

3,000 hectares of spectacular Lake District landscape becomes a new National Nature Reserve

A new National Nature Reserve is being formally created today (15 November) by Natural England in Ennerdale, West Cumbria. It will be the largest nature reserve in the county and the 9th largest in England.

The new 'Wild Ennerdale National Nature Reserve' will cover over 3000 hectares of landscape comprising water, forests and mountains. This formal declaration is among the first 'Super NNR's' in England. Super NNRs are recognised for their landscape-scale approach to partnership working.

The Wild Ennerdale Partnership began 20 years ago and has a vision to allow natural processes to shape the ecology and landscapes within the valley. It brings together four organisations: Forestry England, National Trust, United Utilities and Natural England.

Work over almost two decades has significantly improved nature recovery in the Ennerdale landscape and sustainable grazing has been promoted across grasslands, forests and open fells.

Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, said:

Wild Ennerdale is a diverse and varied landscape which supports some of our most unique and precious wildlife, including Red Squirrels, the Freshwater Pearl Mussels that dwell in the river there and which can live for 100 years, and the Arctic Charr – a fish that has hung on in the valley since the last Ice Age.

We have been working with partners for some years to improve this already amazing place and its declaration as a National Nature Reserve will enhance the spectacular landscape, wildlife and habitats, safeguarding them for the future while providing space for people to get close to wild Nature. National Nature Reserves are at the very centre of our ambition to create a vibrant national Nature Recovery Network comprised of bigger and better places for both wildlife and people. The Ennerdale partnership is a great example of what we have in mind and shows how working together can achieve that aim.

Environment Minister Trudy Harrison said:

Ennerdale Valley is a haven for fish, birds and insects and provides much treasured access to green space for local people. The

declaration today strengthens our commitment to nature's recovery and our ambitions under the 25 Year Environment Plan to leave the natural world in a better state than we found it.

Support from local communities is essential for the success of National Nature Reserves, and it's vital that we work together to protect the future of these wildlife habitats. I hope the partnership will continue to build strong relationships with local landowners, communities and farmers – who are custodians of the countryside – to develop sustainable uses for these sites.

Ennerdale Water in the valley is home to the Arctic Charr – a fish that has survived here since the ice age – and the River Ehen, which flows out of the lake, hosts the biggest population of freshwater mussels in England.

The valley is encased by woodlands of Atlantic oakwood, rich with bryophytes, lichens, and conifers which are a vital habitat for red squirrels. As altitude increases out of the valley, woodlands are replaced by montane heath where nationally rare plants such as shrubby cinquefoil and alpine saw-wort can be spotted.

National Nature Reserves (NNRs) were established to protect some of England's most important habitats, species and geology, provide 'outdoor laboratories' for research and offer opportunities to the public, volunteers, schools and specialist interest groups to experience wildlife and nature first-hand, along with learning more about nature conservation and benefits for nature and society.

Rachel Oakley on behalf of the Wild Ennerdale Partnership said:

We're delighted to achieve NNR status for this beautiful Lake District valley. We are constantly reminded of the nature and climate crisis we face now and for the future and this announcement (today) shows how working together and prioritising nature can reap rewards for us all".

These landscapes are constantly evolving and need to be 'fit for purpose' to adapt and respond to the many challenges we face. Nature can thrive if given space and a helping hand and we are seeing tangible results of that in Ennerdale. We are doing this through partnership working and today is very much about acknowledging and thanking the wide range of individuals and groups locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally who have supported this journey to date. NNR status is about prioritising nature recovery and will continue to do that at scale, along with many other great projects around the county".

It's fitting that Wild Ennerdale becomes the largest NNR in the county as we mark the 70th anniversary this year of the first NNR's back in 1952".

The announcement today demonstrates how the Government is delivering on the Environment Act – a key target of which is to halt the decline in our wildlife populations through a legally binding target for species abundance by 2030.

England's first Nature Reserve was created on 19 May 1952. Wild Ennerdale is the 221st site to be formally recognised, with sites spanning more than 106,000ha across England. These 'nature hotspots' are key to restoring nature across England and helping to bring green spaces and wildlife to everyone, including those who live in towns and cities.