



# Somerset Eurasian Beaver

## Management Strategy and Implementation Plan

*Second Draft - June 2024*



**Somerset**  
Wildlife Trust



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## Version Control

Version	Purpose	Date
0.4	Publishing for consultation with organisations likely to be involved in Steering Groups	31 May 2024
0.5	Publishing for public consultation	July 2024
0.6	Post consultation amendments for review by Steering Group	[TBC – c. Oct 2024]
1.0	Finalised version for publication and activation	[TBC – c. Nov 2024]
	Strategy scheduled for review	2029

## Acknowledgements

This strategy has been produced by Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) on behalf of the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South-West (FWAG SW) with funding from the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA).

It has been informed by consultation with key stakeholders from relevant statutory bodies and local authorities, representative organisations and the public. Organisations that have contributed specialist knowledge and advice include:

- Angling Trust
- Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA)
- Avon Wildlife Trust
- Beaver Trust
- Bristol and Avon Catchment Partnership
- Canals and Rivers Trust
- Country Land and Business Association (CLA)
- Devon Wildlife Trust
- Environment Agency
- Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South West (FWAG SW)
- Forestry Commission
- Forestry England
- Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust
- Natural England
- National Farmers Union (NFU)
- National Highways
- National Trust
- Network Rail
- The Rivers Trust
- Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA)
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
- Royal Zoological Society of London (ZSL)
- Wildfish (formerly Salmon and Trout Association)
- Somerset Consortium Drainage Board
- Somerset Council
- Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA)
- Somerset Wetlands NNR
- Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT)
- University of Exeter
- Wessex Water
- Wild Trout Trust
- Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust

We are also indebted to the wider stakeholders and members of the public who generously gave us their time attending in person consultation sessions and completing feedback forms to help shape the content and direction of this first Beaver Management Strategy for Somerset.



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## Executive Summary

Prior to beavers becoming extinct in England around 400 years ago, the built and social landscapes developed with beavers as a part of them. However, in the intervening time, huge amounts of human development have not needed to consider interactions with beavers. Increasing national interest in reintroducing beavers led to them being designated a European Protected Species in England in October 2022. This means it is now an offence to carry out any action without a licence (currently CL52, CL51 and CL50 issued by Natural England) that affects beavers' ability to survive. These licensable activities include capturing, injuring, killing or disturbing beavers, or damaging their breeding and resting places.

Within England, in addition to multiple captive populations, free-living populations have been created following legal releases, escapes from enclosures, natural dispersal, and some

populations of unknown origins. Some of these are now in Somerset, including a recognised population on the Avon and Somerset Frome, and reports of beaver activity elsewhere across the country.

A technical background document was produced to provide a single point of reference for the national and Somerset-specific ecological, social, legal and financial situation that exists as free-living beaver populations re-establish here. That report concludes with a brief series of recommendations for how to prepare for any issues that may occur in the near future and to increase the opportunity to benefit from beavers' return to Somerset. From these recommendations and discussions held by the Steering Group partners, strategic goals have been created. These are described in greater detail in the body of this strategy and include:



Creation and activation of one or more **Beaver Advisory Group(s) (BAGs)**



**Improved resource** to provide in situ advice to land managers and, where necessary, support land managers to conduct mitigation work



**Ongoing engagement and knowledge sharing** with stakeholders and communities



**Establishing baselines and ongoing monitoring of beavers' effects** on other species, hydrological processes, and interactions with humans



**Advocating for long-term funding** to restore and preserve this legally protected species, and for individual land managers maintaining their land for beavers and providing public services



**Ensuring local socio-economic and public policies** reflect beavers' new status as a European Protected Species, with **adequate accompanying guidance and training** to help people transition business models and everyday behaviours, and advocating for the same at national level



Ensuring updates in understanding of **optimising beaver health and welfare** are reflected in management and mitigation protocols in Somerset, and that best practices are always adhered to, including contributing genetic data to the national beaver studbook



Ensuring beavers are **integrated into local climate adaptation, flood risk management, nature recovery actions and socio-economic policies** and advocating for their integration into national policies and actions

## Introduction

Eurasian beavers (*Castor fiber*) became extinct in the UK between the 16th and 18th centuries. Their extinction is most likely to have been because of unsustainable levels of hunting to harvest their pelts, meat and castoreum rather than to eradicate a pest or protect property and livestock. However, alternative products are now available removing the need to hunt beavers. This reduced level of threat makes it reasonable to now consider restoring this extirpated but once native species.

Notwithstanding that progress, since their extirpation, humans have continued to heavily modify the landscape and waterbodies for housing, industry, agriculture, and other land uses, with beavers not needing to factor into considerations. This has led to, among other things, climate change, severe reductions in water quality and a biodiversity crisis. Beavers are considered ecosystem engineers, capable of transforming river systems and surrounding

riparian areas with a disproportionately high impact relative to their abundance and biomass. They are known to have positive and negative, and potentially complex interacting, outcomes on the environment. Positive effects include: reducing climate change impacts such as flooding and drought; improving water quality; modifying habitats to increase biodiversity; inhibiting some invasive non-native species; affecting fish ecology; job creation and diversification; and providing amenity value for local communities. Negative effects include: increased risk of flooding in beaver-created wetlands; subsidence caused by burrow collapse; crop-foraging; tree-felling; and a potential to exacerbate spread of invasive non-native species. However, overall, the acknowledged benefits they could bring socially and environmentally are being demonstrated to outweigh the negatives in other locations worldwide where beavers have been restored.



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In 2002, beavers were brought back to the UK within an enclosed population. Other enclosed populations followed, with the subsequent discovery of wild populations of both known and unknown origin in Scotland and on the River Otter in Devon. Government backed studies and public support for these two wild populations led to changes in legal frameworks for managing beavers and their impacts. In 2021, wild beaver populations were found on the Rivers Avon and Frome, including sections within Somerset and sightings are now being received for other river catchments across Somerset. In 2022, beavers were given European Protected Species status in England (following Scotland, that had done the same in 2019). Successfully reintegrating beavers into our heavily populated, productive and extensively modified landscapes is complex. Examples of successful reintroduction and management techniques can be found across Europe and North America. However, these approaches must be tailored to Somerset's communities, economy and landscapes.

The national modelling indicates that 5,200 beaver families will be required to achieve Favourable Conservation Status in England: it is estimated there are just 180 families currently. At the moment, it is not known what beavers' impact will be on the environment in Somerset, how quickly they will disperse, or how well received they will be by local communities: all of these factors will affect how many beaver families it might be appropriate to maintain in Somerset. Accordingly, there are no current targets for the number of beaver families Somerset could or should have. However, it is reasonable to assume that the beaver population will increase naturally as a result of breeding and dispersal from neighbouring counties.

There may also be instances when releasing free-living beavers or creating new captive populations in Somerset is advantageous (e.g. to increase genetic diversity and health, to expedite habitat restoration and nature recovery, for community engagement, or for business diversification). Releases will only be considered where the ecological and social modelling suggests it is realistic and appropriate to do so (e.g. with broad community support, not near infrastructure like railways). In time the population size will plateau when carrying capacity is reached (e.g. when all suitable habitat is used or there is not enough food to sustain a larger beaver population). However, regardless of the method of arrival or speed and direction of population expansion, we do need to acknowledge that beavers are already present in Somerset, bringing with them multifarious impacts on the environment, infrastructure and human lifestyles that we have not had to consider or accommodate for several centuries. This co-designed management strategy uses the best available evidence to find and coordinate ways to facilitate the best possible outcomes for humans, beavers and other wildlife in Somerset, while mitigating any potential challenges.

Feedback [will be/was] considered to improve the co-designed and collaborative strategy before it [is/was] finalised and published. The actions are designed to be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound. However, as it is difficult to predict the scale or speed of beavers' recolonisation, or how they will be received by the people of Somerset, it is primarily focused on short-term goals (less than five years). It will need to be regularly reviewed and updated whenever any significant change to the social, ecological or political landscape dictates but, in any event, no later than five years from the date of this document.

<b>2022 and 2024</b>	Stakeholder consultation events take place
<b>2022 and 2023</b>	Ecological modelling and surveys in Somerset. Ongoing input from a wide range of organisations that have a responsibility to beaver management or whose responsibilities and activities may be impacted by, or may have the potential to impact, Somerset's beaver populations. Building on findings described in social and ecological research and case studies done in other locations worldwide where beavers are present as well as regulations regarding beaver activity and welfare in England
<b>May 2024</b>	Draft strategy reviewed by the Steering Group partners
<b>July-September 2024</b>	Draft strategy provided to the public for their comments and feedback through an online survey (available for [10 weeks]) and [a series of/[x]] in-person events

## Aims and Scope

This strategy uses the data documented in the Technical Background Report, published research and case studies of other situations of human and beaver co-existence. Using the outcomes of other studies of beaver population returns within Europe and the UK, and data specific to Somerset, this strategy provides pragmatic recommendations that enable humans to live alongside free-living beaver populations in Somerset. It will be used to inform proactive context-specific beaver management strategies that ensure that all interests (human and non-human) and impacts are properly considered. It aims to optimise the benefits that beaver presence and activity can offer, whilst mitigating potential damage and challenges to co-existence.

The challenges and opportunities created by the interaction between beaver and human activity will be felt to greater or lesser degrees in different parts of the county and by different stakeholder groups. Accordingly, while this strategy aims to provide guidance on how to prepare and respond to increased beaver presence, it can neither pre-empt nor provide detail for every specific site, and every decision should therefore be made on a case-by-case basis. The actions described below are neither an exhaustive nor prescriptive list for Somerset as a whole or for any individual catchment. Location and context-specific advice will be considered in more detail by local beaver practitioners and land managers who may develop their own management strategies. In addition to location-based nuances, management interventions should use the most up-to-date information at the time. Therefore, it is further intended that this document will be used to inform and underpin catchment-based or more localised land and asset management strategies.

While each goal has a set of “Indicators of Success” the exact method of reaching those indicators is not detailed in this document. This is to allow Responsible Organisations to execute those visions in a way that fits with their own business models and resources.

As a final point, at this early stage of beavers’ return to Somerset, it is unclear how quickly or widely they will disperse and colonise, what their impacts will be, or how they will be received by the people of Somerset. This strategy is to initiate conversations about how different stakeholders can support each other to effectively manage beavers and their impacts within Somerset. To ensure the visions in this strategy can be realised, it focuses on realistic, achievable short-term goals. It will need to be regularly reviewed and updated, including whenever there is a significant change to the social, ecological or political landscape. It will also be essential to review no later than five years from the date of this document when knowledge about beaver management and resourcing in Somerset will have increased. At that point, it may be possible to imagine longer-term targets. However, as at the date of this strategy, the visions that follow are not trivial to achieve but will enable practitioners and land managers to build confidence in managing beaver populations and any threats those expanding communities might represent, while also capitalising on their many benefits for people and planet.

## Thematic Areas

The main strategic goals of this strategy are:

### **Establishing Beaver Advisory Group(s) (BAGs)**

Previous beaver reintroduction projects recommend that key stakeholders should meet regularly to co-develop strategic, co-ordinated approaches to working with local human communities, share knowledge and address concerns, and provide advice about managing free-living beaver populations in their area. This strategy will ensure Somerset has optimal co-ordinated, multi-agency support at a local level, and considers beaver populations that straddle county-boundaries and therefore require communication with and input from organisations in neighbouring counties.

### **Adequate resource for management, mitigation and co-existence**

As a keystone species, beavers have a dramatic and swift impact on the environment. Humans and beavers have continued to live alongside each other in some places, whilst in other places where beavers have been reintroduced this co-existence has been successfully relearnt. However, achieving renewed co-existence may require alterations in how we think about and behave in nature, which can be supported by having professionals to provide advice to land managers and, if necessary, support active management of beaver activity in the early stages of the species' return. This strategy names where additional resource would be most beneficial and sets out steps for how that could be realised.

### **Community engagement and knowledge sharing**

While beavers' return to Britain is relatively recent, they have successfully re-established and, in most cases, been well received in other countries. Beavers have also been present and living harmoniously with people around the globe throughout their absence from Britain. Learning from these case studies can ensure that positive outcomes are capitalised on and practices that had undesirable or unintended effects are not repeated. This can be supported by raising awareness and understanding of beaver ecology among the public and by practitioners receiving feedback from communities with lived experience. This strategy commits to two-way knowledge sharing becoming normalised to achieve the best outcomes for humans and wildlife.

### **Research and monitoring**

Beavers are ecosystem engineers. Ongoing monitoring of ecological indicators is highly desirable to improve the management of both this (quasi-)novel species and environmental, flood risk, climate adaptation, and nature recovery strategies. However, resource for survey work is finite. This strategy underlines the need for a pragmatic approach, ensuring that learning is advanced by commissioning research specific to Somerset's unique characteristics or that serves to answer nationally under-researched questions, and not duplicating research with transferrable findings.

### **Funding**

Currently, most beaver management is funded by short-term sources, and often provided by private donors and philanthropists. It is also often restricted to establishing new populations and reintroductions, rather than maintaining and managing healthy free-living populations or supporting local human communities. Beaver activity has been modelled to reduce government spend, for example in reduced need for flood management. However, absence of centralised, long-term and guaranteed funding undermines ability for long-term, strategic business planning.



This includes limiting ability to recruit an adequate number of professionals who can build relationships with and support communities in this transitional period, causes 'brain-drain' as short-term contracts end and specialist knowledge is lost, and risks losing public trust and goodwill towards species recovery projects generally if people do not feel properly supported. Therefore, this strategy highlights our commitment to continue campaigning and advocating to government bodies to provide centralised, long-term funding and support needed for beaver practitioners and land managers as they transition business models to accommodate beavers and provide public services (e.g. in flood management and climate adaptation).

## Policy

Policies and regulations should equitably and pragmatically consider both humans and non-human species, maximising possible benefits and reducing or avoiding potential harm. As a species that has been missing from Britain for several centuries, there has been no need to consider beavers within policy or regulations. However, as beaver presence increases and given their new European Protected Species status, it is imperative this is now addressed. As the organisations involved in delivering this strategy operate at a local/regional level, their ability to alter national legislation, regulations and guidance is limited to providing expert, specialist advice, advocacy and campaigning. However, through this strategy, they commit to co-creating and enacting practical, robust, and enforceable regulations, policy and guidance at a local level and providing advice and campaigning for changes at a national level.

## Beaver health and welfare

In 2024, Natural England published its second Disease Risk Analysis (DRA) that includes details on infectious and non-infectious illnesses, as well as other hazards (e.g. road traffic accidents). The updated DRA does not suggest there has been any significant change in risk either to or from beavers since the initial DRA, nor observable detriment caused by the beavers of unknown origins, but vigilance is still required to ensure British populations remain healthy and zoonoses are neither

introduced nor spread. This strategy confirms the intention of all beaver practitioners in Somerset to prioritise and ensure the highest standard of beaver welfare, including stress minimisation and good biosecurity protocols during all translocations, releases or mitigation work. It also incorporates the importance of including information on health and welfare within community engagement to reduce misinformation being perpetuated that could lead to unnecessary worry in human communities and beaver persecution.

## + Integration into local and national strategies

Research evidences that beavers deliver significant improvements including, but not limited to flood risk alleviation, water quality improvement, biodiversity enhancement, and contributions to social prosperity. These changes have very significant financial, social and environmental value. Therefore, beavers should be considered as an important option to support other regional and national strategies that address the biodiversity and climate crises, including delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, climate adaptation flood risk management strategies, and business diversification and support policies. An opportunity exists to align beaver management strategies with those other regional and national strategies. This strategy enshrines the commitment to novel thinking across organisations to realise the huge potential beavers can provide by considering and, where appropriate, including their activity in all new or updated policies and strategies, and to advocate for their inclusion in regional or national policies and strategies. Alongside this will run clear communications and learning opportunities to increase the wider public's understanding of the integrated climate and biodiversity crises, the actions they can take to mitigate those crises, and the role of beavers as a natural part of the mitigation 'toolkit'.

## Indicators of Success

Indicators that work on the thematic areas is being successful will include:

### **Established Beaver Advisory Groups (BAGs)**

- There will be local BAG Steering Group(s) that ensure support and advice is available throughout Somerset, including beaver populations that cross borders between Somerset and neighbouring counties.
- All organisations that can influence or make decisions for county policy or infrastructure, or who have specialist knowledge about beaver ecology or management will be represented within one or several BAG Steering Group(s).
- BAG Steering Group(s) will have approved Terms of Reference, meetings scheduled for the current calendar year, and a Chair responsible for ensuring meetings for the next calendar year are scheduled in Q4.
- Biannual Partnership Group meetings will be scheduled for the current calendar year with the Steering Group Chair(s) responsible for scheduling meetings for the next calendar year in Q4.
- Somerset's BAG Steering Group(s) will liaise with national beaver practitioner groups.

### **Adequate resource for management, mitigation and co-existence**

- Funding will have been secured for, at a minimum, one two-year, full-time Beaver Field Officer. This person will have been recruited and trained, and they will be actively engaging with land managers and local communities to offer advice and support with practical beaver management activities. By introducing a fee-charging consultancy service, this role could become partially self-funding.
- All BAG Steering Group partners will have a named representative who attends and engages with Steering Group meetings and training. They will disseminate information throughout their organisation so all colleagues can comply with evolving regulations and better support their clients/ contacts.
- All BAG Steering Group partners will have considered succession planning to ensure responsibility for beaver management is fully handed over if the original member is temporarily or permanently unable to continue their role within the BAG.
- A dedicated group of volunteer Beaver Wardens will have been created. Suitable individuals will be supported by the Beaver Field Officer and other appropriate contacts from the Steering Group partner organisations. They will be building relationships with and taking responsibility for supporting specified land managers, supporting community engagement and awareness-raising events, and participating in ecological monitoring.
- Where co-existence challenges exist, land managers and the public will be confident liaising with, and know they will receive support from, their local BAG or other national agency.

## Community engagement and knowledge sharing

- Following consultation with BAG partner organisations and the wider community, this strategy will have been agreed with wide support resulting in a consistent approach to beaver management and community support across Somerset.
- To build trust and increase transparency, the strategy will be published on, at a minimum, Somerset Wildlife Trust's website and [beavermanagement.org](http://beavermanagement.org), and available to anyone to view.
- Representatives at BAG Steering Group and Partnership forum meetings will be routinely disseminating action points and key agenda items to colleagues for integration into their own organisations' business planning and operations, and to clients.
- In addition to the enclosed populations at National Trust Holnicote, at least one demonstration site will have been identified in central, north and/or east Somerset to increase ability for a greater proportion of the population to see the reality of beaver activity for themselves. This/these could be new or existing enclosed or free-living population(s) with permission of landowners who are willing to facilitate public access for controlled community engagement events.

## Research and monitoring

- A pragmatic decision will have been made on how to use limited financial and human resource to ensure all necessary baseline surveys and ongoing monitoring can be completed without duplicating effort with comparable and transferrable research being completed elsewhere.
- As beavers are known to be ecosystem engineers, ecological surveys will be conducted to monitor their impacts and allow evidence-informed, risk-based decisions by organisations and management techniques to be improved (e.g. to increase welfare). This will particularly focus on contexts that are unique to Somerset, e.g. the Levels and Moors drainage system. Initial surveys will include hydrological function and interaction with fish species, riparian habitat species, and invasive non-native species (INNS). Responsible Organisations for each survey will have committed to repeat surveys so that trends can be observed. However, this will be flexible as research questions are answered or cease to be considered useful, or new questions arise, and beaver management adjusted as appropriate.
- Data from surveys are appropriately recorded, reported and shared to increase learning among beaver practitioners and wider stakeholders.
- The facility to record beaver sightings in Somerset will be more accessible to the public and better promoted on BAG partners' websites and social media, resulting in an increase in recordings of sightings of both beaver and their signs.
- There will be a better understanding of the size and distribution of beaver populations in Somerset due to the increase in public recordings and a full survey conducted by trained ecologists.

## Funding

- Advocacy by BAG partners will be resulting in long-term and improved funding from centrally-provided grants and subsidy payments. Grants and subsidies will be routinely available and easy to apply for, including Countryside Stewardship and Flood Risk Management grants. These will appropriately reflect the costs and benefits incurred by land managers maintaining their land for beavers or transitioning business models to account for beaver activity, increasing certainty for business and land management planning. This will incentivise managing land for beavers and enable legal beaver mitigation.
- Consultancy fees for advice and practical beaver management and, separately, for green finance advice and support, will make it possible for (partially) self-funding, long-term Beaver Field Officer and Beaver and Riparian Habitat Finance Officer roles.

## Policy

- Advocacy by and advice provided to governmental bodies from BAG Steering Group partners will be resulting in national legislation and regulations being amended to afford beavers the same level of consideration as other protected species. These amendments will be accompanied by training and guidance (e.g. Codes of Practice) that ensure practitioners and the public are aware of their legal obligations and are supported to make any changes to business or everyday activities as necessary.
- Advocacy by and advice provided to governmental bodies from BAG partners will mean the current gap between the government's desire for a national return of beavers and the reluctance to approve applications for catchments that do not already have beaver populations is closed. This will result in it being easier to translocate beavers when the environmental and social conditions suggest it is appropriate to do so.



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## Beaver health and welfare

- Translocation and lethal control are always a last resort, only ever used after all other mitigation steps have been exhausted and, should they be necessary, always prioritise beaver welfare. However, it is important to note that neither translocation nor lethal control are expected to be required as management techniques in Somerset before this document is next reviewed.
- Beaver management in Somerset always follows national guidance for best practice, the most recent Disease Risk Analysis (DRA) and all relevant biosecurity protocols. This will increase welfare outcomes and decrease risk of zoonoses or pathogen transmission between beavers and other species including humans, and prevent inadvertent spread of invasive non-native species that might be found in beaver wetlands.
- Blood/tissue sampling will be conducted in all instances where beavers are translocated or re-released within or from Somerset. Results will be provided to the beaver studbook keeper. This will lead to an increase in understanding of genetic diversity and health of the Somerset population, informing management decisions.
- Case studies will be shared by BAG Steering Group partners both in meetings and, if appropriate, with the beavermanagement.org (Natural England, Beaver Trust and Devon Wildlife Trust) to increase learning and knowledge among beaver practitioners, informing and improving future management decisions.

## + Integration into local and national strategies

- As a keystone species and ecosystem engineer with proven ability to support climate adaptation and flood risk management, improve habitat for a wide range of other species, and provide a range of socio-economic benefits, beavers are included into integrated local climate adaptation, flood risk management, nature recovery, and socio-economic strategies.



## Goal 1: Creation of Local Beaver Advisory Group(s) and Partnership Forum

### Background

Based on the experiences of other species reintroduction programmes, and beaver reintroductions in Europe, Scotland and Devon, along with input from local stakeholders, activating local advisory and management groups are a crucial element of any management regime. Once beaver populations are more established and 'normalised' within the landscape, these local groups are less necessary, with support given more by national bodies instead. However, local advice groups are vitally important during the early phases of recolonisation.

### Vision

By the end of 2024, a decision will have been made on the preferred geographical remit for the BAG(s) in Somerset, the organisations that will be represented in the partnership will have been confirmed and group(s) will be operational with agreed Terms of Reference (ToRs). Steering Groups will feed into and be informed by two-way conversations at wider Partnership Forums. Somerset's Steering Group(s) will also engage with national beaver practitioner groups. Through its/their establishment and regular meetings, and effective communication channels outside meetings, the BAG(s) will enable a co-ordinated approach to providing advice, community engagement and enabling beaver management across Somerset, with each human community and beaver population enjoying an equal, equitable and consistent level of consideration in management decisions county-wide.

### Goals to achieve vision

Goal	Responsible Organisation	Options	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
1.1. A decision will have been made on how many BAG Steering Groups there will be across Somerset and its/ their geographical scope	Consensus/majority decision of all organisations listed in Table 1	<p>Option 1: six BAGs operating at catchment-scale, but excluding catchments that do not originate in Somerset</p> <p>Option 2: five BAGs largely based on catchments but with a separate BAG for the Levels and Moors, also excluding external catchments</p> <p>Option 3: One county-wide BAG including all activity inside Somerset's county boundary</p> <p>Option 4: two BAGs based on each of the Catchment Partnership footprints in Somerset (Bristol and Avon CP and Somerset CP), with liaison with neighbouring CP-based BAGs</p>	All partner organisations are willing to support the geographical scope of the group(s) and have (a) named representative(s) to attend group meetings and deliver practical management actions	May 2024



Goal	Responsible Organisation	Options	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
1.2. A decision will have been made on how to refer to the group(s) (either BAG or BMG)	Consensus/majority decision of all organisations listed on page 17	Option 1: Beaver Advisory Group Option 2: Beaver Management Group	There is majority consensus over how the group will be referred to	May 2024
1.3. Which organisations will be represented on BAG(s) will have been decided, all partners will have been engaged with, and all will be aware of and in agreement with their assigned responsibilities	Consensus/majority decision of all organisations listed on page 17	N/A	All partner organisations have (a) named representative(s) to attend group meetings and deliver practical management actions	June 2024
1.4. BAG(s) will be (re)activated with agreed ToR and a regular programme of meetings for 2025 diarised. This will include details of how Chair(s) will be selected and how long their tenure will be for	Chair of the BAG(s) (likely Somerset Wildlife Trust initially)	N/A	The draft ToR for Avon and Somerset Frome BAG will have been updated as appropriate (including the name, geographical scope, and organisation and representative names). This will have been circulated to all group partners	September 2024
1.5. Steering Group(s) will be contributing to and receiving communications from national beaver practitioner groups	Steering Group Chair(s)	N/A	Steering Group(s) will have at least one named person responsible for communicating with Natural England's national beaver practitioner meetings. That person will routinely and quickly update the Steering Group partners of what was discussed at national meetings so advice and management can be updated to reflect new understanding or other developments	September 2024
1.6. Partnership Forums attended by the Steering Group(s) and wider stakeholders will be held biannually	Steering Group Chair(s)	N/A	Dates for in-person Partnership Forums will be set until the end of 2025, with a named person from the Steering Group(s) responsible for arranging meetings on an ongoing basis	December 2024



## Goal 1.1 – Number and Geographical Scope of Steering Group(s)

Reintroduction programmes of various species have reported that local advisory groups are a crucial element of any management regimen and vitally important during the early phases of recolonisation. This includes the reintroduction of beavers in Europe, Scotland and Devon. Within Somerset, an Avon and Somerset Frome BAG has been established although, in practice, this has not been operational since early 2023. Since that group was created there has been evidence of beaver activity in other catchments across Somerset. Therefore, co-ordinated support is urgently required across the county as beaver populations expand. This lead to the question about whether the Avon and Somerset Frome BAG is reactivated and additional local BAG(s) established, or whether another more efficient and effective way to manage beaver populations across the county exists that enables high quality, pragmatic and swift advice to be given to land managers, and is manageable for Steering Group partners who have responsibilities over multiple catchments. How the BAG(s) will be structured was a large topic of conversation at a workshop for potential Steering Group partners in May 2024.

The four options that were discussed were:

1. BAGs for each river catchment defined by the six main river catchments/hydrological areas in Somerset, including the transitional and coastal waterbodies, namely: Avon and Somerset Frome; Axe; Brue; Parrett; Tone; and West Somerset Streams.
2. One BAG for the relatively unique environment of the Somerset Levels and Moors (defined by the area covered by the Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium) with further BAGs based on amalgamated river catchment areas but of roughly equal size, suggested as: Avon and Somerset Frome; Axe and Brue; Parrett; and Tone and West Somerset Streams.
3. One BAG to cover all of Somerset, including beaver activity occurring on external river catchments that intrude into Somerset but not activity that fell outside Somerset’s border even if that river catchment originated in Somerset.
4. Two BAGs based on the Catchment Partnership footprints (Bristol and Avon Catchment Partnership and Somerset Catchment Partnership) with liaison with Catchment Partnership-based BAGs in neighbouring counties for cross-county catchments and populations. To monitor cross-border populations, the following BAGs currently exist for each catchment:

Catchment Partnership	BAG/Beaver Management Group (BMG)
North Devon Catchment Partnership	East Devon BMG
East Devon Catchment Partnership	East Devon BMG
West Dorset Rivers and Coastal Streams	Dorset Stour Management Group
Poole Harbour Catchment Initiative	Dorset Stour Management Group
Stour Catchment Initiative	Dorset Stour Management Group
Hampshire Avon Catchment Partnership	TBC – In interim, contact established with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust





Topics of consideration for the Steering Group partners included:

- Balancing being a local presence possessing greater depth of knowledge about nuanced local issues with capitalising on the potential for increased knowledge acquisition and knowledge sharing gleaned by covering a wider variety of sites.
- Using understanding of beaver ecology (e.g. their affiliation with riparian habitats but ability to disperse short distances overland between river catchments) to ensure BAGs' geographical remit is not purely administrative but, instead account for the behaviours beavers might be expected to express and that may require management.
- Ensuring geographical areas are small enough that meaningful discussions can be held and decisions made, but not so small that the number of meetings partners need to attend is unsustainable (the recommendation is for each Steering Group to meet quarterly with additional twice yearly Partnership Forums). Similarly, ensuring every organisation that needs to be involved in the Steering Group is invited but limiting that to organisations that have the ability to influence policy or how public assets are managed with other stakeholders contributing through the wider Partnership Forums.
- Recognising that all Steering Group partners are currently contributing their time and resources to supporting local communities with beaver management with no additional funding or human resource available to them and, therefore, ensuring that limited resource is used in the most efficient and effective way possible, capitalising on existing management strategies, policies and business operations wherever possible.
- How to differentiate but also integrate strategic, management decisions from and with practical implementation on the ground.
- How to create effective governance for the BAGs, including effective, driven, democratically chosen Chairs who are either able to conduct the administrative duties this role will generate or who have administrative support.
- How to equitably fulfil the role of, for the most part, not being in democratically given positions of power but, nonetheless, holding powers to take actions that affect other people and that could not be undertaken by most members of society.

After considerable discussion, it was agreed that two BAGs based on the Catchment Partnership footprints (Option 4/Figure 1) was the preferred solution. This enables a joined-up approach across catchments and, in particular, the Somerset Levels and Moors floodplain. Further, all neighbouring counties have structured or are in the process of structuring their BAGs based on Catchment Partnership footprints so this would provide clarity for who was responsible for providing advice for populations that cross county-boundaries with no omissions or duplication/overlap. In terms of efficiency, many organisations represented in the Steering Groups are already thinking and working at a catchment-scale, potentially making it easier to integrate providing beaver-related advice and management when planning business activities or policies. Acknowledging the lack of supplementary resource currently available for beaver management, two BAGs was considered a realistic and achievable level of input from BAG partners continuing their (currently voluntary) participation in the group, attendance at meetings, any delivering on actions agreed at BAG meetings while still having time to simultaneously continue their day-to-day roles.

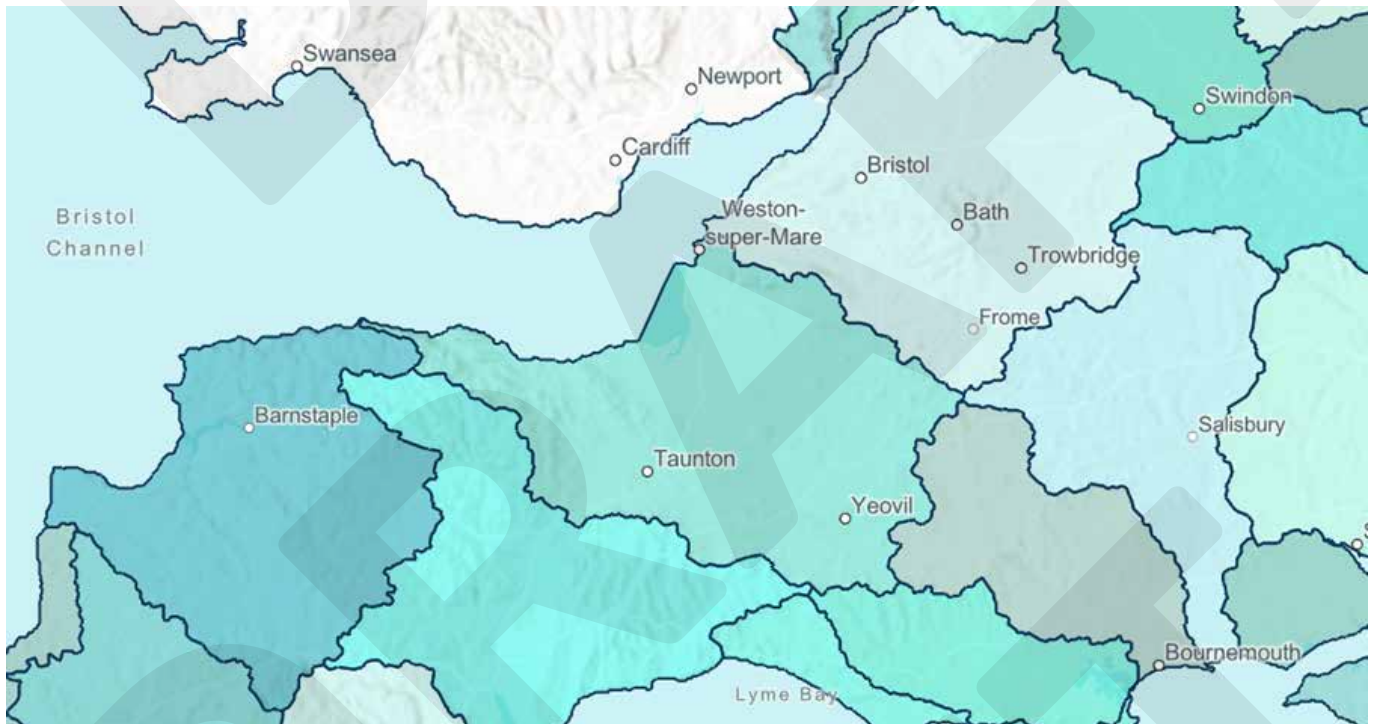


Figure 1: Map of Catchment Partnerships' footprints in Somerset and surrounding counties ©Environment Agency copyright and/or database right 2015

There was a partially unresolved concern about who might Chair these BAGs. The BAG Steering Group partners believed that Somerset Wildlife Trust was the best placed to deliver this role but all acknowledged this was a default position largely driven by lack of capacity in other organisations and the widespread if slightly erroneous perception that restoring beavers to the landscape was predominantly a nature recovery matter. This position overlooks that beaver presence in the county impacts on other ecosystem services and socio-economic concerns (e.g. natural flood management, water quality improvement, diversification of rural economies through ecotourism) which would make it appropriate for other partners with specialisms in those other areas to also lead this Steering Group. Overall, it was concluded that Somerset Wildlife Trust would take on the role of Chairing the BAGs for a fixed term (to be decided when Terms of Reference are drafted) with the role being an elected position that would move around the Steering Group partners or to a councillor who has received a democratic mandate from the public to speak on its behalf.

### Goal 1.2 – Representation on Steering Group(s)

The River Otter Beaver Trial recommended that Steering Groups included organisations who have: ability to make decisions for policy or infrastructure; specialist knowledge about beaver ecology or management; or a responsibility to provide factual information or practical support to the public. It also recommended representation from an independent person or someone with a democratic mandate to overcome potential perceptions of bias or partiality that might arise among wider stakeholders based on Steering Group partners' organisational business mandates. The River Otter Beaver Trial and other trials also demonstrated that BAGs should be locally operated and distinct from centralised governmental or enforcement bodies in the early stages. Offering a locally based team helps land managers and communities re-learning how to live with beavers and Steering Group partners to build relationships and trust, and share knowledge about local matters. Also importantly, local Steering Groups at arm's-length from centralised bodies increases ability for wider stakeholders to ask questions without fear of being reprimanded. Those reports did advise, however, that this governance structure could be adapted once populations are established and communities understand how to live alongside beavers. At that point, when less outreach and communications work is required, centralised departments of statutory bodies can take an increased role. However, beavers are still novel to Somerset so a local approach is imperative at this stage.



The River Otter Beaver Trial concluded its governance structure had been too complex. Nonetheless, it forms a useful basis to build a joined-up network for BAG support in Somerset, which can then be reviewed as necessary. The partner organisations represented within Somerset’s BAG(s) will depend on the geographical scope decided upon in Goal 1.1 – Number and Geographical Scope of Steering Group(s). However, if proceeding with option 4 for Catchment Partnership-based groups, the following would be represented:

	Bristol and Avon Catchment Partnership	Somerset Catchment Partnership
Avon and Somerset Police Wildlife Crime Unit	✓	✓
Avon Wildlife Trust	✓	Optional
Beaver Trust	✓	✓
Bristol and Avon Catchment Partnership	✓	
Bristol City Council	✓	
Canals and Rivers Trust	✓	✓
Country Land and Business Association	✓	✓
Devon Wildlife Trust		Optional
Dorset Wildlife Trust		Optional
Environment Agency	✓	✓
Exmoor National Park		✓
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South-West	✓	✓
Forestry Commission	✓	✓
Forestry England	✓	✓
National Highways	✓	✓
National Farmers Union	✓	✓
National Trust	✓	✓
Natural England	✓	✓
Network Rail (Western)	✓	✓
Network Rail (Wessex)		✓
RSPCA (West Hatch)		✓
Somerset Catchment Partnership	Optional	✓
Somerset Council	✓	✓
Somerset Internal Drainage Board	✓	✓
Somerset Rivers Authority	✓	✓
Somerset Wetlands NNR	✓	
Somerset Wildlife Trust	✓	✓
Wessex Water	✓	✓
Wiltshire Wildlife Trust	Optional	Optional



Feeding into the BAG Steering Groups will be the Partnership Forum. Again following the River Otter Beaver Trial model, it is recommended this forum will be held twice a year. This will be open to any stakeholder with a personal or professional interest in beaver-related activity in Somerset. The Forums will be an opportunity for beaver practitioners and wider stakeholders to share their experiences, updates in knowledge, and co-design solutions to capitalise on the benefits beavers will bring to Somerset and to mitigate against any potential challenges. They will ideally be held before the quarterly Steering Group meeting so that items it is either not possible or not appropriate to resolve in the Partnership Forum can be discussed by the relevant Steering Group and management approaches, strategies or policies can be altered promptly as appropriate.

### **Goal 1.3 – Name of Beaver Advisory/Management Group**

When free-living beavers first returned to England, the term Beaver Management Group (BMG) was used for these support groups. However, these early groups are reporting a public expectation that the groups will actively intervene and provide practical beaver management on a long-term basis. The national (not regional or Somerset-specific) vision is to return beavers to our natural landscape as a normalised, native species for which, as with other wildlife species, advice and support is offered rather than practitioners providing active mitigation. Therefore, the expectation that practical management and intervention are the default position rather than individual land managers learning how to lawfully co-exist with beavers is at odds with the national goal, as clearly outlined in Natural England’s Mitigation Hierarchy. Consequently, it has been suggested these groups should be named ‘advisory’ groups instead. In practice, an advisory group could offer practical support but the groups will primarily offer advice and support aimed at empowering stakeholders to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to co-exist with beavers or carry out their own lawful mitigation themselves before the groups engage in any practical interventions.

### **Goal 1.4(2) – Meeting Schedule**

The River Otter Beaver Trial recommended a quarterly meeting schedule for Steering Groups, with Partnership Forums held biannually. However, these schedules are just recommendations: other BAGs have made the decision for Steering Groups to meet every other month to increase the opportunity to build relationships, and share knowledge and support at this early stage of re-learning how to manage beaver activity and co-existence with humans, while other BAGs just hold annual, not biannual, Partnership Forums. It is anticipated that the BAG(s) in Somerset will follow the model used by the River Otter Beaver Trial but that could be subject to review when the BAG(s) agree its/their own ToR(s). Scheduling meetings will be done once the ToR(s) is/are agreed and approved. However, some assumptions for how this could be done consistently across the BAGs are listed below. Naturally, these will be subject to discussion among the partners before a course of action is agreed and finalised:

- Arranging Steering Group meetings will be the responsibility of the Steering Group Chair.
- Steering Group meetings in Q1 and Q3 will be held in person, with meetings in Q2 and Q4 held online.
- It is anticipated Steering Group meetings will last for approximately three hours and a spread of days of the week should be chosen to increase ability of people with different working patterns to attend.
- Responsibility for arranging Partnership Forums is to be agreed between the Steering Group partners but is likely to be the responsibility of the Chair or their administrative support.



- Partnership Forums will include a mixture of Steering Group partners updating the wider group on the progress of beaver restoration in Somerset, regionally and nationally, and a participatory session in which wider stakeholders can share their learning and experiences with the Steering Group so community-led initiatives to capitalise on benefits and mitigate challenges can be co-designed.
- Partnership Forums (held in Q2 and Q4) will always be in person and are also expected to last for approximately three hours.
- Ideally, Partnership Forums will be scheduled at a time that enables as many members of the public, including Young Farmers and other youth representation, to attend (e.g. school holidays, evenings or weekends). This is done with acknowledgement it will mean Steering Group partners may not always be able to be represented due to it extending their working week.
- Steering Group meetings should occur after Partnership Forums. This will enable Steering Group partners who were unable to attend the Partnership Forum to be updated and a strategic, co-ordinated approach to any outstanding matters from the Partnership Forum to be agreed upon by the Steering Group(s).
- It is unlikely to be possible to find meeting dates when all Steering Group partners can attend. If the usual delegate is unavailable, they should nominate a colleague from their organisation to act on their behalf. Only if less than half of Steering Group partners (including proxies) can attend, will a meeting be rescheduled.





## Goal 2: Adequate Resource to Offer In Situ advice and Support Mitigation Work

### Background

Most other counties where beavers are present have dedicated Beaver Officers. No such post exists in Somerset. While there are some licenced beaver practitioners across the county, not all have the highest level of Class Licences. Further, in the absence of a dedicated Beaver Field Officer in Somerset, beavers are an additional part to pre-existing job roles for all Steering Group partners. As a result, practitioners may not have capacity to respond promptly to potential concerns or incidents. While it is hoped that need for advice and active intervention will decrease as people become accustomed to living with beavers once more, demand is expected to grow in the short-term as beaver populations increase in both size and distribution. This demand may include problem-solving novel challenges that require time, resource, and specialist, practical understanding of beaver ecology, infrastructure, business sectors, or other context that is potentially being impacted. Funding currently exists for beaver reintroduction projects, but maintaining and managing free-living populations is often overlooked by donors or when grant offers are drafted. Having insufficient resource to adequately support human communities and respond to challenges posed by free-living beavers risks losing the trust, good will and largely positive sentiments currently held towards this species in England. To overcome this, more resource is required to support human co-existence with free-living beaver populations, and this resource needs to be guaranteed over the long-term.

### Vision

In addition to the co-ordinated advice and strategic management offered by the Steering Group(s), and learning opportunities provided through the Partnership Forum, at least one Beaver Field Officer will have been appointed for 'on-the-ground' advice and support at a county or regional level. The Field Officer(s) will have access to a team of volunteers, who, ideally, have their own Class Licence but, if that is not possible, have been trained and approved as an Authorised Person under another person's licence. The Field Officer and volunteers will build strong, trusting and long-lasting relationships with local land managers. However, BAG partners who have existing relationships with particular land managers (e.g. FWAG-SW, NFU) and Somerset Wildlife Trust's Human-Wildlife Co-Existence Officer will also be available for early stage concerns and to mediate intractable challenges caused by beaver presence. These positions will all be long-term to attract committed, high quality professionals who may need to relocate to take-up the role, provide continuity of support to land managers, and ensure experience gained in the course of carrying out the role is not lost due to short-term contracts.



## Goals to achieve vision

Goal	Responsible Organisation	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
<p>2.1. At least one Beaver Field Officer will have been appointed to conduct practical mitigation, offer advice, and train volunteers at a county or regional level</p> <p><i>Note: recommendation for paid-for services in Goal 5 – Funding below. While funding for this/these post(s) would be required for the first two years, they could ultimately become partially self-funding.</i></p>	Somerset Wildlife Trust, Avon Wildlife Trust, Beaver Trust	Funding will have been secured for, at a minimum, one two-year, full-time post for a Beaver Field Officer in Somerset or the South-West region and a person/people will have been appointed to this/these role(s). They will hold the highest class licence. They will be known to all group partners and will be developing their own relationships with land managers who they will be supporting with beaver management and riparian habitat maintenance	March 2025
2.2. All organisations within the Steering Group(s) will have (a) named representative(s) who is actively engaging with the group	All Steering Group partners	Partners will: be attending and contributing to all BAG meetings; understand their role in beaver management and be delivering on their responsibilities; know which other organisations can offer support where further, specialist expertise is required; and be proactive in making suggestions that continue to improve the beaver management strategy across Somerset	Initial named delegates identified May 2024 Subject to ongoing review Commitment to be reconfirmed when ToR(s) reviewed
2.3. A volunteer group, nominally operated by the Steering Group(s) but led by Somerset Wildlife Trust will have been established. These dedicated, specialised and trusted volunteer Beaver Wardens will offer in situ advice, build and maintain strong and positive relationships with land managers, support ecological research and, if necessary, support land owners to carry out practical mitigation activities	Somerset Wildlife Trust on behalf of All Steering Group Partners	Somerset Wildlife Trust will have identified suitable volunteers from its staff list and existing volunteers. Those people will have been recruited and trained and received their own Class Licence or trained and approved to act as an Authorised Person under another person's licence. Nominally operating under the BAG partnership, they will be supported by the county/regional Beaver Field Officer(s), Human-Wildlife Co-Existence Officer and staff in other partner organisations. They will be building relationships with land managers who they will be advising and supporting with beaver management activities. They will also be increasing capacity for Steering Group partners to conduct ecological monitoring, data recording and data analysis	March 2025
2.4. Suitable staff and volunteers already known to partner organisations will have been recruited and trained to expand the specialist volunteer Beaver Warden team	All Steering Group partners	Other Steering Group partners will also have identified suitable staff and volunteers from their existing volunteer databases to expand the amount and geographical scope of advice and work that can be provided by the Steering Group(s) and associated volunteer group	September 2025



## Goal 3: Community Engagement and Knowledge Sharing

### Background

Even the best planned and most promising species recovery projects can flounder or fail if local people are not included in conversations, project co-design and decision-making. This is so important that community consultation is included in the IUCN's *Guidelines for Reintroductions and Other Conservation Translocations*. In Somerset, beavers have arrived not as a result of formal reintroductions but, rather, as a result of natural dispersal, escapes, and from other unknown origins. This means that a formal consultation process prior to their return could not be completed. However, learning is an ongoing process and, even in planned reintroductions, engagement should continue after the animals have been released. Therefore, the manner of their arrival in no way negates the need to inform stakeholders and the wider public about beaver ecology, their potential and realised social, economic and environmental impacts, and how those impacts are being managed in Somerset.

### Vision

Stakeholders with professional and personal interests in beavers' return to Somerset will have been included in approving this strategy, which will then be published so it is available and the approach to beaver management in Somerset is transparent. The human and financial resource will exist to conduct a series of community engagement and knowledge sharing events across the county. Aiding this, the number of demonstrator sites in Somerset will have increased to help people visualise the likely impacts of beaver behaviour. Knowledge will also be shared quickly and clearly between professionals whose work is impacted by, or that impacts, beavers.

### Goals to achieve vision

Goal	Responsible Organisation	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
3.1. A first strategy for how to manage and capitalise on beaver activity in Somerset while maintaining high standards of beaver welfare will have been approved and published	Somerset Wildlife Trust on behalf of Steering Group members	Steering Group members will have had the chance to comment on content, ambition and achievability of the draft strategy, both by email and in-person. Wider stakeholders with both professional and personal interests will have been offered the opportunity to ask questions about and comment on the draft Strategy through a mixture of in-person community engagement events and an online feedback form. All comments will have been considered and the draft updated accordingly. This buy-in to the strategy will mean all management decisions are co-ordinated and designed to achieve a common end goal of co-existence with free-living beavers who are undisturbed and causing as little disturbance as possible	Steering Group partners to meet May 2024 Wider consultation and community engagement completed October 2024 Published December 2024





Goal	Responsible Organisation	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
3.2. The strategy will have been published online and be widely available to ensure transparency of beaver management in Somerset	All Steering Group partners	Formatted document will have been published on Somerset Wildlife Trust's website and BeaverManagement.org and will have been shared with partner organisations to promote	December 2024
3.3. Steering Group partners will be actively delivering on their responsibilities under this strategy	All Steering Group partners	Representatives from each organisation will be attending Steering Group meetings and actively delivering on their responsibilities under this strategy. Representatives will be sharing knowledge within their organisation to: 1) empower colleagues to also consider optimal beaver management in their work; and 2) ensure succession planning	Ongoing
3.4. Provide sites in Somerset that demonstrate beaver activity and that are suitable for community engagement work to: foster excitement among those naïve to beavers; showcase the effect of beavers on the wider ecosystem; dispel myths concerning beavers; and allay concerns about the potential impacts of beaver activity	Somerset Wildlife Trust, Avon Wildlife Trust, National Trust	In addition to the existing enclosure at National Trust Holnicote, at least one additional established beaver territory will have been identified or a captive population created that the landowner(s) has/have given permission for the public to access (by invitation only if appropriate). Steering Group Partners in public facing roles (e.g. National Trust staff, the Beaver Field Officer, Human-Wildlife Co-Existence Officer, rangers and volunteers) will have a series of engagement events each year (e.g. guided walks, beaver watching events, beaver cafes, talks).	Ongoing
1.5. Steering Group meetings will consider public-facing communications to ensure wider stakeholders receive all information that is relevant to them in a way that clearly and consistently from all partners	All Steering Group partners	Discussing communications approaches, messaging and content will be a standing item of quarterly Steering Committee meetings. Partners will be sharing agreed approaches with their colleagues. Wider stakeholders will be able to access all relevant information clearly and in a timely way	In ToRs December 2024 Ongoing
1.6. Social media sites will be monitored for comments related to beaver activity particularly new sightings, topics of concern among the wider public and misinformation so these can be identified and actioned	Somerset Wildlife Trust on behalf of the Steering Group	At least one volunteer will have been recruited to review posts made on community pages on social media sites (e.g. FaceBook, Insta, X) for reports of beaver activity or references to beavers. They will do this at least once a week and report any new sightings to Somerset Environmental Records Centre to increase knowledge about where beavers are present in the county. They will also forward topics of concern being raised by the wider public and misinformation in posts to the Steering Group Chair(s) for action	Ongoing monitoring



## Goal 4: Research and Monitoring

### Background

Beavers are agents of change. However, as a species that has been absent from England for several centuries, it is possible that the ecosystem has evolved in their absence, for example, due to climate change, land use changes, introduction of non-native species, and extirpation of native and non-native species. Beavers' impacts can be predicted using learning from other areas with similar conditions or through computer modelling. As outlined elsewhere in this document, the benefits usually outweigh the costs, but the predictions generated always come with some uncertainty.

Conversations during the 2022 stakeholder consultation identified concerns about how beavers might impact existing habitats and species and the need to have support structures in place that are able to respond to changes as necessary. Of particular interest were wet woodlands/riparian trees and fish species, especially salmon. These discussions also demonstrated the desire to monitor beaver populations and their spread through and between catchments. These themes are in keeping with research being conducted where beaver populations exist elsewhere in England and Scotland. It has also been seen that, in some circumstances, beavers can both create or, alternatively, remove, favourable conditions for invasive non-native species (INNS), although this remains under-researched.

Conducting research into the impact of beavers can support nature restoration and beaver management by informing appropriate management decisions. Further, it might increase ability to gain funding or other resources that are often only made available where there are confirmed beaver populations. For Somerset, this is currently only the Avon and Somerset Frome population despite there being anecdotal evidence for beaver presence in the Brue, Tone and West Somerset Streams catchments. Therefore, to get a more comprehensive understanding of population size and distribution would respond to stakeholder concerns and could, theoretically, make it easier to access much needed resource for beaver management. Further, while modelling has been completed for Somerset, as described above, this was limited by lack of data and can only ever be a 'best guess'. Consequently, research of beaver presence and impact will help refine the modelling described in the Technical Background report to help identify where beavers might be expected to disperse to first, and more or less suitable sites for potential beaver releases.



## Vision

With particular emphasis on surveys conducted in contexts that are rare or unique to Somerset, ecological surveys will be being conducted to monitor the impact of beaver presence in the ecosystem. It is anticipated this will initially include: beaver distribution and population size; abundance of fish species, particularly salmon and trout species; riparian plant species; and hydrology. Surveys will be repeated on a regular basis (recommended as annually or biennially but as appropriate for the research question and topic and available resource). Records will also be kept of advice given, interventions conducted by beaver management practitioners and incidences of beaver persecution. These will act as a proxy to understand how social tolerance of beavers might be changing as beavers become both more widespread and normalised. Cumulatively, trends identified from the additional ecological and social data will enable practitioners to make risk-based but evidence-informed decisions to capitalise on identified opportunities and challenges, continue or adapt appropriate mitigation approaches, identify areas for habitat improvement to encourage beaver dispersal, and areas that are more or less socially and ecologically appropriate for potential creation of new free-living populations. However, the survey areas outlined above will be subject to annual review by the Steering Group partners. Changes will be made to avoid using limited resource on surveys that is not gathering useful information (e.g. due to the research question already having been answered) or to commission additional surveys when new research questions arise or evolve.

## Goals to achieve vision

Goal	Responsible Organisation	Options	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
4.1. It will be easier for the public to record beaver sightings and signs in Somerset due to the Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC) being more widely known and used	Somerset Wildlife Trust/SERC	N/A	Links to the Somerset Environmental Records Centre and advice on how to download an app (iNaturalist or Mammal Mapper) are more visible on Somerset Wildlife Trust's website	March 2025
4.2. It will be easier for the public to record beaver sightings and signs due to an app (or modifications to an existing app) for beaver signs and sightings	Beaver Trust/ Devon Wildlife Trust	N/A	Beaver Trust/Devon Wildlife Trust will have developed an app that enables the public to record beaver sightings and signs, whether this is via creation of a new app or agreed updates to an existing nature recording app. Wider stakeholders will be confident uploading records to the app. Data will be available to Steering Group partners for management and monitoring purposes	December 2025
4.3. Wildlife recording systems (e.g. SERC, Mammal Mapper) will be more actively promoted	Somerset Wildlife Trust, SERC, Environment Agency, Wessex Water, Somerset Council, and other Steering Group partners	N/A	Wildlife recording systems are regularly promoted by Steering Group partners (e.g. Communications teams) across social media and in newsletters and mailshots (e.g. with volunteers)	Ongoing



Goal	Responsible Organisation	Options	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
<p>4.4. Somerset's beaver population will be better understood following completion of a full population survey (presence/absence and population size). Note, this could be done by organisations/ individuals that are not part of the Steering Group with Memorandums of Understanding or other agreement</p>	<p>Natural England, Environment Agency, Somerset Wildlife Trust</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Funding and approval will have been received to commission a beaver population survey that, following a tender process, ecologists will have completed over winter 2024/25 on all watercourses mapped as being of high or medium suitability for beavers in Somerset. To ensure data can be compared and trends identified, this will, insofar as reasonably practical, replicate the methodology used during the 2022 survey on the Avon and Somerset Frome (see NECR470). A report by the ecology company will have been provided to Somerset Wildlife Trust for wider distribution</p>	<p>December 2025</p>
<p>4.5. Data will be available on baseline hydrological function in Somerset with an ongoing, defined commitment to research the effect of beaver activity on hydrological function in areas where conditions are unusual or unique and there is less opportunity for the effects to be monitored elsewhere in the UK or globally. Note, this could be done by organisations/ individuals that are not part of the Steering Group with Memorandums of Understanding or other agreement</p>	<p>Environment Agency, Wessex Water, Somerset Council</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>The Responsible Organisations will have collectively identified data already held on hydrological function across the different water course types in Somerset but with a particular focus on areas that are unusual or unique to Somerset (e.g. Levels and Moors floodplain, coastal, intertidal). They will have an agreed system in place to store and share that data between Steering Group partners. Through a schedule of ongoing surveys, they will be monitoring key hydrology metrics and observing trends to identify changes that could be attributable to beaver presence. These metrics may include (but are not limited to): nutrient levels (particularly phosphates, nitrates, and dissolved carbon), pollution (sewage), peak flow rate, and flooding and drought (upstream and downstream). A schedule for regular repeat monitoring will have been established</p>	<p>Method for data storage December 2024</p> <p>Schedule for surveys until 2029 ongoing as each Responsible Organisation completes its annual work planning</p>



Goal	Responsible Organisation	Options	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
<p>4.6. Data will be available on baseline fish populations in Somerset with an ongoing, defined commitment to research the effect of beaver activity on fish populations. This will have a particular focus on areas where conditions are unusual or unique and there is less opportunity for the effects to be monitored elsewhere in the UK or globally (e.g. on the Levels and Moors floodplain). Note, this could be done by organisations/ individuals that are not part of the Steering Group with Memorandums of Understanding or other agreement</p>	<p>Environment Agency, Wessex Water</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>The Responsible Organisations will have collectively identified data already held on fish populations in the waterways across Somerset. They will have an agreed system in place to store and share that data between Steering Group partners. Through a schedule of ongoing surveys, they will be monitoring fish presence and abundance, and observing trends to identify changes that could be attributable to beaver presence. Following concerns at stakeholder consultations, this will initially focus on, but is not limited to, salmonid and trout species. A schedule for regular repeat monitoring will have been established</p>	<p>Method for data storage December 2024</p> <p>Schedule for surveys until 2029 ongoing as each Responsible Organisation completes its annual work planning</p>
<p>4.7. Surveys will have been completed and reported on species in riparian habitats in Somerset. Data will be gathered with the aim of informing predictions of their future activity and potential opportunities and challenges. Note, this could be done by organisations/ individuals that are not part of the Steering Group with Memorandums of Understanding or other agreement</p>	<p>Environment Agency, Wessex Water, Somerset Council</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>The Responsible Organisations will have collectively identified data already held on flora and fauna in riparian habitats across Somerset. They will have an agreed system in place to store and share that data between Steering Group partners. Through a schedule of ongoing surveys, they will be monitoring riparian species presence and abundance and observing trends to identify changes that could be attributable to beaver presence. This will have a particular focus on areas that are unusual or unique to Somerset (e.g. Levels and Moors floodplain, intertidal wetlands, etc) to understand how this different habitat type affects beaver activity and impacts. It will also include invasive non-native species. A schedule for regular repeat monitoring will have been established</p>	<p>Method for data storage December 2024</p> <p>Schedule for surveys until 2029 ongoing as each Responsible Organisation completes its annual work planning</p>



Goal	Responsible Organisation	Options	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
4.8. Steering Group partners will have a co-ordinated schedule of surveys across the county that capitalises on the opportunity to learn about beaver activity at this early stage of their recolonisation but does not duplicate effort or resource. That schedule will be flexible as new research questions arise or as questions are answered and research is no longer required	Steering Group partners	Surveys are completed where circumstances are unique/ rare (e.g. canalised ditch system of the Levels and Moors) but comparable research already being conducted elsewhere is not duplicated in Somerset	It will be a standing item at Steering Group meetings to discuss data collection, storage and research. Research areas will be informed by findings of previous surveys in Somerset and more widely, and feedback raised by wider stakeholders at Partnership Forums. Where possible, Steering Group partners are including beaver-related research into their usual surveying schedule or have the resource to commission beaver-specific research where their usual survey would only have a tenuous impact with beaver activity or welfare. Further, they will have the resource to be able to commission new surveys when novel issues arise. Findings of the research will be published and able to be shared to promote learning among beaver practitioners and the wider community. Each research question will be investigated for as long as, but only as long as, it fulfils a social or environmental purpose, with flexibility to add or remove different survey types as the need arises	Ongoing with annual review at Steering Group meetings
4.9. There is better understanding of beavers' impact on the spread of INNS. This is applied to help slow and prevent the spread of INNS	Catchment partnerships, Steering Committee partners and INNS action groups	N/A	Catchment partnerships, Steering Committee partners and INNS action groups will be working together to exchange knowledge, and work together on existing programmes to support the best environmental outcome from the habitat changes beavers can create. This may include creation of a Local Action Group (LAG) for INNS control (see the Non-Native Species Secretariat: <a href="http://www.nonnativespecies.org/local-action-groups-lags/about-lags">www.nonnativespecies.org/local-action-groups-lags/about-lags</a> ). Examples of actions this knowledge could be applied to are not releasing beavers in areas where their presence might perpetuate spread of INNS, and looking for interventions to make sure that INNS do not benefit from habitat changes	Ongoing



## Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

Any field-based activity associated with beaver reintroduction and monitoring, mitigation or management should routinely follow 'check clean dry': [www.nonnativespecies.org/what-can-i-do/check-clean-dry](http://www.nonnativespecies.org/what-can-i-do/check-clean-dry). Alongside this best practice, looking for interventions to make sure that INNS do not benefit from the habitat changes is essential. For example, if we understand the INNS present in an area, release projects and beaver management groups can work together to restrict or stop the spread of 'new' species before they take hold.

The Non-Native Species Secretariat offers information on Local Action Groups (LAGs). Through these, information exchange and joint working within existing programmes can be used to support the best environmental outcomes.

Natural England has developed class licence training for those responding to beaver activity which highlights the importance of identifying and responding to the presence of INNS before and during the transition to beaver presence. This includes continual vigilance to identify and respond proportionately to the different INNS, promoting join-up between practitioners and the continued use of 'check clean dry'.

There are various options available to support landowners with INNS management:

- The Environment Land Management Scheme has invasive species management options within Countryside Stewardship
- Landscape Recovery projects are required to have an INNS management plan
- Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategy plans can also provide support for INNS management: [www.nonnativespecies.org/resources-and-projects/guidance-for-lnr-and-bng-projects](http://www.nonnativespecies.org/resources-and-projects/guidance-for-lnr-and-bng-projects).



## Goal 5: Funding

### Background

Funding high quality, pragmatic and dedicated advice and support for co-existence with free-living beaver populations in England is challenging. Across the world, including in Scotland, Germany and the US, some level of support is provided by their respective governments. Some government grants are available in England but, as at the date of this Strategy, there are only three that are specific to beavers. Other grants that indirectly relate to beaver activity or habitat creation/maintenance exist but they are relatively new, their application to beaver-related activity is not widely known about or understood, they are complicated to apply for, and, unsurprisingly, there is limited uptake. There is also limited provision to support the wider public where beaver activity affects private homes and gardens and the land managers are not eligible for green finance offers. Additional funding sources do exist or are being developed in a way that could incorporate beaver activity (e.g. Biodiversity Net Gain, Environmental Land Management Schemes, philanthropic donations). There are also other potential sources that are not designed with beaver activity in mind but that could, tangentially, be applicable (e.g. Environmental Improvement Plan funding, District Level Licensing, English Woodland Creation Offers). Naturally, these are far from certain and do not allow for long-term planning or certainty that businesses, communities and some private land managers need. This leaves Somerset and other catchments England-wide with free-living beavers in a difficult situation: beavers are present but there is scant funding available to provide long-term support to maintain healthy beaver populations and enable human-beaver co-existence, despite beavers now being legally protected and relevant to, among other things, the government’s Environmental Improvement Plan, natural flood management, and increased connection with nature.

### Vision

It will be accepted that governmental (and other) grants and incentive payments that relate to beaver activity or habitat needs, even if they were not written specifically for beaver management, can be used by land managers adopting beaver friendly practices or land uses. There will be support available for land managers to help them understand how these payments relate to their land and be confident in applying for them. As a result, land managers will be fairly and adequately recompensed for any cost, rewarded for delivering a public service (e.g. in flood management) and financially supported to transition or diversify their existing business models or homes to accommodate beavers.

### Goals to achieve vision

Goal	Responsible Organisation	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
5.1. There will be a greater range of government grants and incentives that offer fair payments that motivate land managers to create space for beavers on their land and that are easy to understand and apply for. Similarly, grants and incentives will be available for organisations that offer beaver management advice and practical support to further enable beaver recovery and human-beaver co-existence	Natural England	Natural England, supported by the Steering Group partners, will be providing advice and campaigning to DEFRA for improved funding to enable provision of long-term beaver management advice and, where necessary, practical support. This will result in an increase in government-issued grants and incentives that relate and to beaver activity directly or indirectly (e.g. maintaining riparian buffer strips). Through improved and clearer associated guidance documents, land managers and organisations will be more confident in how these schemes relate to their activities, with more applications being made and approved	Ongoing





Goal	Responsible Organisation	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
<p>5.2. A Beaver and Riparian Habitat Finance Officer is available to advise and support land managers and organisations involved in providing beaver management and practical support on the wide range of grants and incentives that relate directly or indirectly to beaver management or delivery of a public service as a result of accommodating beavers on their land</p>	<p>Beaver Trust, FWAG-SW, The Wildlife Trusts via Somerset Wildlife Trust, Natural England</p>	<p>A Beaver and Riparian Habitat Finance Officer is hosted by one of the Responsible Organisations. The Finance Officer has an in-depth understanding of how a wide range of government and private revenue streams can be used to incentivise, reward and enable land managers to make space for beavers. The Finance Officer will be providing resources that help land managers and organisations understand the relationship between their land management decisions, beaver management and available grants. They will also be liaising directly with individual land managers about options that are applicable to their specific sites. Land managers and the wider public will be aware of this service due to publicity by Steering Group partners, at Partnership Forums, and on appropriate websites</p>	<p>March 2025</p>
<p>5.3. Consultancy fees are charged by practitioners for providing financial advice. While up-front funding for this post would be required for at least the first two years, consultancy fees could be used to partially fund the role thereafter</p>	<p>Organisation hosting Beaver and Riparian Habitat Finance Officer</p>	<p>The fee structure for specific advice and support has been written and agreed by the Steering Group partners. A template contract for use between beaver practitioners offering consultancy services and land managers will also be written and agreed</p>	<p>March 2025</p>
<p>5.4. Grants available to Risk Management Authorities for flood management and climate adaptation projects (e.g. Grant in Aid, Local Levy, Natural Flood Management Funding) are available for and being used to mitigate any potential impact of beaver activity on flood defences and capitalise on beaver activity as a form of natural flood management</p>	<p>Natural England, Environment Agency, Wessex Water, IDB, Somerset Catchment Partnership</p>	<p>The Responsible Organisations, supported by the Steering Group partners, will be providing advice and campaigning to DEFRA for improved funding and guidance for how grants that are available for flood and coastal erosion risk can be used to mitigate potential impacts of beaver activity on flood defences. Flood Risk Managers (e.g. Environment Agency, Somerset IDB, SRA, Wessex Water) will be using these to support flood mitigation projects including making space for beavers and to protect infrastructure against beaver activity</p>	<p>September 2025</p>
<p>5.5. The risk of invasive non-native species spreading in habitats affected by beaver presence is being controlled by land managers making use of government grants</p>	<p>Beaver and Riparian Habitat Finance Officer, Field Officer, all Steering Group partners in land manager/public facing roles</p>	<p>Land managers will be supported by the Finance Officer, Field Officer, and all Steering Group partners to understand and apply for financial options for invasive non-native species management including the Environment Land Management Scheme and, potentially, funding for Landscape Recovery Projects</p>	<p>September 2025</p>



Options for funding streams include:

### Direct Government Funding

Three CS grants exist (BC3 for mesh and wire fencing for permanent crop protection; BC4 for tree guard post and wire; and BC5 for expert dam management).

According to analysis done by the Beaver Trust, creating 20 metre buffer strips along watercourses reduces human-beaver conflicts by 95%. Therefore, to enable land managers to create these buffers and/or allow more extensive beaver wetlands to form, existing grants and incentive payments that do not explicitly mention but that, nonetheless, might apply to, beaver activity should be identified and more widely utilised. There is one known example of SW12 (making space for water) being used where beaver are present and Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) payments are being made. Areas where the impact of beaver activity or work to accommodate beaver might overlap with other actions already funded by grants and incentives, include: District Level Licensing for Great Crested Newt pond creation; phosphate/nitrate credits; flood alleviation; carbon storage from woodland creation; and Biodiversity Net Gain credits. Other beaver practitioners may be able to help identify or share knowledge on how they have previously applied for these existing funding solutions in this novel situation (e.g. payments for ecosystem services for flood risk benefit).

Through Partnership Forums, wider stakeholders will have the opportunity to provide information about what payments would be most helpful to them in order that the Steering Group can liaise with: 1) central government to facilitate those payments and; 2) other beaver practitioners in England to develop a nationwide strategic campaign to government to design and implement the most useful and necessary grants.

### National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England

Through the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England (FCERM), the Environment Agency provides grants to support Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) deliver flood management and climate adaptation projects. While not tested for beavers as at the date of this strategy, grants have been awarded to mitigate the impact of burrowing by badgers, another protected species, where their activity undermines flood banks (McCartney, 2023). It is reasonable to assume that the same could apply to beaver activity although this requires further investigation and testing. If successfully cross-applied, this income stream could be a potential source of funding for organisations involved in or responsible for delivering flood management and climate adaptation measures in locations where beaver are, or are likely to become, established. As an added benefit, this could provide a long-term funding solution to both increase the potential of beavers as a form of Natural Flood Management and reduce their negative impacts such as damage to flood management infrastructure.

### Financial Consultant Fees

Practitioners studying how existing finance options can be cross-applied to beaver management report this is a complicated and time-consuming process. That is not a burden that land managers can be expected to take-on alone. Further, if individuals rather than organisations are expected to do this in isolation, there is reduced ability for that knowledge to be shared more widely so that using these finance options in this way can become mainstream. Ultimately, it would be highly desirable to have a consultant who specialises in understanding the various finance options that should be available beaver-related work. Not only would this benefit land managers and increase likelihood of them wanting to reach out to BAG partners for advice and build long-term relationships, fees received by one or more consultants hosted by partners of the BAG Steering Group could make the role partially self-funding and more sustainable long-term, or financially support BAGs and management, advice and community engagement work in the county.



## Field Officer Consultant Fees

Making use of the government's BC5 grant, the Field Officer role could follow a similar consultancy fee model to the Finance Officer. As at the date of this document, we are not aware that the government's BC5 grant has been applied for but advice is that it should relate to expert management of the entire beaver territory, not just the management of a single dam. It is considered crucial that whole territory management is eligible, particularly at this relatively early stage of beavers' return to England when the most dramatic changes are more likely to arise and demand for advice or adaptation measures is expected to be higher. If upheld, qualifying land managers could recoup 90% of the consultancy fees meaning that the actual cost to them would be just 10% of the consultant's fees. This will reduce the number of instances where financial constraints prevent land managers from accessing timely advice on how to legally manage beavers with a high standard of welfare, or making decisions that enable human populations to capitalise on the benefits co-existence can bring. Having an income stream will also increase likelihood that the Field Officer role is more financially viable and sustainable over a longer time period, increasing capacity to provide high quality advice and support to local communities.

## Philanthropy and Donations

Drawing on philanthropic sources, private donations, one-off grants from companies and government, and local support could help secure additional funding. The key to this will be highlighting and maximising the benefits of beavers locally to local people, economies and biodiversity. While grants and donations have provided temporary staff support to the Avon and Somerset Frome BAG, and the SRA has provided funding to develop this strategy, this funding is not guaranteed, is often ring-fenced for particular actions, and does not allow for long-term planning. Further, as beavers become more commonplace, they will become less exciting and less attractive to funders and it is expected that these funding sources will become increasingly scarce. Therefore, while donations are a hugely valuable and appreciated income stream and should still be actively pursued, they cannot be the only source of funding as reduced support later may put existing BAGs or their activities at risk of collapse.





## Goal 6: Policy

### Background

During beavers' absence from Great Britain, socio-economic, public and environmental policies have not needed to consider beavers' needs or activity, or how to co-exist alongside beavers. In 2022, beavers were designated as a European Protected Species in England (following Scotland who made the same designation in 2019). Other protected species in Britain are specifically named in some guidance and have provisions made for them (e.g. surveys and mitigation activities before, during and after land development) but, currently, no such consideration exists for beavers. It is also unclear to what extent many decision-makers or those whose work will affect beavers are aware of their protected species status and that some activities can only be undertaken with a licence. This risks an increase in beaver-related wildlife crime, whether wilfully or due to ignorance of what it is and is not legal where beaver are or are suspected to be present. Lack of robust policy structure that has a long-term vision also jeopardises ability to fully capitalise on goodwill of land-managers delivering a public service by making their land available for beavers with little or no certainty on which to base their land management decisions.

The Environment Agency has a unique understanding and expertise in the water environment and long standing, established relationships with stakeholders. It has a key role developing, influencing and embedding key policies, programmes and plans associated with the water environment. Environment Agency and Natural England working together across these areas can be a strong voice. Currently, the National Beaver Team and Area Beaver Technical Specialists are working to integrate beaver into these policies, programmes and plans at all levels, for example, Plan for Water, River Basin Planning, Catchment Action Plans, and Flood Risk Management Strategies.

### Vision

Policy in England will reflect that beavers are a native and protected species. Guidance and Codes of Practice will have been updated, or new documents issued, to support practitioners comply with legislation and policies so that ignorance is no defence for beaver persecution or other contraventions of legislation. These policies will not penalise people at the expense of beavers but will help people and businesses capitalise on the many social, economic and environmental opportunities co-existence with beaver can bring, while offering support where challenges might arise. These policies will also articulate long-term visions and how they will be realised. They will be easily available and transparent, and training will be offered to support practitioners and the wider public adapt their business practices and everyday behaviours.

### Goals to achieve vision

Goal	Responsible Organisation	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
6.1. Legislation and regulations are updated to reflect beavers as a protected species (e.g. for civil engineering, environmental impact assessments, nature recovery strategies)	Natural England, Environment Agency FWAG-SW, All Steering Group partners	Natural England and Environment Agency will be providing advice to DEFRA and the National Reintroductions Task Force advocating for legislation and regulations to be amended so that they specifically name and consider beavers as a European Protected Species with all the protections, responsibilities and support that entails. As policies are updated, they are widely circulated to increase awareness among all relevant stakeholders	Ongoing



Goal	Responsible Organisation	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
6.2. Relevant stakeholders are empowered to change business practices in order to comply with updated policy requirements	Natural England, Environment Agency, FWAG-SW, All Steering Group partners	The Responsible Organisations will be providing advice to government so that whenever a policy is updated, associated guidance is also released that provides a practical, jargon-free explanation of the responsibilities and rights of all affected stakeholders (e.g. land managers, developers, ecologists). This guidance combined with training events will enable the relevant stakeholder groups to understand any changes they need to make and empower them to adapt	Ongoing
6.3. The process to apply for and be granted release licences to create or bolster free-living populations in any catchment where social and ecological feasibility suggest a reintroduction would be successful is improved. This will apply whether bolstering existing free-living populations (e.g. to increase population size or genetic diversity) or creating new populations. It will also apply whether on catchments where beavers are already present or where they are currently extirpated	Natural England, FWAG-SW, All Steering Group partners	Natural England is providing advice and advocating to the government and the National Reintroduction Task Force so it is easier to apply for and be granted beaver release licences. As a result, 'beaver bombing' will be decreasing. In turn, the origins and health of free-living beaver populations will be more accurately known and accurate records held on the beaver studbook. However, translocations are complex, stressful for the beavers with associated welfare concerns, and potentially expensive so will only be used either when there is a demonstrable social or ecological benefit, or, in the case of management, when other mitigation options to make space for beavers and enable co-existence have been exhausted	September 2025



## Goal 7: Optimising Beaver Health and Welfare

### Background

Prior to any release (or re-release) of beaver into Great Britain, they are required to undergo a health screening and only those individuals screened as clear of disease can be released. However, there have been escapes and populations established from unknown sources, and the health of those beavers is unknown. The free-living population on the Avon and Somerset Frome is one such population of unknown origins. A health screening was conducted of those beavers in 2023, although, as at the date of this strategy being written, the results are still awaited. However, it is not anticipated the results will indicate ill health due to no reports of unhealthy beavers, no reports of zoonoses in humans, and no increase in other wildlife being reported as unwell from pathogens that would or could have originated from beavers. In 2024, Natural England published its second Disease Risk Analysis (DRA), which includes details of infectious (e.g. pathogens) and non-infectious (e.g. road traffic accidents, stressors) hazards. The updated DRA does not suggest any significant or observable detriment caused by increase in population size, beavers of unknown origins or as a consequence of increased understanding of beaver-related hazards. There has also been no overall increase in risk between the first and second DRAs despite a higher number of hazards being screened in the latter assessment. However, vigilance is still prudent to ensure British populations remain healthy and zoonoses are neither introduced nor spread.

### Vision

Any action involving beaver management will always choose the best practice to prioritise and ensure the highest standard of beaver welfare, including stress minimisation and good biosecurity protocols. Actions will always follow national guidelines and there will be adequate human and financial resource to deliver this. There will be comprehensive community engagement that increases public awareness and understanding of possible zoonoses and other hazards that might affect beavers, humans and other wildlife: this will include information about how likely and severe infectious and non-infectious hazards are modelled to be to decrease perpetuation of misinformation, decrease uncertainty and fear, and enable harmonious co-existence.

### Goals to achieve vision

Goal	Responsible Organisation	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
7.1. The mitigation hierarchy (accommodation > mitigation > translocation > lethal control) forms the basis of all management decisions made about beavers. Note it is not expected that translocation will be a necessary mitigation option in Somerset, nor that lethal control will be a necessary mitigation option in England for the duration of this first Strategy	All Steering Group partners	As a requirement of holding a Class Licence, licensees must submit an annual return of when and how they used their licences. Natural England is also compiling a library of case studies. These documented reports, supplemented by records of advice given or management work undertaken without a licence, will reflect that the mitigation hierarchy is always being followed with advice for co-existence being the first action taken before any practical mitigation is considered or conducted	Ongoing with review at Steering Group meetings



Goal	Responsible Organisation	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
7.2. Beaver management in Somerset always follows national guidance for best practice	All Steering Group partners	Policy updates, new research and discussion of new case studies in the Natural England/ BeaverManagement.org library will be a fixed agenda item at Steering Group meetings. Each organisation will have a mechanism in place for disseminating this information to colleagues and updating their practices as required	Ongoing
7.3. On the rare occasions that beavers are released or translocated either within, from or to Somerset, the advice published in the most recent DRA is followed	All beaver practitioners involved in translocation or release	Having made themselves aware of current advice on beaver management, all practitioners involved in releases/ translocations are appropriately licenced, fully plan their projects and, to ensure continued learning and transparency, document all actions taken and their outcomes	For duration of individual translocation or release projects
7.4. Blood/tissue sampling for genetic analysis is conducted in all releases, translocations or capture and re-release (e.g. during rescues), and results are logged with the beaver studbook keeper	Practitioner leading release, translocation or rescue, ZSL and studbook keeper	It is standard practice for blood or other non-invasive sampling to be conducted whenever a free-living beaver is caught. ZSL will have sufficient resource to process genetic samples. ZSL or the practitioner responsible for the capture and release will have a mechanism in place to provide results of the screening to the studbook keeper. This will be used to inform decisions on appropriate translocations, e.g. ensuring translocations increase genetic diversity to improve health and resilience in free-living populations	Prior to release of animal during release, translocation or rescue
7.5. Practitioners providing advice to members of the public will be able to clearly communicate information about disease transmission from and to beavers and other animals, including zoonoses to humans. This will empower the public to maintain good biosecurity and reduce spread of misinformation that might lead to unfounded fears and persecution	All BAG partners, including possible Beaver Field Officer and specialist beaver volunteer group	In conversations and other communications, public and land managers display good awareness of the currently low risk of zoonotic transmission from beavers, and reports or other evidence of beaver persecution are low. This could include information about hygiene protocols (e.g. Check-Clean-Dry) to empower the public to maintain good biosecurity and reduce spread of INNS in locations where beavers are likely to be present. Steering Group partners will also be contributing their knowledge of the relationship between beavers and INNS to help inform and strengthen Somerset's Local Nature Recovery Strategy development and delivery	Ongoing
7.6. To enable continued learning and to improve beaver management practices and co-existence with beavers, knowledge learned about beaver health or welfare will be quickly and clearly shared with other practitioners working with beavers	Any practitioner or wider-stakeholder involved in beaver management	Steering Group partners will proactively share case studies through the Natural England/ BeaverManagement.org library and at Steering Group meetings. Where appropriate, these will be written down and published for wider learning. Partnership Forum attendees will be encouraged and confident sharing their own experiences with Steering Group partners at Partnership Forums or on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis through direct communication with Steering Group members at any time	Ongoing with review at quarterly Steering Group meetings



## Goal 8: Integration into Local and National Strategies

### Background

Scientific literature and results from recent trials demonstrate that beavers can deliver significant improvements to flood risk alleviation, water quality improvement, biodiversity enhancement, and other ecosystem services which have been shown to be of very significant environmental and financial value. They can also contribute to local economies, for example, as an attraction for eco-tourism, wildlife photography and guided tours. While some people will experience detriment, there is a consistent conclusion that, overall, the benefits far outweigh the costs. Beavers should be considered as a significant new option available in delivering Local Nature Recovery Strategies, improving climate adaptation and resilience, reversing the decline of biodiversity, and enabling rural businesses to diversify. Therefore, an opportunity exists to align this (and other) beaver management strategy(s) with other regional and national strategies aimed at addressing the biodiversity and climate crises and social prosperity. This is likely to require novel, cross-organisational, multi-disciplinary working to realise the huge potential beavers provide but that, currently, are not included or thought about within the existing practices and delivery mechanisms.

### Vision

Beavers are considered and, where appropriate, included in all new or updated local climate adaptation, biodiversity recovery, and socio-economic strategies allowing the many social and environmental benefits beavers could provide to be capitalised on in Somerset. There will also be an increase in beavers being incorporated into the equivalent national strategies. However, acknowledging that some people will experience detriment as a result of expanding beaver populations, these strategies will also make provision for adequate support to be offered so no member of society suffers disproportionate harm. Alongside this will run clear communications and learning opportunities to increase public understanding of the climate and biodiversity crises, the actions they can take to mitigate those crises, and the role of beavers as a natural part of the mitigation 'toolkit'.

### Goals to achieve vision

Goal	Responsible Organisation	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
8.1. Practitioners working in climate adaptation and flood risk management are supporting wider stakeholders to understand how the climate and biodiversity crises are interlinked and the positive actions they can take for recovery from both	Bristol and Avon Catchment Partnership, Environment Agency, FWAG-SW, Natural England, Somerset Catchment Partnership, Somerset Council, Somerset IDB, Somerset Rivers Authority, Somerset Wildlife Trust, Wessex Water, and all Steering Group partners	During company policy reviews/updates and whenever new stakeholder communications are created, Steering Group partners will take the opportunity to promote the symbiosis between nature recovery and climate action. This will lead to a systemic change such that attendees at Partnership Forums and other client contacts of Steering Group partners are also taking action for recovery from both emergencies simultaneously. Example policies include but are not limited to: Local Nature Recovery Strategy; Biodiversity Action Plans; Catchment Action Plans; Catchment Flood Management Plans; Biodiversity Net Gain	Ongoing in keeping with Strategies review schedules





Goal	Responsible Organisation	Indicator of success	Estimated completion date
8.2. Increasing both business diversification and potential revenue creation, and ability for the public to have meaningful connections with nature, beavers will be incorporated into the Somerset Tourism Strategy and other private businesses' tourism strategies in the county	Somerset Council, Country Land and Business Association, FWAG-SW, National Trust	Somerset Council will have incorporated opportunities for eco-tourism derived from beaver presence into the Somerset Tourism Strategy. Similarly, Steering Group partners who work with business owners will be supporting them to capitalise on opportunities presented by beavers in their own individual business strategies. These will be written with awareness of potential negative impacts that might be caused to other local resident communities and potential climate impacts	Ongoing in keeping with Strategies review schedules
8.3. Grants and incentive-based schemes integrate climate adaptation, flood management, and biodiversity recovery	See Goal 5 – Funding	See Goal 5 – Funding	See Goal 5 – Funding
8.4. Government policies integrate climate adaptation, flood management, and biodiversity recovery	See Goal 6 – Policy	See Goal 6 – Policy	See Goal 6 – Policy



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