

# EA habitat creation and flood scheme leading the way on new 'Global Standard' for nature-based solutions

An Environment Agency-led award-winning coastal habitat creation and flood alleviation scheme on the West Sussex coast has successfully piloted a new global standard for nature-based solutions established by the world-leading authority on conservation of nature.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) developed the Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions for use by governments, businesses, investors, communities and NGOs to ensure that nature-based solutions reach their potential to address societal challenges, such as climate change and biodiversity loss.

The Global Standard will raise awareness of the benefit of nature-based solutions around the world and provide assurance for future investment in such schemes, including from the private sector, such as through carbon credits and biodiversity net gain.

Scientists estimate that nature-based solutions could provide approximately one third of the climate change mitigation needed by 2030 to stabilise warming to below 2°C.

IUCN worked with the Environment Agency to pilot the Global Standard using the Medmerry managed realignment project on the West Sussex coast.

At the time of completion, the £28m Medmerry project was the largest open-coast scheme in Europe and is one of the most sustainable projects the Environment Agency has ever delivered and subject of universal acclaim.

The project, delivered with the support of the RSPB and local communities, involved the construction of four miles of new sea defences to reduce the flood risk to hundreds of properties and created a new wetland for wildlife to flourish.

Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency, said:

Nature-based Solutions are an essential tool in managing climate change. We are delighted to have piloted the Global Standard through our work with RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts. It will identify nature-based solutions that are well governed and delivering benefits for nature and society. This will provide assurance to investors, developers and communities about how projects are being delivered on the ground.

With the UK hosting COP26, the International Union for Conservation of Nature's new Standard sends an important message to State and

non-State actors about the importance of investing in nature to deliver climate ambitions.

Through an EA-led process, Natural England, RSPB and multiple Wildlife Trusts also worked with IUCN to pilot the Global Standard with four other projects in England:

- Haweswater in the Lake District, United Utilities land farmed and managed by the RSPB;
- Centenary Riverside in Rotherham, a flood alleviation scheme and wetland reserve in Rotherham managed by Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust;
- Great Fen, a habitat restoration project in Cambridgeshire managed by The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire; and,
- Sussex Kelp Restoration Project managed by the Sussex Wildlife Trust, which has incorporated nature-based solutions into its project design.

Stewart Maginnis, IUCN Deputy Director General, said:

The IUCN Global Standard enables the widespread application of nature-based solutions by providing a single accountability framework applicable to all sectors and stakeholders.

The Global Standard assures the quality and credibility of Nature-based Solutions as effective interventions that provide benefits to both human well-being and biodiversity.

Much of the Medmerry site is now managed by the RSPB as a nature reserve, and has become a wildlife haven with nesting sites among the pools supporting rare birds such as avocets, black-headed gulls, little ringed plovers and oystercatchers.

Adrian Thomas, Medmerry project manager for the RSPB, said:

Nature-based solutions are essential to our efforts to tackle the nature and climate emergency and unlock the power of our natural world to both provide homes for the threatened wildlife we love but also tackle the climate crisis.

Throughout the creation of Medmerry, we looked constantly for win-wins. Here, local communities now get vastly improved flood protection, extensive new access, additional habitat for fish stocks and new saltmarshes for farmland grazing, while threatened wildlife gets a real boost. It is this multi-benefit approach that makes Medmerry such a role model.