

**DEFRA ELMS - LANDSCAPE RECOVERY:**

**connectivity in productive farmed landscapes**

**Trial Summary**

This is a trial funded by DEFRA to investigate how farms can contribute to the Landscape Recovery component of the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS). This is an opportunity for farmers and landowners to help shape this scheme and to examine how your farm can fit into the new system.

* We will compile a report for your farm that will examine farm business management and natural capital data to identify areas suitable for nature recovery.
* Business plans will help support decision-making about how your business model might change
* Your farm will be mapped for its land cover and digital maps produced to support future aid schemes.
* By understanding the farm system and its business management we will help determine acceptable ELMS payment rates for changes in land use.
* Farms working together will have a greater impact on providing public goods. Land connections to support this will be directed by Nature Recovery Maps.
* Farms taking part in the trial will have the opportunity at an early stage to influence the design and content of the new ELMS.

If you are interested in taking part, please contact Tim Bevan on 07725 797295

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**Farmer-Led Landscape Recovery**

**Help us to shape the future of the new**

**Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS)**

Thank you for your interest in working with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) to trial ideas for the new scheme. We are facing a time of great change in the way government supports land management. As existing schemes are withdrawn over time, this will be the only remaining mechanism designed to support landowners and farmers. The new ELMS being developed by DEFRA is taking a new approach, with payments made only for the delivery of public goods, described below.

We are asking you to be part of a ‘test and trial’ to find out how farms can contribute to that element of ELMS called Landscape Recovery. By participating, you have a real opportunity to shape the design and operation of this new scheme.

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust recognises how essential it is to work with farmers if we are to connect areas of fragmented habitat across the county. The area between the lower Wye Valley and the Wyre Forest spans some of the largest areas of semi-natural ancient woodland and historic hunting forest in England and could provide a nationally-important climate corridor for nature. However, there is a large break in connectivity between the Forest of Dean and Malvern Hills. This is where a mosaic of more permeable farmland combined with wetland, grassland, heathland and joined-up areas of woodland is needed to create a functioning ecosystem better suited to support nature and people in the long term. Central to this landscape is the 1000-year-old Dymock Forest straddling the M50 and the Gloucestershire and Herefordshire boundary between the rivers Wye and Severn.

We need your help to find out how best to fill these gaps in our landscape, and what incentives and actions are needed to make innovative change.

**Why should you take part in this trial?**

This is your opportunity to be involved in a new support mechanism before it becomes available to all when launched in 2024. The test and trial looks at individual farms but recognises their place in the greater landscape. We will work together with you to see how we can create natural areas, such as woodland or increased tree cover, within a farmed and productive landscape so that both nature and farming are integrated for mutual benefit.



**What we need to find out from you is:**

* what dictates your current farming methods
* what will encourage land use change or a change to more sustainable farming practices (time, money, skills/advice)
* what timescale of agreements will be attractive to you
* what incentives are required and how can the various funding opportunities work for your farm
* how can we integrate ecosystem services (public goods) with your farming system to benefit the natural environment and food production

**We will provide for you the following:**

* A farm business plan and appraisal
* A land cover survey of your farm, resulting in a vegetation cover map.
* An analysis of existing natural capital and public goods
* Advice about where land cover changes will have a positive impact on the environment
* Suggestions for future funding mechanisms that will work for your farming system

Business planning is essential for you to make informed financial decisions on the most appropriate public goods that your land can deliver. Any financial gain to be made from taking part in ELMS will be clear, together with the likely effect on your farm’s cash flow. The plan will support the resilience of a farm business by considering the business opportunities available for delivering public goods and increasing natural capital value.

This is a new approach for everyone. Taking part in this trial provides you the opportunity to help design the new scheme and influence DEFRA at this early stage. You will have the opportunity to shape the future of ELMS, instead of being dictated by it.

**What to do if you are interested in taking part?**

We are hoping to involve 24 farmers or landowners from Gloucestershire in this ELMS trial, supported financially by DEFRA. To be part of the trial you will be asked to commit to working with your assigned farm adviser to provide details of your current farm management and discuss the content of long-term land management agreements. This commitment is expected to take each farmer or landowner approximately one and a half days, for which you will be compensated at a rate of £200 per day.

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**Further information on the test and trial**

**Environmental Land Management Scheme Landscape Recovery Test and Trial**

This trial will run between January 2022 and December 2023. We plan to produce business and natural capital appraisals for twelve farms in each year of the test and trial. We will arrange farm visits to gather the essential data on mutually suitable dates and with ample prior warning.

The test and trial includes a professional survey of a farm’s land vegetation cover using the latest UK habitat classification codes. The survey should need little input from the farmer or landowner and would be done in late spring and early summer when the vegetation is in a suitable condition.

Understanding the farm system and its business management is important to determine acceptable payment rates to farmers and landowners; particularly important when a farmer or landowner is asked to make a land-use change which may be very long-term. This trial will not directly set payment rates for ELMS. However, feedback from farmers and landowners with information about current farm practice, finances and potential land uses will have significant influence on the way rates are determined.

For the recovery of biodiversity and to adapt to climate change at the scale required the scheme will seek the collaboration of groups of farmers to provide continuity across the landscape. In addition to the individual farm plan and agreements we will devise three examples of group participation agreements. These will help identify the additional needs of landowners if they are to co-operate successfully.

**Public goods**

Payments under DEFRA’s ELMS scheme will be made for the delivery of the six public goods as described in their 25-year Environment Plan; these are:

* clean air
* clean and plentiful water
* thriving plants and wildlife
* reducing environmental hazards such as flooding and drought
* mitigating and adapting to climate change and
* enhancing the beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.



**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**Why is land stewardship being changed so dramatically?**

Previous stewardship schemes failed to achieve the wildlife and environmental gains expected and did not prove to be value for money. The last Countryside Stewardship scheme was too complex and difficult to apply for and hence had poor uptake. While previous schemes had more limited objectives, the ELMS covers a broader range of environmental goods.

**What benefit will I see from taking part in the trials?**

You will receive free advice and support regarding DEFRA’s plans for the future of the English countryside. The business and natural capital appraisals will help you plan for the future and the land cover maps will set a baseline for you to use in future farm support schemes.

**What happens to the data, maps and plan produced for my farm?**

Some of the data collected will be personal and related only to your holding and so will be confidential with respect to other farms in the cluster participating in the trial. The plans and maps will need to be submitted to DEFRA as part of the trial procedure to inform them of any issues and for them to gauge the suitability of the agreements as a mechanism for ELMS payments.

**Why is ELMS so different to previous environmental-focused schemes?**

The new ELMS is split into three components; the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) available to all farmers in England, Local Nature Recovery (LNR) which will be targeted to meet local objectives, and Landscape Recovery (LR). The SFI will expect farmers to follow sets of standards, LNR will be options-based under the six public goods given above, while LR will feature large-scale projects that will create extensive areas of new habitats and habitat connections. LR is likely to require neighbouring farms to collaborate to create the scale of change required to meet the scheme objectives.

**What time commitment will be expected if I take part?**

We expect your total time commitment to be no longer than one and a half days for which you will be compensated at the rate of £200 per day. You will be interviewed by a farm advisor to gather data for the business appraisal and natural capital assessment and to discuss the content of land use change agreements.