

# The Natural Capital Initiative

*Bringing together knowledge and expertise  
to protect our life support systems*



## Summary Annual Report 2010-2011

### Introduction

The Natural Capital Initiative (NCI) is a leading independent forum, bringing together scientists, policy-makers, business and others to consider how the benefits people receive from nature—‘ecosystem services’—can be incorporated into decision-making at every level. It identifies gaps in science, policy and practice and facilitates the debate about how to address these; liaising with, and informing, government, research council and other initiatives.

The NCI was founded in 2008 and is a partnership between the British Ecological Society, the Society of Biology and

the NERC Centre for Ecology & Hydrology. The day-to-day activities of NCI are co-ordinated by a small Secretariat drawn from the three partner organisations, and supported by occasional volunteer placements. The Secretariat is supported by a Steering Group which includes representation from a selection of areas of expertise required to address 21st Century challenges in managing the natural environment for human wellbeing.

This report summarises key activities of NCI in the period October 2010 to September 2011.

### Completion of the ‘Towards no net loss, and beyond’ Workshop Series

In 2010, the Natural Capital Initiative organised three interdisciplinary workshops to address challenges for the increased use of biodiversity offsetting in the UK. The workshops addressed three main topics: practical challenges for biodiversity offsetting, information requirements and the potential to offset ecosystem service loss. Participants represented a wide variety of technical disciplines as well as the private, public and non-profit sectors.

The third ‘Towards no net loss, and beyond’ workshop took place in December 2010. It brought together 35 representatives of the public policy, conservation, and business communities to assess the potential to offset for ecosystem services alongside biodiversity. Among the key messages derived by workshop participants and included in a summary report for policy makers were:

1. Developing offsets for ecosystem service provision should not be at the expense of the short term delivery of mechanisms to increase the use of biodiversity offsetting.
2. Once biodiversity offsetting schemes have been implemented in the UK, monitored and evaluated, these could be extended to encompass ecosystem services explicitly.

*Workshops were supported by  
NERC Grant NE/1529390/1*



## Enabling citizen choices about land use and the natural environment – 16th February 2011

In February 2011 the Natural Capital Initiative organised an 'Open Forum' to discuss challenges in enabling more effective public dialogue about land use and the benefits people derive from the natural environment. The aim was to discuss what can be learned from past projects and initiatives to identify opportunities arising. The event was run as 'Open Space', whereby participants set the agenda and resolve questions of particular interest to them.

Examples of challenges and opportunities identified are:

- Dialogue about strategic issues, not just local and short term issues, will be crucial for the protection of ecosystem services.
- Topical environmental issues such as flood protection can form a useful starting point for public dialogue because they increase awareness of ecosystem services and natural capital.
- Novel communication technologies have strong potential for use in initiating public dialogue. For example, social media can successfully engage young people in land use issues.

Key messages were included in a [policy briefing and meeting report](#). Following the 'Citizen Choices' event, seminars for policy officials were held in London and Edinburgh.

*Financial support from Sciencewise Expert Resource Centre.*



## Discussion paper on the design of natural asset checks in public policy appraisal

Following a meeting with Richard Price, Defra Chief Economist, in early 2011, NCI was invited to submit a discussion paper to inform an expert workshop in May 2011 on the development of natural asset checks in public policy appraisal. In response, a document was drafted by various CEH staff involved in NCI (Bruce Howard, Rosie Hails and Allan Watt) together with Professor Roy Haines-Young and PD Dr. Marion Potschin (University of Nottingham Centre for Environmental Management). The paper focused on considerations in environmental science and management and addressed topics such as thresholds, cumulative impacts, and the selection of appropriate accounting units.



## Scoping workshop on human health and the environment – 20th May 2011

The NEC Valuing Nature Network is an interdisciplinary network for valuing biodiversity, ecosystem services and natural resource use. NCI accepted an invitation from the convenors of VNN to organise a workshop to examine the challenges for valuing the human health benefits provided by healthy ecosystems. The event, held at the Institute for Public Health in London, attracted 25 leading experts representing diverse fields including medicine, public health, ecology, geography and environmental economics. Knowledge gaps and uncertainties identified by the participants included:

- The links between the various aspects of biodiversity and human health.
- Ways of managing ecosystems to stimulate behaviour change (to achieve more healthy lifestyles).
- Clarity on the major health issues that can be tackled through ecosystem management.

## Ecosystems Knowledge Network

A variety of pioneering projects across the UK are exploring new ways of managing specific areas of land and sea to enhance the benefits people derive from them. They provide an opportunity to assess the costs and benefits of taking an ecosystems approach; a set of principles for managing the natural environment that is systematic, strategic and people-centred. As part of its Natural Environment White Paper commitments, Defra is sponsoring an Ecosystems Knowledge Network to use practical project experience to bring about a step change in the uptake of an ecosystems approach at the local level. A consortium involving the Natural Capital Initiative, the NERC Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Fabis Consulting, the University of Exeter and Countryside is preparing to set up and develop the Network. Further details will be posted on the NCI website in December 2011. To register your interest please contact [secretariat@naturalcapitalinitiative.org.uk](mailto:secretariat@naturalcapitalinitiative.org.uk)

Further information and contact details

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