpreted carefully. For example, an upward trend due to conservation effort might be wrongly interpreted as suggesting there were no development-related issues for that species. Despite the strong reservations on the use of a species indicator, it was recognised that NCOI8 requires some data on this and that any guidance would be a useful starting point for discussions. CT also made the point that developers should be encouraged to include "wildlife gardens" in new developments to help movement of wildlife and connectivity of outside sites. These gains could only be measured by species trends, not habitat. TC said that in former

Avon great crested newts are not very well recorded at present and therefore caution would have to be exercised in the early years of interpreting data. .

Group discussed need for concerns about monitoring COI need to be raised nationally. Any comments on SERC document to be directed to BB. It was decided that this could form the basis for discussions around this issue for the proposed LDF workshop.

2. Nature Map indicator

The group addressed the issue of how to determine if the South West Nature Map is accomplishing its desired goals. This centred around whether an indicator or indicators were desirable or possible. TC was concerned that some groups did not fully understand the purpose of Nature Map. There was some concern that work in some areas to rework or remap Strategic Nature Areas may not be using the Rebuilding Biodiversity methodology. Nature Map working group to follow this up. Biodiversity South West, which developed Nature Map, regards it as the “final first iteration” and that significant revision of SNAs should not be undertaken at present. The next stage should be refinement of mapping and conservation effort within each SNA.

It should be clear where the “master copy” of Nature Map is held and who owns it. Each county level Nature Map should be in the custodianship/responsibility of LBAPs and LRCs. This issue will be discussed by the Nature Map working Group

RP introduced various possible indicators such as number of landscape scale projects within SNAs. BB made the distinction between output indicators, such as projects and actions resulting from Nature Map and outcome indicators such as habitat changes. The Rebuilding Biodiversity Methodology sets out possible indicator by outlining existing habitat targets and creation targets. RP passed around a map produced by Cornwall Wildlife Trust, showing the location of landscape scale projects in the county (as rough ovals) superimposed on a version of Nature Map (with all SNAs one colour). CT pointed out the need to distinguish different sizes of “landscape scale” projects, in terms of the amount work done (habitat restored etc). There are also reservations that funders of large projects might get the mistaken impression that no further work needs doing if an SNA has one or two such projects already underway.

Despite these issues, it was generally concluded that some form of information on landscape scale projects, and how they relate to Nature Map and SNAs, would be good for each County. This would be for information purposes rather than as an indicator. NB discussed interactive web based Nature Map being developed by BioSW which could be used for this purpose. CT made the point that inputting data into any interactive map should be made as simple as possible to ensure that it was used adequately.

BAP priority habitat was raised by TC and BB as a possible “outcome” indicator. BB said that in Somerset it was recognised that 100% coverage of habitat mapping was unrealistic. They were trying to prioritise habit mapping to SNAs and area under pressure from development. That would result in 30-50% of the county being properly mapped. The SNA work could feed into a regional Nature Map indicator. CD said that in Devon they were looking into (1) tweaking the SNA boundaries and (2) Have a Devon layer looking at county priorities such as connectivity between river valleys.

After discussion it was agreed that a suitable indicator for Nature Map would be BAP habitat extent and quality within SNAs. This could also be used to highlight areas needing work and in turn attract funding. It would first be necessary to find out what is currently available in terms of data. It might be possible to sample random SNAs to get some information as a start. We would need statistical advice for this. RP agreed to contact the new regional statistician, Paul Moore, to ask about this.

3. Biodiversity South West reporting

Group discussed question of should BioSW be reporting and if so what. Should they report on their activity and state of biodiversity in South West. In the past BSW had tried to produce a “report card” on the state of the region’s biodiversity. A draft version had used expert opinion to populate a traffic light card of various species and habitats as increasing (green), no change (amber) and decreasing (red). NB wondered if the recently produced “biodiversity indicators in your pocket” could be broken down regionally. RP will investigate. CT said that any traffic light system had problems with interpretation and that to stimulate debate a case study approach might be more useful. BioSW will need to discuss the need for reporting to guide BIRG.

4. Marine and Coastal indicators.

RP updated the group on the Marine and Coastal Sector Group’s thinking on indicators. As they are still in development the group had no comments on these

However it was noted that there is a lack of clarity on who is responsible for marine data in the SW. TC said that as part of the Severn Barrage project a lot of data from the seabed was being gathered and he was in the process of seeing if BRERC could have a copy of the results. CT said that DBRC ran a project on a metadata catalogue for marine databases which should be available on the Finding Sanctuary website. CT also said that DWT was doing their own biodiversity hot spot mapping (contact Richard White). It was generally agreed that while there were lots of marine databases there were problems with availability and ownership. It was decided to have marine databases as an item agenda at the next BIRG and to invite Tom Hooper to give a presentation on the findings of the metadata catalogue project.

5. South West Protected landscapes Forum indicators

The core indicators used by the SWPLF were briefly discussed. The biodiversity indicator is still SSSI condition, which BIRG did not consider optimal. BAP habitat was again considered a much better measure, if a baseline could be established. There was reluctance from the SWPLF to pay for this work.

This led to a wider discussion of all the organisations that need biodiversity data of a similar nature and how BAP habitat could be used for many of their needs. Organisations mentioned in addition to SWPLF were Local Authorities, Natural England and the Environment Agency.

CD reported to group that Devon BAP/Council has funds to produce a monitoring framework for the county and he is currently pulling together project brief. He will circulate to group for comment. Although establishing a surveyed baseline of BAP

habitat would be expensive, a partnership approach might work. Limiting it to SNAs and areas of development pressure would reduce this.

The next steps are:

Establish a methodology: sample size, update frequency etc.

Estimate overall costs (possibly for several options).

Determine appropriate partners who may contribute to the project.

Determine how data will be used in future.

It was agreed that this would be brought to the next meeting of South West LRCs. Note it will also be discussed at Nature Map meeting.

7. Date of next meeting: 1.30 pm, 3rd October 2007, Renslade House, Exeter. Biodiversity recording and reporting Systems. BARS, NBN, Recorder, Marine Datasets.

Actions:

1. RP to send Nature Map guidance to SIP group.
2. Invite representatives from NE and EA who advise on LDFs to the proposed regional workshop and AMR biodiversity indicators.
3. Correct SNA colour on Nature Map (Purple Moor Grass to Woodland, North Devon).
4. RP to forward Welsh connectivity presentation to CD.
5. RP to bring BIRG's conclusions to Nature Map working group.
6. RP to contact statistician Paul Moore regarding habitat sampling.
7. RP to ask BSW steering group for lead on SW "report card" or other reporting possibilities.
8. Add agenda item for next BIRG on marine databases in the SW – where are they and who owns them? Invite Tom Hooper to give a presentation on the metadata project.
9. BAP partnership project proposal on next LRC meeting agenda.
10. RP to forward Devon County Council's document to BIRG for comment. RP will circulate the next draft when ready.

Abbreviations:

ALGE	Association of Local Government Ecologists
AMR	Annual Monitoring Report
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan (Habitat)
BRERC	Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre
BSW	Biodiversity South West
DBRC	Devon Biodiversity Records Centre
DCC	Devon County Council
DERC	Dorset Environmental Records Centre
DeWT	Devon Wildlife Trust
DoWT	Dorset Wildlife Trust
LA	Local Authority
LBAP	Local Biodiversity Action Partnership
LDF	Local Development Framework
LRC	Local Records Centre (environmental/biodiversity information)
NERC	Natural Environment and Rural Communities (Act)
SCC	Somerset County Council
SERC	Somerset Environmental Records Centre
SIP???	
SNA	Strategic Nature Area (from the South West Nature Map)
SSDC	South Somerset District Council
SWO	South West Observatory