



OPERATIONAL SELECTION POLICY OSP10

NATURE CONSERVATION IN GREAT BRITAIN 1973 - 1991

Revised November 2005

1 Authority

- 1.1 The National Archives' Acquisition Policy announced the Archives' intention of developing Operational Selection Policies across government. These would apply the collection themes described in the overall policy to the records of individual departments and agencies.
- 1.2 Operational Selection Policies are intended to be working tools for those involved in the selection of public records. This policy may, therefore, be reviewed and revised in the light of comments received from the users of the records or from archive professionals, the relevant government departments' and agencies' experience of using the policy, or as a result of newly discovered information. There is no formal cycle of review but we would welcome comments at any time. The extent of any review and revision exercise will be determined according to the nature of the comments received.
- 1.3 If you have any comments upon this policy, please e-mail records-management@nationalarchives.gov.uk or write to:

Acquisition and Disposition Policy Manager
Records Management Department
The National Archives
Kew
Richmond
Surrey
TW9 4DU

2 Scope*

- 2.1 This policy relates to records created between 1973 and 1991 about government policy on the conservation of the natural environment (birds, animal and insect wildlife, non-cultivated plants, forests, fungi and natural physical features) in Great Britain, with the exception of those functions which were covered by the Scottish Office. It does not cover pollution or water management issues which will be the subject of separate Operational Selection Policies.
- 2.2 The Policy covers the lifetime of the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC). NCC provided advice and guidance to government and others on conservation issues and was responsible for protected areas across Great Britain. It also commissioned or supported research relevant to these matters. As the lead government department on nature conservation, the majority of records selected through this Operational Selection Policy will come from NCC and its interaction with other government departments and non-government

* In researching this OSP a number of published works were consulted. I should, however, like to acknowledge in particular John Sheail, *Nature Conservation in Britain The Formative Years*, The Stationery Office 1998.

organisations. It will also relate to records created by the Countryside Commission (CC), the Forestry Commission (FC), the Department of the Environment (DoE), and the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF).

- 2.3 Records worthy of permanent preservation from DoE have been identified in an Operational Selection Policy covering the period 1970 to 1979. This Policy will therefore cover DoE records relating to nature conservation between 1980 and 1991.
- 2.4 This Operational Selection Policy is not an exhaustive statement of all the records that will be acquired but is intended to provide a clear direction to archival selection and to those who are making review decisions. There will inevitably be records held by other bodies covered by the Public Records Act 1958 which were in some way involved in nature conservation, for example the Welsh Office and the Ministry of Defence, and the principles established in this policy will be followed by those reviewing records relating to nature conservation across government.
- 2.5 In 2001, English Nature was reviewing NCC files closed from 1974 onwards. The Countryside Agency was reviewing Countryside Commission files closed in 1974. The Forestry Commission was reviewing files closed in the mid 1970s. MAFF and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) were reviewing records closed in the early 1970s. This Operational Selection Policy is not retrospective and will not be used to re-review files which have already been selected for permanent preservation.

3 Departmental Responsibilities

- 3.1 The Nature Conservancy Council was established on 1st November 1973 under the Nature Conservancy Act 1973. Its role was to designate and manage National Nature Reserves (NNRs), and notify, and where possible protect, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) across Great Britain. NCC also commissioned research which informed the care of protected sites, and which provided the basis for the dissemination of advice and guidance to central government and other bodies as necessary. In addition NCC could provide grant-in-aid to other bodies undertaking conservation work and was responsible for licensing certain activities which had an impact on wildlife such as shooting or culling in protected areas.
- 3.2 The Countryside Commission was established in 1968. It was responsible for conserving the countryside in England and Wales and making it available for public recreation, whilst taking into account the needs of those who live and work in the countryside. It was not an executive body, rather it provided policies, guidance and advice, and funded bodies whose work would forward its aims. Its work included the designation and monitoring of various types of protected areas including National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and ensuring access to them.

- 3.3 The Forestry Commission, first established in 1919, was responsible for creating and maintaining British forests and promoting the British timber industry in order to reduce the dependence upon imported timber. Its activities affected large parts of the British countryside and in the 1960s subsequent legislation gave the Commission a duty to manage wildlife in the areas for which it was responsible.
- 3.4 The main areas of DoE's responsibility which affected nature conservation were planning, local government and environmental protection. The main records of relevance are those relating to countryside planning and environmental protection. In addition DoE became responsible for the designation of sites of international interest, including sites designated under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention) in 1976, and Special Protection Areas in 1981. As the parent body of NCC and CC, DoE was also responsible for legislation relating to conservation issues including compliance with European Community directives.
- 3.5 MAFF was responsible, amongst other things, for the promotion of more efficient farming in Great Britain, including the fishing industry. This had a direct effect on large areas of the countryside, coastline and UK fishing waters and was responsible for significant changes in the natural habitat of marine life, wild animals and plants. The Agriculture Departments of the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office had responsibility for agricultural activities in their respective countries but on most issues followed policy set by MAFF.

4 Relevant Collection Themes in The National Archives' Acquisition and Disposition Policies

4.1 The Acquisition and Disposition Policy Statements outline certain themes, which form the basis of The National Archives' appraisal and selection decisions. Of these themes, the following are of potential relevance to nature conservation within Great Britain:

4.2 Acquisition Policy 2.2.2 Interaction of the State with its Citizens and its Impact on the Physical Environment:

2.2.2.2 The impact of the state on the physical environment

Disposition Policy 2.2.6 Records Suitable for Presentation:

2.2.6.1 Records which are not selected for preservation at The National Archives itself but which meet the collection policy criteria of a *bona fide institution* with relevant expertise may be presented to that body under section 3(6) of the Public Records Act 1958.

5 Key Themes for Selection

5.1 Where appropriate significant events have been mentioned by year. Otherwise the themes capture the relevant areas of activity during this period. The order of themes and their constituent elements is not significant. The records selected will be at policy level, unless indicated otherwise below.

5.2 The Nature Conservancy Council (NCC)

5.2.1 NCC was the government body with primary responsibility for nature conservation during this period. As such records of its main activities will be selected. These are:

- The establishment and organisation of NCC in 1973 and any major subsequent changes to its responsibilities or structure including its split into three national bodies in 1991. The NERC continued to have conservation research responsibilities following the creation of NCC in 1973. Although it is not covered by the Public Records Act 1958, its records are held at The National Archives and any further selections will be made in accordance with this Operational Selection Policy
- Meetings of the NCC and other major committees and working groups which directed NCC policy and its implementation

5.2.2 The development and implementation of the NCC statement of policies in 1974 describing the future priorities of the newly formed organisation.

5.2.3 The preparation and implementation of the Strategy for Nature Conservation published in 1984.

5.2.4 Policy files on NCC grant-in-aid activities.

5.2.5 Policy files on NCC licensing activities.

5.2.6 English Nature currently includes in its library holdings a large photographic collection, which is defined as a public record under the Public Records Act 1958. The collection will be retained by English Nature under section 3 (4) of the Act as it is still used regularly. Should this change, the collection will be reviewed according to the criteria laid down in this Operational Selection Policy.

5.3 Designated Areas

5.3.1 Under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, as amended by the Countryside Act of 1968 and subsequent legislation, NCC was responsible for the designation, acquisition (by compulsion if necessary), and management of National Nature Reserves (NNRs), and the scheduling of areas (sites) of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Increasing provision was made for agreements to be drawn up with the land owner or occupier as to the management of SSSIs. Much controversy arose as to the protection of those sites, not only from developments subject to statutory planning control, but also

from agriculture and planning which were not. Records about the following will be selected:

- 5.3.2 Files on the preparation and publication of *A Nature Conservation Review* in 1977 and its impact on government policy. The Review originated under the Nature Conservancy from 1967 onwards, and its completion and publication, were sponsored by NCC and the NERC. Its purpose was the selection of biological sites of national importance to nature conservation in Britain.
- 5.3.3 NCC policy on the designation and management of all protected sites. This will include some policy files relating to high profile individual sites for example Ribble NNR in Lancashire, Parsonage Down NNR in Wiltshire, the ploughing of Walland Marshes SSSI in Kent, West Sedgemoor SSSI Somerset, and the designation of Halvergate Marshes in Norfolk.
- 5.3.4 Major public enquiries into developments in areas recommended for designation by NCC including the inquiries into Amberly Wild Brooks in Dorset and the proposed Nigg Point oil refinery in Ross Shire. Records of these organisations will be held by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- 5.3.5 Files on the management of NNRs, which were owned, leased, held on the basis of a Nature Reserve Agreement, or controlled by NCC by some combination of these methods. Each NNR was considered to be of national importance and one of the best examples of a particular habitat.
- 5.3.6 Files relating to the designation and management of SSSIs are currently held by the local teams in English Nature for the lifetime of a site. They will not be selected for permanent preservation. However, when they are no longer required by English Nature they will be offered to local record offices under section 3.6 of the Public Records Act 1958 in accordance with section 2.2.6.1 of the Disposition Policy.
- 5.3.7 English Nature has created a database of all SSSIs which holds details of geographical location and criteria for designation. It is intended that this database and subsequent quinquennial snapshots will be transferred into the National Digital Archive of Datasets to form part of the national archive.
- 5.3.8 Policy files recording NCC liaison with the Forestry Commission, MAFF, DoE, MoD, NERC and other organisations relating to the protection and management of protected sites.
- 5.3.9 Policy files relating to advice given by NCC to local authorities on structure plans and local plans. In 1976 national planning guidelines were issued which required local planning authorities to consult the Secretary of State for the Environment before disregarding advice from NCC on sites listed in the Nature Conservation Review Structure. Local plans are held by local authorities and are not covered by this Operational Selection Policy.

5.3.10 Policy files relating to public inquiries which contain information not submitted to the inquiry, or recording the impact of an inquiry on policy.

5.4 **Dissemination of Advice, Guidance and Information**

5.4.1 Under the 1973 Act the NCC was tasked with providing advice and guidance on conservation issues to the government and other organisations, both public and private. It was also responsible for disseminating information to the general public, which it did through educational programmes and public awareness campaigns. Records on the following will be selected:

5.4.2 Policy changes resulting from advice from NCC (or other government bodies) to organisations on the impact of their current or proposed activities on the natural environment. The NCC frequently provided this type of advice or guidance to a wide range of organisations. This included government departments such as the Departments of Energy, Industry and Trade and the Ministry of Defence and parliamentary and government committees. Advice was also given to non-government organisations such as the British Gas Corporation and bodies relating to the control and supply of water. In the case of public record bodies, including DoE, MAFF, the Countryside Commission and the Forestry Commission, records will be selected from the lead department, ie from the department which reconsidered policy not from the department which provided the advice or guidance.

5.4.3 Policy on education and public awareness activities on nature conservation.

5.4.4 UK response to European and international conservation initiatives including response to the World Conservation Strategy published in 1983.

5.5 **Research**

5.5.1 NCC either commissioned or undertook research to support the management of designated sites or to provide a basis for policy guidance and advice.

5.5.2 The Forestry Commission did not undertake research into environmental issues - advice or guidance on the impact of forestry on the natural environment was produced by NCC and NERC.

5.5.3 Research within MAFF was primarily into agricultural matters but in the 1980s the impact of farming activities and pest control on the natural environment was recognised and the Ministry subsequently began to commission or undertake research in this area.

5.5.4 Research commissioned by the Countryside Commission is covered by a separate Operational Selection Policy *The Use and Conservation of the Countryside for Recreational Purposes 1974 - 1983*. This Operational Selection Policy (OSP 4) covers Countryside Commission research up to 1990.

- 5.5.5 Research reports published by the NCC are held in the English Nature library where they are made available to the public under the Environmental Information Regulations 1992. NCC published reports, or indeed any others relating to nature conservation, will not be transferred to The National Archives unless they form part of policy files selected for permanent preservation, or unless they cease to be available from English Nature. The following will be selected:
- The role of NCC in commissioning research from the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology and other bodies to support policy advice and management of protected areas and/or species
 - The criteria for commissioning specific research projects including the effects of forestry and agriculture on the natural environment

5.6 **Government Policy on the Management of the Countryside**

- 5.6.1 The Forestry Act 1919 created a Forestry Commission to regenerate British Forestry by promoting afforestation and developing a home timber industry. At that time less than 5% of Great Britain was covered by forest: by 2000 this had risen to over 10%. Many of the new forests introduced new species of trees to a particular area, and were planted on land previously not used for this purpose. This had a considerable impact on plant and animal wildlife in and around them.
- 5.6.2 One of the main aims of the 1947 Agriculture Act was to ensure that the UK became more self-sufficient in food production. This led to changes in farming in order to improve efficiency and output, including the use of pesticides, the modernisation of farming methods and increases in the amount of land being farmed. This was supported by a system of financial grants to farmers. In addition land which was being put to agricultural use (including forestry) was not subject to planning control and so areas of particular conservational value were often damaged by government funded schemes, irrespective of the advice given by NCC.
- 5.6.3 These measures had a significant impact on the countryside and frequently brought conservationists into conflict with farmers and the forestry lobby. It also led to friction between the different areas of government representing these opposing interests. Measures introduced to ensure cheap and plentiful supplies of food and timber resulted in the transformation of large areas of the natural habitat of the wildlife of Great Britain.
- 5.6.4 By the 1980s the profile of nature conservation had risen and it began to be reflected in government policy, especially in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The move towards a more holistic approach to the management of town and countryside accelerated. Records about the following will be selected:
- 5.6.5 The impact of government proposals or policies relating to the natural environment on policy within government departments, particularly MAFF, DoE and Forestry Commission.
- 5.6.6 The exemption of forests from capital transfer and other forms of taxation.

- 5.6.7 The drafting and implementation of legislation which had an impact on countryside. Of particular importance were:
- The Countryside Bill 1978
 - The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
 - Amendments to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Forestry Act 1967 passed in 1985
 - The Agriculture Act 1986
 - The Environmental Protection Act 1990
- 5.6.8 The Countryside Review Committee established in 1973 and led by DoE to review the state of the countryside. The Committee considered the effects of government policy on the countryside and looked at the scope for reconciliation between conservation and agriculture in a number of discussion papers issued throughout the 1970s.
- 5.6.9 Changes to forestry planting schemes which required consultation with environmental bodies before grant-in-aid could be given.
- 5.6.10 Implementation of the 1974 Forestry Commission Policy on Forestry and Conservation.
- 5.6.11 The Sandford Committee Report published in 1974 (this is covered by the Operational Selection Policy on the *Conservation and Use of the Countryside for Recreational Purposes* (OSP 4) published in March 2000).
- 5.6.12 Preparation and impact of the 1975 White Paper *Food From Our Own Resources* which called for increases in agricultural production to be reconciled with environmental safeguards.
- 5.6.13 Preparation and impact of the 1977 NCC report *Nature Conservation and Agriculture*.
- 5.6.14 Preparation and impact of the 1978 report of the MAFF Advisory Council for Agriculture and Horticulture.
- 5.6.15 Preparation and impact of the 1980 Forestry Commission Policy Review.
- 5.6.16 Publication in 1986 of NCC paper *Nature Conservation and Afforestation in Britain* and its subsequent rejection by the government.
- 5.6.17 Preparation and impact of *Agricultural Landscapes: A Second Look* published by the Countryside Commission in 1984 (the original Agricultural Landscapes Initiative is covered by the Operational Selection Policy on the *Conservation and Use of the Countryside for Recreational Purposes* (OSP 4) published in March 2000).
- 5.6.18 The impact of the Commons Environment Committee Report of 1985.

- 5.6.19 Preparation and impact of *Conservation and Development* published by DoE in 1986.
- 5.6.20 The impact of the great storm of 1987.
- 5.6.21 The establishment of the Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme by MAFF in 1987.
- 5.6.22 Preparation and impact of *This Common Inheritance*, a White Paper led by DoE in 1990.

6 Structure of Filing Systems

6.1 Nature Conservancy Council

The filing systems for the NCC for this period are well documented. They are divided between HQ Great Britain and three national headquarters. Relevant series are: C (Conservation), CPA (Corporate Projects), CST (Conservation Services Team), D (Designations), DIR (Directors Files), EC (England Conservation), HAB (Habitat Restoration), HPT (Herpetology), INT (International), LNR (Local Nature Reserves), L (Lands), LOW (Lowlands), MAM (Mammals), ES (England Science), A (Head Office admin), S (HQ Science), PO (Private Office), P (various but includes Agriculture and Forestry), RE (Reserves) RPE (Reserves Policy England), RW (Reserves Wales), S (Science), UPL (Uplands), VET (Veteran Trees), WES (Wildlife Enhancement Scheme) .

6.2 Countryside Commission

The Countryside Commission had three thematic registries: policy, case work and local authority. Each theme had a number and could be qualified by a sub-theme and then a further sub-theme where necessary. The system was duplicated in regional offices using regional prefixes to provide a unique identifier. The system was reviewed and rationalised in the late 1970s but the basic structure continued. This would normally allow for straightforward identification of relevant files: however, the review was necessitated by poor maintenance and monitoring which resulted in many files being misplaced within the system. It will therefore be necessary to do a brief review of all files prior to 1980. From 1980 onwards individual themes can be initially identified, but it will then be necessary to undertake a file-by-file review to ascertain whether material is worthy of permanent preservation.

6.3 Forestry Commission

Information relating to nature conservation in the Forestry Commission will be found in the Headquarters policy files, forest plans and conservancy files. Headquarters and conservancy files will need to be reviewed on a file-by-file basis. All forest plans have now been transferred to The National Archives.

6.4 Department of the Environment

An existing Operational Selection Policy, OSP1: *The Department of the Environment, 1970 – 1979*, states which records will be preserved from the DoE

up to 1980. From there on information worthy of permanent preservation relating to nature conservation is most likely to be found in files created by:

- The Environmental Protection Directorate, Rural Affairs and Sport, all divisions
- The Central Directorate of Environmental Protection, Rural Directorate; Environmental and Conservation Policy Division
- Records of public inquiries concerning conservation issues

6.5 **Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food**

Information worthy of permanent preservation relating to nature conservation in MAFF is most likely to be found in files created by:

- **Land Use and Tenure Division**, Land and Resources Unit, Environment Co-ordination Unit, Lands and Environmental Affairs Unit, Environmental and Conservation Policy Unit, Environmental Protection Division
- **ADAS** Environmental Unit
- **Rural Structures and Grants Division**
- **Environmental and Conservation Policy Division** (CON Series)
- **Environmentally Sensitive Areas** (ESL and ETF Series)
- **Countryside, Marine Environment and Fisheries Directorate**, Marine Environmental Division, Lands, Land Use and Tenure Division, Conservation Policy Division (PL Series), Environmental Policy Division

7 **Implementation**

7.1 English Nature is currently reviewing NCC files closed from the early 1970s onwards. Reviewers have identified the series detailed in section 6 above. The Policy is being used in making selection decisions, but due to the way in which these series were created in most cases a file-by-file review will still be necessary.

7.2 The Countryside Agency is currently reviewing records closed from 1974 onwards using OSP4. Following the completion of this Operational Selection Policy, future reviews will start with a review of registry lists to eliminate files which are not covered by either Policy or the selection criteria for other areas of the Commission's work. This will then be followed by a file-by-file review using the Operational Selection Policies as formal guidance on what should be selected.

7.3 The Forestry Commission is currently reviewing files closed in the early 1970s. It does not have a central review unit. This Operational Selection Policy will be issued to all reviewers to be used in making selection decisions alongside existing criteria for other areas of the Forestry Commission's work. It will also be referred to in the revised Forestry Commission Records Management Handbook.

7.4 This Operational Selection Policy will be implemented in DEFRA for DOE files alongside OSP1 *The Department of the Environment 1970 - 1979*. The department uses a two-stage review process comprising:

- An initial rapid review of the files of the former DoE for this period which will be conducted on a file-by-file basis using functional group and title. This method will be used to separate those files which relate to the collection themes identified in this policy from those files which do not
- The files identified as relating to the collection themes will then be subject to a more detailed second review to ensure that they contain high-level material worthy of preservation. The percentage of files rejected as a result of this examination will be monitored; if the percentage is low the practice can be abandoned

7.5 DEFRA has a centralised review unit with full time reviewers who undertake file-by-file review. They are currently reviewing MAFF files closed in the early 1970s. Reviewers will identify the series identified in section 6 above, and any others likely to contain files relating to nature conservation. The Operational Selection Policy will then be used alongside existing criteria in making selection decisions.

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Annex One: Key Events

The following is a list of key events designed to be used as a tool for reviewers to highlight material which should receive a more detailed examination. The appearance of a topic on this list does not mean that all material relating to that topic should be preserved.

1973

- Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) established on 1st November under the Nature Conservancy Act 1973
- The Countryside Review Committee was established and continued to consider discussion papers throughout the 1970s

1974

- NCC issues statement of policies
- Forestry Commission Policy on Forestry and Conservation
- Sandford Committee Report published

1975

- White Paper *Food From Our Own Resources* published

1976

- Department of the Environment (DoE) became responsible for the designation of sites of under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention)
- National planning guidelines were issued requiring local planning authorities to consult the Secretary of State for the Environment before disregarding advice from NCC on sites listed in the Nature Conservation Review Structure

1977

- NCC report *Nature Conservation and Agriculture* published
- *A Nature Conservation Review* published by NCC and NERC

1978

- The Countryside Bill 1978
- Report of the MAFF Advisory Council for Agriculture and Horticulture published

1980

- Forestry Commission Policy Review

1981

- DoE became responsible for the designation Special Protection Areas
- The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

1983

- World Conservation Strategy published

1984

- *Agricultural Landscapes: A Second Look* published by the Countryside Commission
- Strategy for Nature Conservation published by NCC

1985

- Amendments to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Forestry Act 1967
- Commons Environment Committee Report published

1986

- Agriculture Act 1986
- NCC paper *Nature Conservation and Afforestation in Britain* published
- *Conservation and Development* published by DoE

1987

- The great storm
- Establishment of the Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme by MAFF

1990

- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- *This Common Inheritance*, a White Paper led by DoE

1991

- NCC split into three National Bodies: Countryside Council for Wales, English Nature and Scottish Natural Heritage