

Valuing nature – National Ecosystem Assessment

NERC research provided much of the information for the groundbreaking UK National Ecosystem Assessment, the first analysis of the UK's natural environment in terms of the benefits it provides to society and our continuing economic prosperity.

The NEA helped shape the government's Natural Environment White Paper, designed to deliver green economic growth and greater wellbeing. NERC research will remain vital for implementing the new policy.

Partners: Governments of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, Economic and Social Research Council

The collaboration

Environmental science is critical for understanding, preserving and benefitting from the essential services that nature provides. These 'ecosystem services' include food, clean air and water and recreation, which are difficult to quantify but vital for human wellbeing.

The National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA) involved a combination of environmental and economic research to provide, for the first time, coherent evidence about the state of our natural environment and services it provides for the UK.

The NEA shows that the natural world is not only critically important to our wellbeing and economic prosperity, but has been consistently undervalued in conventional economic analyses and decision making. Climate change and a growing UK population will put increasing pressure on ecosystem services, many of which are already in decline.

For example, the report estimates that pollinators are worth £430m per year to British agriculture, and the contribution of inland wetlands to water quality is worth up to £1.5b per year to the UK. It also estimates the health benefits of living with a view of



a green space are worth up to £300 per person per year, and that increasing green spaces could reduce runoff and urban flooding which costs around £270 million a year in England and Wales.

The involvement of policy partners in the project meant the science could be fast-tracked into policy. The NEA helped shape Defra's Natural Environment White Paper and made significant contributions to other strategy documents and frameworks.

Environment Minister Caroline Spelman said: *'The UK National Ecosystem Assessment is a vital step forward in our ability to understand the true value of nature and how to sustain the benefits it gives us.'*