



ENVIRONMENT
AGENCY



Striking the Right Balance

Somerset Levels and Moors
Water Level Management
Strategy Review

Public Consultation

Background

The Somerset Levels and Moors form one of Britain's largest and best surviving wetlands. The area consists of 60,728 hectares (150,060 acres) of low-lying land which drains to the Severn Estuary.

This special landscape has internationally recognised conservation value and is an important agricultural area. Tourism, recreation and local industries all play a significant role.

The key element in this unique setting is water. Striking the right balance through water level management is critical if the range of interests from householders, farmers and road users to wintering birds and breeding waders, wet meadows and valuable archaeological remains are to be safeguarded.

For many years conflicts have arisen between various interests over the way the Levels and Moors should be managed. In particular there have been tensions between agricultural and conservation viewpoints, mainly over the management of water levels.

In 1991 an attempt was made to overcome these difficulties when a strategy for water level management and nature conservation was published. This has led to advances but differences still impede progress.

The Environment Agency has major flood defence, conservation and other responsibilities in the Levels and Moors. It is seeking to review and update the strategy, with other interested parties, in the light of experience and changed circumstances.

A central part of this review will be a period of extensive public consultation. This leaflet spells out the process.





Aims of the Review

Given the importance of the Somerset Levels and Moors it is vital to develop a water level management strategy which strikes the right balance between the various interests involved.

To progress matters it is generally recognised that the review must produce more explicit and defined outcomes to avoid confusion and inaction. These include:

- Agreeing achievable targets, the actions required and by whom;
- Identifying what can be done to overcome constraints;
- Prioritising the areas in which to direct the agreed actions;
- Identifying sources of funding needed to achieve the agreed targets.

In exploring the way forward three key principles have been identified which must also be taken into full account. These are:

- The need to protect human life and the area's necessary infrastructure;
- The encouragement of sustainable agriculture;
- The promotion of the socio-economic well-being of the area.



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Key Issues

A whole range of specific issues are expected to be considered as part of the review. These will include:

- Water shortages on the Levels and Moors in winter and summer;
- Water level targets in Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- Sustainable land use in floodplains;
- Future water level management plans;
- Preservation of archaeological remains;
- Poor water quality in ditches;
- The withy industry;
- Effects of urban development;
- The maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity;
- Wetland restoration.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list and if you feel that there are other issues to be considered we will be pleased to hear from you.

Public Consultation Arrangements

Whatever your particular interest we want to hear from you with your views on the future of water level management on the Levels and Moors.

Here are some of the ways in which you can help the review:

- Study the full consultation report and send us your comments. This is available free of charge from 'Strategy Review', The Environment Agency, North Wessex Area, Rivers House, East Quay, Bridgwater TA6 4YS, (Tel: 01278 457333). Comments should also be sent to this address.

Copies of the full report will also be available in public libraries.

- Come to one of our exhibition roadshows and discuss the issues with our staff. These will be held at:

Glastonbury Town Hall:

10am-5pm, Mon. 9 February 1998

Langport Arms Hotel, Langport:

10am-5pm, Mon. 23 February 1998

- Attend one of our public meetings and debate your concerns. These will be held at:

Wedmore Village Hall:

7.30pm-9pm, Mon. 9 February 1998

Burrowbridge Coronation Hall:

7.30pm-9pm, Mon. 23 February 1998

The consultation period will run until Tuesday 5 May 1998.





Key

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| 1. Catcott, Edington and Chilton Moors | 10. Tealham and Tadham Moors |
| 2. Kings Sedgemoor | 11. Westhay Heath |
| 3. Langmead and Weston Level | 12. Westhay Moor |
| 4. Meare Heath | 13. West Moor |
| 5. Moorlynch | 14. West Sedgemoor |
| 6. Northmoor | 15. Wet Moor |
| 7. Shapwick Heath | 16. Curry and Hay Moors |
| 8. Street Heath | |
| 9. Southlake Moor | |

The Somerset Levels and Moors

