



OPERATIONAL SELECTION POLICY OSP4

USE AND CONSERVATION OF THE COUNTRYSIDE FOR  
RECREATIONAL PURPOSES  
1974 - 1983

Revised October 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 department's 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](mailto:records-management@nationalarchives.gov.uk) or write to:

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

## **2 Scope**

- 2.1 This policy relates to records about the conservation and recreational use of the countryside produced by the Countryside Commission, the Forestry Commission and the Department of the Environment.
- 2.2 It is not an exhaustive statement of all the records that will be acquired but is intended to provide a clear direction to acquisition work and to those who are making review decisions.
- 2.3 The Countryside Agency, (which was formed by the merger of the Countryside Commission and the Rural Development Commission on 1 April 1999) is currently reviewing Countryside Commission files closed in 1973. The Forestry Commission is reviewing files of a similar date. Records worthy of permanent preservation from the Department of the Environment have been identified in an Operational Selection Policy (OSP1) covering the period 1970 to 1979. This Operational Selection Policy will cover the period of 1974 to 1983, the end of the first Thatcher administration.

## **3 Departmental Responsibilities**

- 3.1 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 and worked through providing policies, guidance and advice, and by funding bodies whose work forwarded its aims. Its work included the designation and monitoring of specific sites and ensuring access to them. Conservation issues often led to disagreement between rural organisations, especially the farming community, and in the early 1980s emphasis was put on the Commission's role as arbitrator and conciliator between bodies with conflicting interests.
- 3.2 The Forestry Commission, first established in 1919, was responsible for creating and maintaining British forests, so producing sufficient timber to supply the UK market. In more recent years the Forestry Commission made a concentrated effort to promote the recreational use of forests, along with the surrounding countryside, and on many occasions worked with the Countryside Commission to achieve this.
- 3.3 The Department of the Environment was responsible for planning, local government and environmental protection, all of which had an impact on the recreational use of the countryside during this period. The main records of relevance for this period are those relating to countryside and urban planning issues.
- 3.4 The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food did not have any significant involvement in recreational use of the countryside until the establishment of its Environmental and Conservation Policy Division in 1985, and as such is not included in this Operational Selection Policy.

**4 Relevant Collection Themes in The National Archives' Acquisition Policy**

- 4.1 The Acquisition Policy Statement outlines certain themes which will form the basis of The National Archives' future appraisal and selection decisions. Of these themes, the following are of potential relevance to the recreational use of the countryside:

**2.2.1 Policy and administrative processes of the state:**

- 2.2.1.5 Formulation and delivery of social policies

**2.2.2 Interaction of the State with its citizens and its impact on the physical environment:**

- 2.2.2.1 The economic, social and demographic condition of the UK, as documented by the state's dealings with

individuals, communities and organisations outside its own formal boundaries

2.2.2.2 The impact of the state on the physical environment

## **5 Key Themes for Selection**

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.

### **5.1 Preservation, Development and Management of the Countryside**

During the 1970s it was recognised that land management, including development control, was the most effective means of protecting the countryside, both to preserve it and make it available for recreational use. This manifested itself partly in the designation and monitoring of distinct areas of the countryside for preservation - National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Heritage Coasts and Country Parks. In addition advice and guidance was also given in relation to countryside development outside these areas, including forests and woodland.

The Countryside Review Committee of 1976 approved a management approach to countryside conservation and recreation, especially as farming and forestry were not subject to any statutory control. It also called for closer liaison with the farming community. The report fostered a general recognition that conservation and recreation were an integral part of the country way of life and that all rural issues would be best dealt with by looking at management of the countryside as a whole. The following areas should be documented:

#### **5.1.1 Designation**

- The designation, maintenance and monitoring of National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Heritage Coasts including Heritage Coast Pilot Projects: primarily policy files but also case files recording new designations, changes to boundaries and unsuccessful proposals for designation for significant sites. Conservation of the Broads and the New Forest was of particular importance during this period

### 5.1.2 Land Development and Management

- Policy files on the development of countryside management as a concept, including the impact on the countryside of the growth of development plans and the development control system
- Policy files on the development and implementation of National Park Plans, Country Park Management Plans, Local Authority Structure Plans and Countryside Management Schemes. This includes the impact of local government re-organisation in 1974 on the administration of national parks
- Policy files on the impact of the National Park Policy Review Committee Report of April 1974 (Sandford Report) and the formal government response to its recommendations in January 1976. Records of the Review itself are captured by the Department of the Environment Operational Selection Policy 1970 - 1979 (OSP1)
- Policy and research files on the management of lowlands, coast and uplands areas including the Future of the Uplands Exercise and the Norfolk Broads Grazing Marsh Experiment
- Policy files on common land
- Policy files on the impact of mining for minerals, oil and gas in designated areas
- Policy files on involvement in major public enquires and files holding significant material not presented to the enquiry
- Policy files on liaison over farming issues, especially the New Agricultural Landscapes programme published in 1975, and examples of files on its implementation
- Policy files on the impact on development in the countryside of the Department of the Environment Review of the Development Control System, 1975 (Dobry Review)
- Policy and example files on the of development and management of green belt and urban fringe sites including Operation Groundwork
- Policy files on preparation of 1978 Countryside Bill (which subsequently fell following change of government)
- Policy files on forestry and tree planting schemes including the Forestry Commission Scheme, Basis III
- Policy and research files on guidance on forest design to include recreational aspects, and the management and planning of woodland areas including small woods on farms
- Policy files recording the effect of Dutch Elm disease on the countryside and measures taken to remedy the situation
- Policy and research files on moor land conservation
- Policy files on Ministry of Defence use of designated areas
- Policy files on the drafting, passage implementation and monitoring of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
- Policy files on the Finance Act 1975 which exempted land of outstanding scenic beauty from Capital Transfer Tax, and advice on the management of this land

## 5.2 Access

Access to the Countryside needed to be controlled for the safety of members of the public, to preserve specific sites where necessary and to allow the work of landowners to continue unhindered. The Countryside Commission worked both to ensure that legal access was permitted and to avoid accidental straying onto private land. The Forestry Commission actively encouraged members of the public to use its land for recreational purposes whenever possible. The following areas should be documented:

- Policy and example case files on the planning, designation, variation and maintenance of footpaths, bridleways, long distance routes and coastal footpaths
- Policy files on the Countryside Commission input into and impact of the Public Local Inquiry into the use of Dartmoor by the Armed Forces in 1975, and public access to Defence land generally
- Policy files on improvements in way marking including the national code
- Minutes and papers of the Countryside Commission Public Rights of Way Advisory Committee
- Policy files on access to open country
- Policy files on the promotion and use of public transport and cycling for countryside recreation

## 5.3 Facilities and Activities

Both the Countryside Commission and the Forestry Commission provided advice on and funding for many specific facilities and activities in the countryside. The following areas should be documented:

- Policy files on maintenance and monitoring of Country Parks
- Policy files on and including the Forestry Commission Conservancy Recreation Plans and Recreation Policy
- Policy and example case files on the planning and provision of wayfaring and orienteering activities, forest walks, forest nature trails, forest drives and recreational routes
- Policy and example case files on the planning and provision of riverside walks, towpaths and other water features
- Policy and example case files on the planning and provision of facilities for the disabled and elderly
- Policy and case files on measures taken to deal with overuse of very popular sites, including Mount Snowdon
- Policy files on issue of second homes in designated areas

## 5.4 Research, Promotion and Public Awareness

The Countryside Commission was charged with promoting an understanding of the countryside and related issues with the public, including its value for recreational purposes. It also undertook research into

techniques to both preserve the natural beauty of the countryside and to improve recreation management. The following areas should be documented:

- Research and policy files on the increase in the use of countryside by the public for recreational purposes and the correlated increase in demand for information
- Policy files on the promotion of the countryside and forests through an improved understanding of the environment. This includes policy and example case files on interpretation projects and plans, and specifically interpretation of the work of farmers
- Minutes and papers of the Countryside Recreation Research Advisory Group (CRRAG)
- Research files recording statistics of significant surveys relating to recreational use of the countryside
- Research and policy files recording the development and promotion of the Country Code
- Policy files on liaison with English and Welsh Tourist Boards to promote the use of the countryside
- Research files and policy files recording change in recreational use of the Countryside, and its impact on the areas concerned

## **5.5 Financial Assistance**

The Countryside Commission encouraged local authorities, voluntary bodies, landowners, farmers and others to take action on conservation and recreation provisions by funding eligible projects. In the early 1980s the Countryside Commission started to fund more private sector bodies and voluntary organisations in order to achieve the best value for limited resources. The following areas should be documented:

- Policy files on grant-in-aid to eligible bodies
- Policy files on the impact of the windfall payment of £1.5 million to the Countryside Commission in Autumn 1978, which was used for grants to non-public sector bodies
- Policy files on potential sources for funding other than central government, e.g. European Economic Community (EEC) Directive on less favoured areas

## **6 Structure of Filing Systems**

### **6.1 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 to 1983 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.

## **6.2 Forestry Commission**

Forestry Commission files relating to recreational use of the countryside were created by two different sections of the organisation, namely Commercial Recreation and Forest Recreation. Commercial Recreation files were held at Headquarters in the Silviculture Division (later the Forest Management Division) and the Forestry Practice Division, and covered all areas of recreational activity within the Forestry Commission. This series contains material worthy of permanent preservation, specifically in relation to the development and planning of recreational activities on Forestry Commission land, but it will be necessary to undertake individual review of files to ascertain which should come to The National Archives. The Forest Recreation Series was held by local offices which serviced individual forests. The files record local, low level initiatives, and it is unlikely that any of them will warrant permanent preservation.

## **6.3 Department of the Environment**

The Department of the Environment's files relating to recreational use of the countryside, and the designation of particular areas duplicate those created by the Countryside Commission and so should not be permanently preserved. In addition, the Operational Selection Policy for the Department of the Environment 1970 - 1979 (OSP1) identified no major countryside planning issues, and so countryside planning files will not be preserved. However, the Department of the Environment Operational Selection Policy does capture policy files on the introduction of the urban fringe initiative.

## **7 Implementation**

7.1 The Countryside Commission is currently reviewing records created in 1973 and this is due for completion in June 2000. The review of files created during the early period of this Operational Selection Policy will start shortly thereafter, initially with a review of registry lists to eliminate files, which are not covered by either this Operational Selection 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 Policy as formal guidance on what should be selected, to be completed by January 2001.

7.2 The Forestry Commission does not have a central review unit. Once this Operational Selection Policy has been agreed, it will be issued to all reviewers to be used in making selection decisions along side existing



criteria for other areas of the Forestry Commission's work. It will also be referred to in the revised Records Management Handbook.

- 7.3 This Operational Selection Policy does not identify any additional records from the Department of the Environment which should be preserved. For information about the selection priorities, identified for Department of the Environment records, see the Operational Selection Policy for the Department of the Environment, 1970-1979 (OSP1).

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