

King's Speech for Nature 2026

The 2024 King's Speech proposed 40 different Bills to overcome the challenges facing the UK. Not one of those Bills sought to tackle the severe and ongoing loss of nature in the UK that threatens our food, water, health and homes. Since 2024, wild species and the habitats on which they depend have continued to decline. The prospect of catastrophic ecosystem collapse has inched closer.

This briefing is an invitation to do better. 2026 can and should be a turning point for nature recovery; for wildlife, for people and for national security.

In January this year, the UK Government published a summary of the National Security Assessment on global biodiversity loss, showing nature decline to be a growing risk to the UK's economy and overall security. Halfway to the UK's legally binding target to halt the decline in nature by 2030, this should be the moment the UK Government acts on the evidence and steps up the delivery of nature recovery, before it is too late. Sustained polling shows how popular such action to save cherished wild species and spaces would be.

The Wildlife Trusts propose eight bills that, if progressed by the UK Government, would put legal boosters under efforts to restore nature. To be effective, such efforts should be accompanied by the continued delivery of core, non-legislative mechanisms for nature, including:

- Maintenance of current nature protections like the Habitats Regulations, which form the foundations from which nature recovery can spring.
- Progression of Environmental Land Management schemes to support farmers, including expansion of Countryside Stewardship and Landscape Recovery schemes to increase rewards for farmers taking nature friendly actions.
- Fully funded and cross-UK Government implementation of the Environmental Improvement Plan, and sustained focus on achieving the 2030 targets set under the Environment Act 2021 and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

The Bills proposed below would complement these core mechanisms to recover nature. They adopt the template of a UK [Government briefing note](#) to show what could be - wild spaces restored, harmful practices ended, wild species brought back, more people connected to nature and private sector investment increased. The proposed legislation demonstrates the level of ambition UK Ministers should aim for if delivery is to match warm words about wildlife, and to meet the rising public demand for nature action.

Nature is necessary to our collective future, providing lasting security, bolstered national identity and a potent source of joy. Ahead of the opening of the new session of Parliament, The Wildlife Trusts offer a propositional 'King's Speech for Nature' as an invitation to the UK Government embrace this popular, positive, and urgently needed agenda. This is a blueprint for action.

Note on territorial extent and application: The Bills proposed in the document would be UK Government Bills, introduced to the Westminster Parliament to cover England. The Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland determine their own environmental policies.

The Ocean Emergency Bill

The Ocean Emergency Bill will give Defra emergency powers to tackle the rapidly deteriorating marine environment, including control of marine by-laws and planning processes where urgent intervention is needed for nature. The Bill will require Defra to use these powers to swiftly deliver a whole-site ban on bottom trawling in Marine Protected Areas and a Marine Spatial Plan across English seas.

What does the Bill do?

The Bill will amend the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and Fisheries Act 2020 to create an environmental emergency power, vested in the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The power, to be invoked when there is scientific evidence of critical species and habitat decline at sea, will allow the Secretary of State to:

- Put in place marine by-laws within one month.
- Require all UK Government Departments and bodies to act in accordance with a marine spatial plan, produced by Defra.

The Bill will include a legally binding requirement for Defra to invoke the environmental emergency power, on the basis of current scientific evidence of critical seabird decline and Marine Protected Area deterioration, to achieve:

- A whole site ban on bottom trawling in 41 English MPAs by 31st December 2026.
- The application of a cross-UK Government Marine Spatial Plan covering all marine activities to English seas by 31st December 2027, with a focus on how to achieve Environment Act, Fisheries Act and Clean Power targets in a complementary manner.

The Bill will impose a duty on the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to review how further use of emergency by-law powers and adoption of a whole-site approach to protection could improve the management of Marine Protected Areas. The Secretary of State will be required to report the review, with recommendations for action, to Parliament by 31st December 2027.

Key facts

- Marine wildlife is in a perilous state. The majority of UK seabird species are in decline, with breeding abundance falling sharply and some species facing extinction.¹ One in six of the UK's top ten fish stocks, including North Sea cod and mackerel, are in critical condition and at risk of total collapse.² The spaces meant to give wildlife a refuge, Marine Protected Areas, are deteriorating – 56% of MPAs in the UK have at least one designated feature that's in unfavourable or declining condition due in part of the damaging practice of bottom trawling.³
- Policy efforts to retrieve this situation have become bogged down. Defra instigated a Marine Spatial Prioritisation Programme in 2022, to explore how a Marine Spatial Plan could

¹ [Seabird population changes in the UK 1986–2024](#), JNCC, March 2026

² Oceana [report on fish stocks](#), 2025

³ Wildlife Trusts [research on MPA condition](#), 2025. See also Wildlife Trusts [ban bottom trawling](#) campaign

coordinate marine activities to better protect nature, but the Programme has struggled to get cross-UK Government traction and has so far failed to produce any outcomes. A 2025 consultation on banning bottom trawling in parts of 41 English MPAs has also not yielded any results a year on, due in part to a complicated marine by-law process vested in the Marine Management Organisation. Progress towards the necessary next step, securing a whole-site ban on bottom trawling across further English seabed MPAs has been glacial.

- Emergencies require emergency powers. The Bill will give Defra powers and target dates for delivery, to unblock the system and deliver ocean recovery, before it is too late.

The River Restoration Bill

The River Restoration Bill will help restore rivers to their natural flow and form. It will give the Environment Agency and Defra duties, powers and targets to remove artificial barriers in rivers and to increase habitats in recovery for nature alongside rivers, reducing pollution and flooding risks.

What does the Bill do?

The Bill will give the Environment Agency a duty to map and assess artificial barriers in English rivers, and to reduce their number as a core Agency function. This duty will be accompanied by powers to remove artificial barriers, without compensation for the owner, if the following conditions are met:

- The barrier is interfering with the natural flow and function of the river, including by inhibiting fish passage.
- The barrier serves no navigational, energy production, flood defence or water supply purpose.
- The barrier has limited heritage or recreational value.

A subsidiary duty will be placed on the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to provide sufficient financial and wider support to the Environment Agency to enable it to fulfil its new duty. This will include direction to prioritise barrier removal within existing capital spend programmes for flooding and the water industry. The Secretary of State will be required to report to Parliament by 31 December 2028 on progress in reducing artificial barriers in English rivers and on planned next steps.

The Bill will also give the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs a target to increase the amount of habitats around rivers in recovery for nature, known as the Wilder Rivers Banks target. The Secretary of State will be required to report to Parliament by 31 December 2028 on how Environmental Land Management schemes, the Water Restoration Fund and regional water planning have been used to achieve the target to demonstrably increase wildlife richness on land adjacent to rivers.

The Bill will give the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs a duty to improve enforcement of all existing legislation pertaining to water quality. The Secretary of State will be required to report to Parliament by 31 December 2027 on how enforcement of existing law to reduce water pollution and hold polluters to account will be improved.

Key facts

- Over 650 rivers in England do not achieve good ecological status because of barriers to fish migration. These modifications to rivers, made over many centuries, impede species movement, cut off rivers from wider freshwater networks and degrade riverine habitats.⁴

⁴ [Academic paper](#) 'A comprehensive assessment of stream fragmentation in Great Britain', Jones et al, 2019

- Despite many of these barriers no longer having a function, and in many cases costing more to upkeep than remove, no concerted effort has been made to remove them. The removal of artificial barriers is one of the most cost-effective ways to restore ecological function.⁵ The Bill will give the Environment Agency the legal steer and powers needed to mount this effort and ensure Defra support to see this through.
- After decades of agricultural intensification and urban development, nature rich habitats alongside waterways are also under pressure. In many areas ploughed fields, grazed pasture, manicured lawns or urban hard surfaces extend almost to the top of the riverbank, leaving the banks bare of wild plants and trees.
- The absence of wilder banks has significant impacts on the form and function of rivers. Eroded soils, farm chemicals, manure and road runoff flow straight into the channel. Sewage pollution grows worse, in the absence of wild habitats to hold rainwater back from the sewers. Invasive species more easily take hold. Exposed waterways, lacking in overhanging plants let alone trees, heat up in the summer sun, to temperatures that are fatal for fish and aquatic insects.⁶
- A Wilder River Banks target will elicit coordinated action to tackle these problems. More wild habitats fringing rivers means cleaner, more biodiverse waters.
- Delivery of the target will make a demonstrable contribution towards the legally-binding targets to create or restore 500,000ha of habitat outside of protected sites, and to reduce nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment pollution from farming by 40%. It will also boost the capacity of river ecosystems to adapt to climate change, with natural ecosystems alongside rivers providing improved climate resilience for people and nature, including through natural flood management. The Rivers 2040 project, undertaken by The Wildlife Trusts, Trent Rivers Trust and Intact Insurance to map the environmental, economic and social impact of restoration along the course of the River Trent, provides a blueprint for the benefits this approach will provide.⁷
- Recent years have seen persistent failures to enforce existing regulations designed to prevent water pollution, from sewage, chemical and agricultural sources. A cross-sector review and enforcement improvement plan will bear down on the worst polluters of English waters.

⁵ Environment Agency [paper](#) on physical modification of rivers, 2025

⁶ Wildlife Trusts Wilder River Banks [briefing](#), 2025

⁷ Rivers 2040 [project](#), 2026

Better Land Use Bill

The Better Land Use Bill will end public subsidies for environmentally damaging bioenergy, reduce damaging impacts from intensive livestock farming, enforce the Land Use Framework across UK Government and enhance environmental restoration on land protected for nature.

What does the Bill do?

The Bill will reduce a damaging land use by ending all subsidies for bioenergy production in England. From 31st December 2028 no public funds will be used to support the growth of crops for energy.

The Bill will also place a duty on the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to improve the sustainability of intensive livestock farming in England. The Secretary of State will be required to present an improvement plan to Parliament by 31st December 2027, including proposals to:

- Reform the environmental permitting system, including the extension of permitting to dairy cattle and new controls on the disposal of slurry from intensive farms.
- Issuing a moratorium on new intensive livestock units, and the expansion of existing units, in the catchments of waterbodies failing good ecological status, or of protected areas at risk of failing their conservation objectives, as a result of pollution from intensive livestock farms.

The Bill will place a duty on all Secretaries of State to work to fulfil the objectives of the Land Use Framework for England.

The Bill will enhance environmental restoration on land protected for nature by:

- Creating a new statutory purpose for protected landscapes. The new statutory purpose will have equal weight to existing statutory purposes and will require National Parks and National Landscapes to actively recover nature across the area they cover.
- Requiring the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to undertake a review of protected nature sites in England, to identify barriers to improving the management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Wildlife Sites, and to implement solutions, including new methods to address offsite pressures.

Key facts

- 1% of land in England is currently used to grow crops for bioenergy.⁸ These crops are burned for large-scale electricity production, fed into anaerobic digesters, or used as biofuels for cars and potentially aviation, both at home and abroad. This form of energy production makes climate change worse through carbon emissions and land use change, takes out land which could be used for food production and nature recovery and – due to the qualities of bioenergy crops like maize – erodes the soil and pollutes rivers, jeopardising our long-term food security and water supplies. This environmentally damaging land-use should not be subsidised. The

⁸ Defra [bioenergy statistics](#) 2026, figure 1

cessation of all financial support from public funds for bioenergy will take effect on 31st December 2028, giving producers time to switch to less environmentally damaging crops. Public funds previously used to subsidise bioenergy will be redirected to increase rewards for farmers undertaking nature recovery actions on their land.

- Intensive livestock farms, frequently owned by large corporations, are on the increase in England, and are responsible for growing pollution, both of air and water.⁹ The existing environmental permitting system meant to manage adverse impacts is failing to do so¹⁰, resulting in iconic rivers like the Wye facing terminal decline as a result of too many intensive livestock farms in the area.
- A duty on the Secretary of State to tighten up the permitting system, including bringing intensive cattle farms into it and overhauling controls on the most damaging by-product from intensive livestock farms, huge amounts of slurry, will reduce impacts from existing operations. Environmental evidence will be used to inform decisions on when new intensive livestock farms can safely be permitted, and when they should not be on the grounds that, even with mitigation, they would push struggling local ecosystems behind breaking point.
- As well as reducing impacts from harmful forms of land use, the Bill will reinforce a positive UK Government document designed to deliver better land use across England. The Land Use Framework, published by Defra in March 2026, sets out how different land uses can optimally align to maximise environmental, economic and social benefits.¹¹ The document is positive, but it is Defra only policy at present. A new duty on all UK Government departments to implement the Framework will give the document cross-Whitehall bite and ensure its objectives are delivered.
- The UK Government has committed to protecting and managing 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 under the Global Biodiversity Framework. National Parks and Landscapes could play a key role in achieving this target on land, as they cover 25% of England. However, nature in these protected landscapes is often in a worse state inside them than it is without. The lack of a clear ambition for protected landscapes to actively recover nature is one of the reasons for this, as identified by the 2019 Glover Review of Protected Landscapes. Successive Governments have failed to act on proposals to introduce a nature recovery purpose to address this.¹² The Better Land Use Bill will end this inaction and introduce a nature recovery purpose, to help nature flourish in our cherished National Parks and Landscapes.
- England benefits from nature-specific designations, including networks of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Wildlife Sites. However, both designations are suffering from poor management, with too many sites in a deteriorating condition and unable to contribute as they should to nature recovery.¹³ A full UK Government review is needed to understand the site management problems, and to bring forward solutions, including the growing problem of off-site pressures like pollution resulting in a protected site deteriorating. Solutions could range from new regulations to new incentives for landowners, such as tax breaks for owners who demonstrate sustained improvement in site condition through improved management.

⁹ See Wildlife Trusts report on [intensive pig and poultry farming](#), and follow-up [report](#) on chicken numbers.

¹⁰ Wildlife and Countryside Link [report](#) on intensive livestock farming, 2024

¹¹ [Land Use Framework](#) 2026

¹² Wildlife and Countryside Link [30x30 report](#), 2025

¹³ See Wildlife Trusts [research](#) on Local Wildlife Site condition

The Peatland Recovery Bill

The Peatland Recovery Bill will conserve carbon-storing, biodiversity-boosting peatland by banning the use of extracted peat in horticulture and restricting development on deep peat.

What will the Bill do?

The Bill will make it an offence to sell horticultural peat in England, whether for amateur or professional use. This sales prohibition will apply to horticultural peat products regardless of their point of origin; whether dug from peatland in the UK or abroad, horticultural peat will not be possible to sell.

The prohibition will be phased in over two stages:

- A ban on the retail sale and supply of bagged peat for amateur use within six months of legislation coming into force.
- A ban on the sale and supply of peat for commercial growing and professional use within two years of legislation coming into force.

The Bill also requires the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to produce planning guidance directing planning authorities and the Planning Inspectorate to refuse permission for all forms of development on peat more than 30cm in depth.

Key facts

- Peatlands are the UK's biggest carbon sink, storing around 3.2 billion tonnes of carbon. However, due to its poor condition, much of the UK's 2.6 million hectares (ha) of peatland is no longer actively capturing carbon. Estimates suggest it could be emitting 23 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent each year. Degraded peat soils are bad news for nature as well as climate, driving declines in wild species that can only thrive in healthy peatlands.
- The extraction of peat for horticulture is one of the drivers of global peatland degradation. Successive UK Governments have promised to ban the sale of horticultural peat, but no action has been taken, despite strong public support for the policy.¹⁴ The Peatland Recovery Bill will end this stalemate and legally ban the sale of horticultural peat in England. Given the stated intention of the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish Governments to also ban horticultural peat, this legislation may be expanded to be UK wide.
- The horticulture industry has been preparing for a legal ban since 2022 and the number of environmentally friendly alternatives to horticultural peat continues to grow. As such, transition will not be abrupt. To aid with transition, the Bill will first prohibit the sale of bagged peat for amateur gardening within six months, with a longer two year phase-in period for professional use.¹⁵
- The Bill will also address another contributor to poor peatland health; development on deep peat. Such development, frequently for onshore wind, risks breaking up peat deposits and

¹⁴ See Wildlife Trusts [peatland campaign](#) and Peat Free Partnership [peat campaign](#)

¹⁵ Peat free partnership [legislative proposals](#)

destroying peatland habitats, causing both climate and nature damage. Peatland integrity is important for water supply and flood risk reduction.

- Deep peat protections in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) have proved insufficient, with large wind farms still being proposed on deep peat through the Nationally Insignificant Projects regime.¹⁶ New planning guidance from the Peatland Recovery Bill will bolster the NPPF protection by explicitly banning all forms of development, including major infrastructure, on peat over 30cm, directing onshore wind to more environmentally appropriate locations.

¹⁶ See [Yorkshire Wildlife Trust work](#) to oppose proposals to build on deep peat at Calderdale

The Bison and Elk Return Bill

The Bison and Elk Return Bill will create a new regulatory regime for the reintroduction of large herbivores to the wild in England, to boost nature recovery through improved habitat management and the restoration of natural processes.

What will the Bill do?

The Bill will make Natural England responsible for considering applications to reintroduce large herbivores to England. Projects will have to meet the following criteria for approval:

- To concern bison, elk or other large herbivores acting as ecological replacements for extinct mega fauna, such as wild cattle or horses. These species were once common in England, before localised extinctions in recent millennia.
- To have the core nature recovery purpose of restoring foundation species for local ecosystems.
- To propose keeping the animals in a secured area of natural landscape, under the control of the applicant.
- To propose keeping the animals in a wild condition, i.e with minimal human contact and in such a way as allows natural herd structures and behaviours to flourish improving both welfare and nature recovery.

Natural England will be required to apply conservation, animal welfare and monitoring conditions on successful applications.

The Bill will confirm that this regulatory regime applies to large herbivore schemes under the above conditions in place of other licensing schemes and frameworks.

Key facts

- Bison, elk and other large herbivores helped forge England's natural landscape. These large herbivores created the first woodland glades by rubbing up trees and eating the bark, creating space for a wide range of other species to thrive, as well as dispersing seeds. Since the local extinction of bison and elk a few thousand years ago, no other species has been able to perform these jobs in quite the same way. Nature in England is still feeling the loss of these key wild species.
- Over recent years, The Wildlife Trusts and other environmental organisations have worked on pioneering reintroduction schemes for bison, to help nature recover by bringing back its foundational ecosystem engineers.¹⁷
- Reintroductions have been hampered by an overly complicated regulatory landscape. Bison projects have had to apply for licenses under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as reintroduced bison are seen as simultaneously seen as 'kept' and 'wild' animals.¹⁸

¹⁷ See the [Wild Blean](#) project

¹⁸ See [evidence](#) from The Lifescape Project

- A new tailor-made regulatory regime will end this legal absurdity, make it easier to reintroduce bison in a managed way, and see such reintroductions extend to elk.¹⁹ Reintroductions could also cover other large herbivore driven nature recovery schemes. Other large herbivores that could be reintroduced include wild cattle and wild horses, who can fulfil a similar ecological role to bison and elk.
- More of these reintroductions will be a shot in the arm for ecosystems, helping to recover nature by restoring foundational species. Reintroductions could also create significant tourism potential in the communities where they take place.

¹⁹ Derbyshire Wildlife Trust [blog](#) 'Could Eurasian Elk Roam the UK Again?'

The Nature and Climate Development Design Bill

The Nature and Climate Development Design Bill will help ensure that new developments benefit people, nature and climate. It will increase habitats for wildlife next to new homes, improve people's health and bolster private investment in nature recovery through Biodiversity Net Gain markets.

What does the Bill do?

The Bill will increase wildlife habitats associated with new development by making the following requirements a condition of granting planning permission for developments of two or more units:

- The use of plants native to the UK for garden creation and landscaping, in place of non-native plants.
- The use of native grass for garden creation and landscaping, and no use of artificial grass.
- The provision of at least one swift brick or box per unit.
- The deployment of energy efficiency measures and renewable energy production into building design, including high-quality insulation, heat pumps and rooftop solar panels.

The Bill will amend current Biodiversity Net Gain regulations to:

- Remove the de-minimis exemption, meant for very small-scale building projects, which has been abused to exempt large developments from Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Clarify that a 10% uplift in biodiversity after development is the minimum requirement, and that provision over 10% should be encouraged by planning authorities where possible.
- Require BNG in designated New Towns to deliver a minimum 30% gain for nature.
- Require the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government to undertake a joint UK Government review on Biodiversity Net Gain enforcement, with recommendations for action to improve enforcement.

Key facts

- In order to thrive, wildlife needs native flora it has evolved alongside for millennia. Non-native plants provide less opportunities for food, travel and shelter than plants native to the UK. Artificial grass provides no such opportunities, and contributes to increased flood risk due to lower permeability and water-holding capacity.
- With 1.5 million new homes due to be built in England by 2030, the gardens and landscaped public areas provided by developers alongside them will matter for wildlife. Requiring developers to provide native plants and actual grass will increase the value these spaces provide to nature, giving hard-pressed wildlife a lifeline in changing landscapes.

- Nature friendly design measures in new homes themselves can also provide wildlife with homes.²⁰ A hugely popular campaign for mandatory swift bricks in new buildings has not been supported by UK Government, despite such bricks creating nesting and resting spaces for these threatened birds. Mandating swift bricks by law will finally get this reform over the line. Design measures can also lower resident's energy costs by retaining more heat and allow householders to directly benefit from renewable energy, reducing cost of living and bolstering national energy security.
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is a pioneering legal requirement to allow new development to proceed whilst boosting nature's recovery. The policy requires new housing to produce at least a 10% gain in biodiversity by the end of the development, achieved through on site or off-site measures.
- Since its introduction in 2024, exemptions, wavering political support and a lack of enforcement means that the original BNG vision, of the policy covering the majority of new development and leading to a lasting uplift in biodiversity, has not been delivered.²¹
- The reforms in the Nature and Climate Development Design Bill will correct this and allow BNG to be delivered as first envisioned; covering the majority of developments, going beyond 10% gain where possible and being enforced to ensure promised gains are actually delivered. The Bill will also see the ambition of BNG increased further in New Towns proposed by the UK Government, to reach at least 30%, making these new settlements transformational for nature as well as for people.
- These measures will boost nature recovery and allow residents of new homes to enjoy the benefits of more wildlife on their doorstep, improving health and quality of life.²²

²⁰ Wildlife Trusts [report](#) 'Swift and wild: How to build houses and restore nature together', 2024. See also [Feather Speech campaign](#) for swifts.

²¹ Wildlife and Countryside Link [research](#) on BNG

²² See Wildlife Trusts Planning & Development [policies](#)

The Access to Nature Bill

The Access to Nature Bill will confirm a legal right to enjoy a healthy environment and require decision makers to increase public access to nature to uphold that right.

What does the Bill do?

The Bill will enshrine in UK law the 2022 United Nations declaration that everyone has a human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

The Bill will set out a general expectation that decision makers in England should uphold that right by expanding public access to thriving green and blue spaces. The Bill will add a specific expectation that Ministers in the UK Government should uphold the right by fulfilling the commitment, set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan 2025, to ensure that everyone has access to green or blue spaces within a 15-minute walk from home.

Key facts

- Access to nature makes people happier and healthier, brings communities closer together, reduces inequalities and provides a source of joy and meaning in an age of disconnection.²³
- Not enough people have access to these benefits. 1 in 5 households lack access to green or blue space within a 15 minute walk.²⁴
- In 2022, the United Nations voted to recognise that everyone has a human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.²⁵ The UK Government at the time supported the motion, but only on the basis that it did not consider the right to be legally enforceable. It is time to correct this misconception.
- By legislating to confirm that a healthy environment is a human right in UK law, and requiring decision makers to deliver on this by increasing public access to nature, the right will be given tangible meaning and practical application. Increased public access to nature in fulfilment of the duty could be provided through a variety of means across different levels of UK Government, from new country parks on edge of urban areas to new river walks, from source to sea.
- The benefits of such increased access will include a boost for the NHS. More access to healthy green and blue spaces means more people in better health for longer, reducing demands on the NHS. It has been estimated that giving everyone in England good access to green space could save the NHS around £2 billion a year.²⁶ This will also enable an increase in 'green social prescribing' where access to nature is medically prescribed to successfully treat a variety of health conditions.²⁷

²³ Wildlife Trusts [research](#) on access to nature and health

²⁴ Defra access to nature [statistics](#), 2026

²⁵ [UN vote](#) on a Right to a Healthy Environment, 2022

²⁶ Natural England [blog](#), 2025

²⁷ Wildlife Trusts Natural Health Services [Report](#), 2023. See also positive [nature for health](#) approach taken in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026.

The Nature Investment Bill

The Nature Investment Bill will increase private investment in nature recovery. It will create a regulatory regime for natural carbon storage and ecosystem services traded by private companies, to provide certainty to encourage investment. It will also increase demand for ecosystem services.

What does the Bill do?

The Bill will establish a governance framework for nature markets. This will include:

- A published set of rules for nature products, setting out the minimum standards products must meet to demonstrate storage of carbon by natural means and/or wider ecosystem services.
- A dedicated regulator to register entrants to the market, monitor the market and to take enforcement action when rules are broken.

The Bill will also require the Chancellor of the Exchequer to set a target for the amount to be invested in nature from private sources on an annual basis, and to report to Parliament on how the UK Government will deliver on this target. The target and report must be presented to Parliament by 31st December 2027 and must include consideration of mandatory measures for large companies to measure and offset their nature impacts, separate to their climate impacts, through purchase of nature market products.

This Bill will also place a duty on local authorities, the Environment Agency and the water regulator to expand the use of nature-based solutions to reduce flooding and improve water quality.

Key facts

- Nature-related risks, such as increased flooding and disruption to food supplies, could see the UK's GDP shrink by 12% over the years ahead.²⁸ This must be headed off by nature recovery, which public funding cannot achieve on its own. The private sector, the cause of much environmental pollution and extraction, has a responsibility to contribute.
- The private sector also has a clear interest to contribute to nature recovery, given how nature related risks will affect their future activities.
- Some private companies are already investing in habitat recovery products traded on the private market, to fulfil their mandatory carbon offsets as nature-rich habitats store carbon. Products are also being traded on the basis of wider ecosystem services.²⁹ An expansion of these nascent markets would be an effective way to channel private sector investment into nature recovery.
- If this expansion is to happen, nature markets have to first be properly regulated, to provide certainty for investors that purchased products will be of a high quality. The Nature Investment Bill will provide the required regulatory framework, paving the way a significant increase in private sector investment in nature recovery.

²⁸ University of Oxford [research](#), 2024

²⁹ See Wildlife Trusts [work](#) on nature markets

- The nature market will grow further through the Bill's requirement for the Chancellor to set an annual target for nature investment, and to publish measures to meet that target, including possible mandatory nature contributions for large companies reflecting their impact on nature. Mandatory nature contributions could take the form of purchases of nature products.³⁰
 - Restored wild spaces can improve water quality, reducing water bills by lowering water cleaning costs, and protect homes and businesses from flooding by slowing down the flow of water.³¹ A duty on local authorities and the Environment Agency to increase the use of these Nature-based Solutions (NbS) across flooding and water projects will unlock significant public and private investment and increase the number of NbS, and the multi-benefits they provide. The application of this duty to the new water regulator will drive up NbS use by water companies. More NbS use for flooding and water quality will also further increase traded nature products and grow nature markets.
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³⁰ For more on what mandatory nature contributions could look like, see [Nature Recovery Obligation](#) proposals from Wildlife & Countryside Link and [Nature Positive Pathways](#) proposals from the Green Finance Institute

³¹ See Wildlife Trusts [work](#) on Nature-based Solutions. See also March 2026 Parliamentary [Early Day Motion](#) calling for a Nature-based Solutions duty.