

PROGRESS SUMMARY – MERES AND MOSSES NIA YEAR ONE

Objective 1. Bring Core Areas into Favourable Condition Through Active Management

Despite atrocious ground conditions conservation work has begun on three core sites. A community volunteer group have been busy tackling Rhododendron at Cole Mere. At White Mere, a level survey has been carried out to inform a plan to re-wet marginal areas, trees have been removed from one side of the mere and replaced with a new hedge. Restoration is about to take place to remove an artificial area of bank and return it to more favourable habitat. Work on Brown Moss has been held up by the very wet winter and the fencing for scrub control by grazing cattle has only just begun. Wem Moss has been identified as an additional site for improvement and work has taken place here to coppice and remove a significant amount of trees and scrub along with the clearing of footpaths by volunteers to allow public access. A hydrological study will also take place here before the end of the FY. Work has commenced to remove trees from two new sites at Blakenhall Moss and Boreatton Moss. The work of the Perry Catchment Forum continues to make good progress and is extending its work to include a walk-over survey of a significant tributary.

Objective 2. Improve the Management of Buffers and Develop a Network of Corridors and Stepping Stones Linking Cores Sites

Work is underway on 5 non-designated peatland sites and wildlife sites in Shropshire and Cheshire. This work is focused on habitat restoration and the monitoring of water levels to gain a better understanding for future management. Particularly important is the opportunity to work with the Cholmondeley Estate. Consisting of in-hand parkland, woods, meres, degraded peatland and tenanted intense dairy farms; this will give us a real opportunity to put into practice all aspects of the landscape scale approach. Agreement has been reached between the NIA and the estate which will see a staged approach to delivery. Habitat restoration and a feasibility study to tackle water quality (already underway) will be followed by a holistic approach to conservation throughout the catchments of 2 SSSI meres. Taking into consideration and working with farming businesses in order to maximise their business potential, it will also provide a balance between agriculture and conservation. Finally, we aim to provide a longer-term integrated vision/plan for the whole estate. It will take into account biodiversity, farming, landscape, historic and community issues as resources allow. Training in diffuse pollution will also be provided. This should provide an exemplar for future approach to the landscape scale anywhere in UK.

Objective 3. Reduce Diffuse Pollution Through Working on Nutrient Management With Farmers

Our farm adviser is actively engaged with landowners and partner organisations in order to mitigate diffuse pollution and identify opportunities for conservation work and habitat restoration. She has visited 14 Farms in coordination with the Environment Agency and NFU. Through these visits she has identified some training shortfalls in the understanding of nutrient management and diffuse pollution. Working closely with Walford & North Shropshire College and Reesheath College she has made arrangements for farm apprentices within the NIA to receive a package of diffuse pollution training and soil and nutrient management courses for farmers. Supported by Catchment Sensitive Farming staff from Natural England, these will take place in the spring and will have a long lasting effect on the impact of farming within the NIA.

Objective 4. Increase Awareness of and Involvement in the Meres and Mosses

Community engagement in the environment has been very pleasing. A working group at Cole Mere was formed after a NIA led community consultation event. A similar event is planned for Brown Moss, where we hope to recruit another working group. Our community officer has formed a Down to Earth Steering group in Whixall which will lead to recording local history, supporting the work of Natural England on Bettisfield Moss and working with a local business to provide Corporate Social Responsibility days. He is also engaged with parish and town councils through town plans in Ellesmere and Whitchurch. In Welshampton we are helping develop walking resources and supporting the planning for a 'green day' event. In Whitchurch we are supporting the water vole group along with the Cheshire water vole group and working with Whitchurch Infants School to provide forest school activities on Wem Moss. Primary school education in the Meres & Mosses has got off to a flying start with the delivery of our first John Muir Award package for Tilston school in Cheshire. To support further delivery of this scheme, a new hide and learning centre has just been finished at Shropshire Wildlife Trust's Wood Lane nature reserve.

Objective 5. Ensure Lessons Learned are Disseminated and Applied to the wider Meres and Mosses and Beyond

A branding and communications exercise is complete and the development of our website will be complete by April. Active on Twitter and Facebook, our social media penetration is growing. The annual Meres and Mosses Forum was delivered in September 2012 and attracted 42 academics and conservation practitioners. This is being extended in 2013 to include interested amateur conservationists, local farmers and landowners. All of the local universities and agricultural colleges have been engaged and local senior schools have been encouraged to take part in survey work. In February, Harper Adams students, as part of their Managing the Countryside project, produced a QR code and promotional video for the Meres and Mosses to be sited at Wood Lane nature reserve. Public events have been held and attracted over 700 visitors who have learned something about the Meres and Mosses.