**DAERA Environment Fund**

**NATURAL HERITAGE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE FUND COMPETITION 2022/23**

 **ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA and**

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT PRIORITIES**

**This is a grant competition for PROGRAMME/RESOURCE and CAPITAL funding for projects to deliver strategic environmental priorities and to help people to connect with the natural environment. The key themes for funding under this Challenge Competition are:**

* **Nature Recovery: Building Ecological and Climate Resilience**
* **Connecting People with Nature**

**ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

**Eligibility Criteria and Overarching Factors** that will be taken into account in assessing the project and allocating funding are:

a) **Applicants:** Applications may be submitted by constituted not for profit organisations or councils which will deliver measurable key environmental outcomes.

b) **Minimum and Maximum grant:**

The minimum overall Challenge Fund grant is £30,000.

The maximum amount of DAERA funding available under the competition will be 85% of eligible project costs except in exceptional or compelling circumstances.

c) **Value for money:** You must demonstrate that government funding is essential to enable the delivery of the outcome and that the project will be delivered in a cost efficient manner. The application must show how you will lever match funding[[1]](#footnote-1).

d) **Full grant spend by 31/3/2023:** You must supply evidence that you will be able to achieve full spend of the grant by 31/3/2023. This evidence may include a project work plan, evidence of experience of completion of similar projects, planning permission or other permission required and clear proposals for match funding sources.

e) **Evidence of the need for the project and its outputs:** Applicants must outline how the project has been identified, why it is needed, for example how it will help ensure measurable delivery of environmental obligations under international and domestic law, the draft Programme for Government, Green Growth Strategy, environmental policies and environmental action plans where there are gaps in delivery. You should also outline any other benefits such as outputs relating to jobs and skills that your project will deliver or if the project is related to impacts arising from the COVID Pandemic.

f) **Environmental Impact Priorities/Criteria**: The project’s positive environmental impact and how this will be measured and monitored – see sustainable impact section below.

g) **Scale:** The scale of the impact of the proposed project will form a part in the decision-making process – this may include the geographic scale or the size of the population affected.

h) **Sustainable impact**: Projects must demonstrate that they will not cause adverse impact to the environment. In addition, projects must show how the outcomes will be sustained and monitored after the funding period for a minimum of 3 years.

Note:

* Payment of grant will be in arrears unless there are exceptional circumstances requiring a degree of payment upfront.
* The normal Terms and Conditions of grant for the Environment Fund can be found here: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/environment-fund>, along with the Environment Fund Guidance Notes (Parts 1 & 2) which may be useful to help you to understand terminology, priorities and complete some of the questions in the Application Form. These have not been written specifically for this Challenge Competition but apply to the overall Environment Fund.

**Natural Heritage Environmental Challenge Fund**

**Environmental Priorities and Output Measures**

Applicants can apply for projects which are ready to deliver and are able to spend the grant fully by end March 2023. You will need to demonstrate how your project delivers against at least one of the Fund’s Environmental Priorities below.

All on the ground project activity must take place in Northern Ireland[[2]](#footnote-2).

Below are some examples of the type of work or projects that are relevant to the two themes of this fund. Note that this list is not exhaustive. Further advice and information on setting out what your project will seek to deliver against the themes is provided within the Guidance Notes.

1. **Nature Recovery: Building ecological and climate resilience**

We are primarily interested in projects that will significantly contribute towards commitments to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030, described in [Nature Positive 2030 Summary (jncc.gov.uk)](https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/6de7bf27-055e-4407-ad29-4814e1613d90/nature-positive-2030-summary-report.pdf), especially initiatives and actions which will: increase the area of wildlife habitat; protect and improve management of habitats, and/or create ‘nature networks’ which will enhance habitat connectivity and support higher species populations or greater species diversity

These will demonstrate contribution to one or more of the [Lawton principles](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130402170324/http%3A/archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf)[[3]](#footnote-3) listed below:

* bigger (e.g. expansion or buffering of natural heritage sites)
* better (e.g. improvement in condition of a ASSI or restoration of degraded habitats, especially peatlands)
* more (e.g. higher species populations or greater species diversity), and
* more joined up (e.g. creation of wildlife corridors connecting sites)

Projects may include:

1. Actions that will contribute to a larger scale development or implementation of landscape scale nature recovery networks, which may encompass:
* Restoration of priority habitat[[4]](#footnote-4), including terrestrial, freshwater and marine habitats.
* Improvement in the condition of Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs), peatland habitats and designated sites in the terrestrial, marine and coastal environment.
* Creation of blue and green spaces that connect wildlife-rich habitats by acting as wildlife corridors or 'stepping stones'.
* Initiation of a pilot project to scope and demonstrate delivery of the draft post-2020 framework ‘30x30’ target[[5]](#footnote-5), in Northern Ireland at a significant scale
1. Recovery of threatened native species, including helping to reverse species decline.
2. Measures to tackle specific threats to the natural environment such as invasive non-native species, wildfires and ammonia.
3. Nature-based solutions, particularly for water quality (such as natural waterways protection and improvements) and climate change mitigation and adaptation (such as increased natural shoreline resilience to address coastal erosion and coastal squeeze or resilient peatland habitats to address degradation).
4. Establishment and interpretation of baseline surveys and/or environmental surveying, monitoring and mapping where this will produce required statistically reliable long-term surveillance indices/data, including fixed point photography. This can include the equipment and training required.
5. Projects to support ecosystem assessment, mapping, modelling and reporting to inform the design and delivery of effective, coherent nature networks and the development of decision making tools for policies, plans and programmes. This could include pilot projects to demonstrate how natural capital accounting can be implemented and incorporated into policy and decision making.
6. Production of data (including development of monitoring methods), and case studies on the feasibility and application of habitat and species restoration and Nature Based Solutions in a Northern Ireland context.
7. Feasibility studies and development of strategic plans for future large scale delivery of these environmental outcomes to fill a gap in need.
8. Strategic training programmes to address the skills gaps preventing vital environmental action. This may include:
* Invertebrate identification & survey skills
* Practical habitat management skills including use of machinery
1. Purchase of specialist equipment such as for habitat management, restoration, creation or monitoring including air quality and greenhouse gas monitoring.
2. Land purchase to help deliver the environmental outcomes outlined above.
3. **Connecting people with nature**

We are primarily interested in projects that will help connect significant numbers of people with nature - through increasing the quality, quantity or accessibility of nature to people or increasing their understanding and involvement in the protection of nature, natural landscapes and earth science.

Projects may include significant actions contributing to:

1. Design, creation and improvement of nature-rich core path networks, strategic routes, waymark ways and trails in urban and rural locations and provision of associated infrastructure to enhance accessibility for all[[6]](#footnote-6). Routes must: lead to a quality experience of the natural environment; be a minimum of 1km long or provide nature rich link paths to longer walks or provide sustainable access to a designated site; and not charge for their use.
2. Improvements to national or regional environmental education facilities.
3. Provision or improvement of regional/national coordination, resources and capacity building activities for leaders and peer leaders to support development of confidence and capacity to deliver environmental learning and engagement projects for the natural environment.
4. Improving specific groups connection, work for or understanding of the natural environment through strategic coordination activities that may include development and implementation of:
* Educational opportunities and/or access to nature, particularly for under-represented groups and less engaged audiences.
* Citizen science for environmental conservation and improvement where this will produce reliable long-term surveillance indices/data.
* Bolstering health and wellbeing through volunteering or blue/green social prescribing.
* Action for the environment.
1. Strategic community engagement and volunteering development for environmental conservation and improvement including the establishment of strategic local groups or greater public involvement within organisations.
2. Development of feasibility studies, strategic plans, data, mapping and statistics on outdoor recreation and environmental education at a regional or sub-regional scale.
3. Essential short term maintenance, rangering and visitor management associated with the increased use of outdoor recreation routes within priority habitats during the Covid Pandemic.
4. Land purchase to help deliver the environmental outcomes outlined above.

**Guidance on Project Outcomes and Output Measures**

We recognise that it may not be possible to demonstrate delivery of longer-term environmental or social outcomes by the end of March 2023. However, we expect you to:

* set out in your application what you will deliver during the project that will contribute to your longer-term outcomes
* identify how you will measure and monitor the outcomes to be delivered and have a plan to evaluate the project’s impact
* show how you intend to sustain positive impacts of the projects post-delivery.

We expect you to describe in your application where you have drawn on existing evidence around what works in delivering against the key themes, or in developing indicators for your projects.

Below are some example project outcomes and output measures under each theme that you may want to consider in completing the section on Project Outcomes. This may help you to define activities and deliverables within your plan and collect quantitative data to evaluate impact. Please note that these are intended as examples and you may wish to focus on different aspects against your chosen theme(s).

1. **Nature Recovery: Building ecological and climate resilience**

**Example Project Outcomes**

Natural Heritage will be in a better condition, as a result of (for example):

* Existing wildlife habitats protected and enhanced
* Wildlife habitats expanded or more connected
* New or restored wildlife-rich/priority habitats
* Habitat restored or created for enhanced carbon sequestration and storage or improved resilience to climate risks
* Nature and land use change supporting improved water quality
* Nature-based solutions to support climate change adaptation, including flood mitigation or coastal erosion management
* Increased investment in Natural Capital to deliver solutions
* Actions to support species (particularly pollinators and other native species)
* Interpreted standardised baseline data for habitats and/or species that will inform future enhancement/conservation actions.

**Example Output Measures - what are your expected results by March 2023?**

* Area of land/water undergoing or prepared for restoration or to support new habitat or species
* Area of peatland (or other habitat) brought into active management to improve condition
* Area of natural habitats now joined up to create wildlife corridors
* Measures implemented as part of river or waterways restoration plan
* Area of habitat covered by new formulated plans
* Land management assessed for carbon budget and actions implemented to reduce emissions
* Area of land and habitats identified, prepared or undergoing changes to increase resilience to climate change risks , following assessment of local vulnerabilities
* Report on the baseline data with proposed future steps.
1. **Connecting people with nature**

**Example Project Outcomes**

* Engaging or empowering community to support nature-based objectives
* Access to nature improved
* People connecting with nature to increase understanding and/or improve wellbeing

**Example Output measures - what are your expected results by March 2023?**

* Relative position along the community engagement standards scale (outreach/consult/involve/collaborate/shared leadership)
* Opportunities for volunteering for nature or citizen science, such as species monitoring
* Increase in numbers and diversity of people engaging with nature or visiting natural features
* Length of footpath or area of open access land created, improved and/or now accessible
1. **Additional Outcomes:**

**Example Project Outcomes**

* People gain or retain employment in the environment sector
* Skills developed or retained within the organisation
* Greater local involvement in your organisation
* Development of evidence base to inform future work

**Example output measures – what are you expecting to achieve by March 2023?**

* Number of jobs created or retained
* Skills, expertise or qualifications gained
* Increase in visitor or volunteer numbers
* Development of relationships to secure income streams
* Improved evidence base to support ongoing activities
1. You may use other 2022/23 or 2023/24 programme/resource funding as match funding for your project – but not funding you already receive under the Strategic Strand of the Environment Fund. You may also use volunteer time as match funding. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [The](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-list-priority-habitats) organisation delivering the project may be based outside Northern Ireland or there be cross-border work taking place but this grant must be spent on the element of work to be delivered for NI [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Making Space for Nature (Lawton 2010) [[ARCHIVED CONTENT] ARCHIVE: Defra, UK - The Environment - Biodiversity (nationalarchives.gov.uk)](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130402154501/http%3A/archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/index.htm) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Northern Ireland list of priority habitats | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (daera-ni.gov.uk)](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-list-priority-habitats) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Whilst not yet agreed, The 30x30 target is articulated as follows in the current version (CBD/POST2020/PREP/2/1) of the zero draft of the post-2020 framework: “Target 2. By 2030, protect and conserve through well connected and effective system of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures at least 30 per cent of the planet with the focus on areas particularly important for biodiversity”. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Projects and facilities for motorised outdoor recreation are not eligible, except where these are to provide enhanced passive recreation access for people with a disability. Café type facilities and lighting are not eligible. Changing Places (<http://www.changing-places.org/> ) and parking facilities are eligible. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)