

NATURE30

Criteria and approach to Nature30 on Scotland's land and freshwater



Introduction

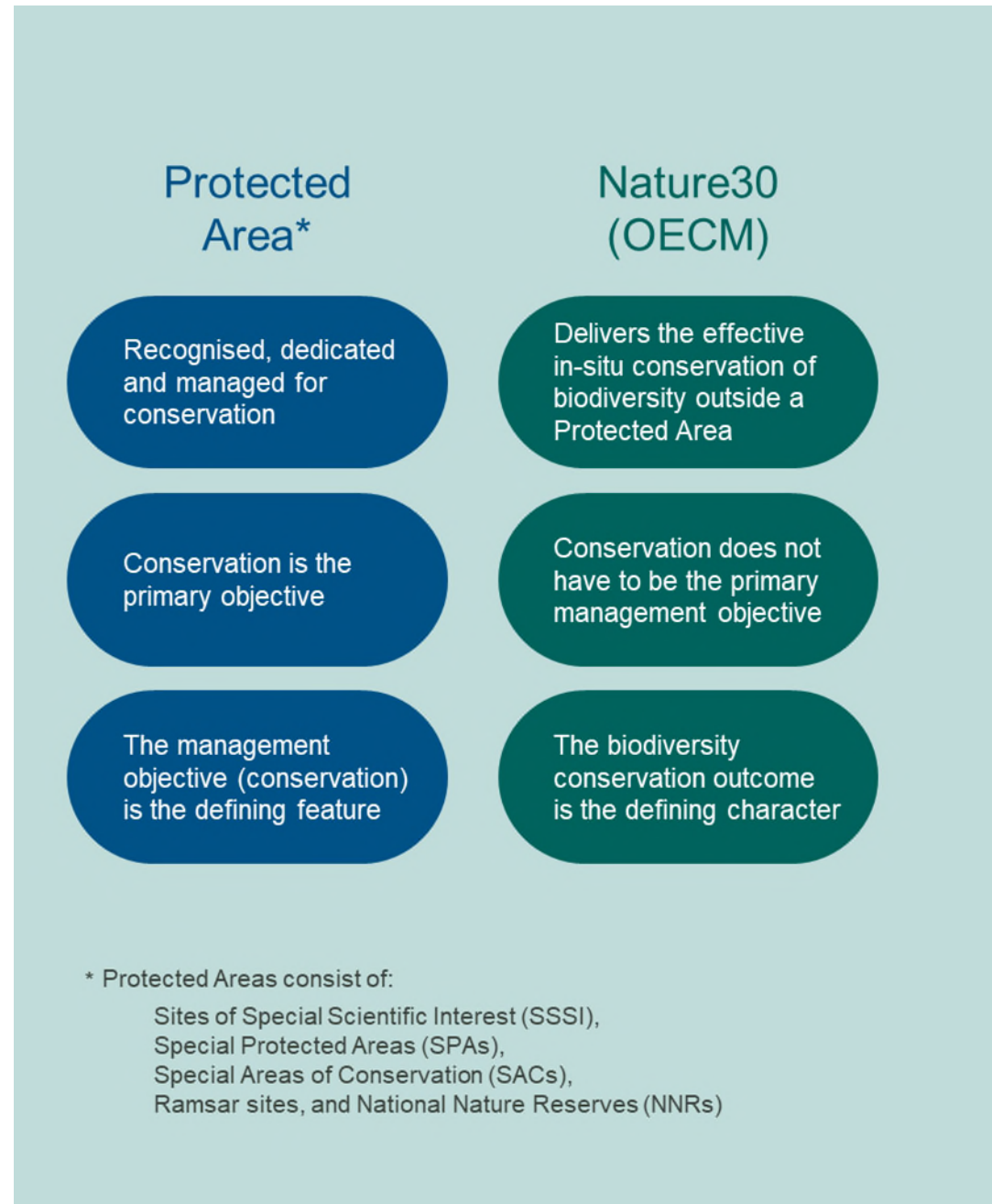
The [30 by 30 target](#), to ensure 30% of the world's terrestrial, inland water, coastal and marine areas are effectively conserved and managed by 2030 through ecologically representative, well connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), was agreed in 2022 as part of the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

The Scottish Government has committed to achieving this target; being delivered through our existing Protected Areas and OECMs as outlined in the [30 by 30 Framework](#). Scotland's approach to OECMs is known as Nature30 going forward.

Nature30 offers a fresh approach to recognising biodiversity conservation in Scotland. In their simplest form, Nature30 sites are defined areas that are put forward by landowners/managers as being managed effectively, in such a way that produces benefits for biodiversity that are secured in the long-term. They are being introduced to complement our existing Protected Areas and help recognise the safeguarding, restoration and enhancement of some of Scotland's most nature rich areas. These two complementary approaches to biodiversity conservation will each play an equally important role in achieving 30 by 30.

To decide how this approach will work in Scotland, a set of Nature30 criteria has been designed.

This document provides the guiding principles and supporting information for recognising Nature30 sites.



What is a Nature30 site?

Noted internationally as an 'other effective area-based conservation measure' (OECM), they are a globally approved means to recognise the safeguarding of biodiversity over a specified geographic area. Sites with Nature30 recognition will have effectively managed objectives for the restoration, conservation or enhancement of biodiversity that may be delivered through or alongside complementary but non-conservation objectives. The management of the site will be committed to maintaining the conservation outcomes in the long term.

Importantly, Nature30 status is a recognition, not a regulation. It does not oblige additional management requirements for landowners. Instead, it acknowledges - through legal or similarly well-defined means - where conservation outcomes are being achieved through existing governance and management.

Examples of areas with Nature30 recognition that do not have conservation management as their primary objective might be sites managed for energy production with secondary conservation objectives, or where conservation objectives are met as a result of the primary objective e.g. defence or water catchment management.

Nature30 recognition is voluntary and, although they are recognised on the basis of assured long-term management, consent can be withdrawn or reviewed if circumstances change, including after it has been formally recognised.

What Nature30 is	What Nature30 isn't
✓ Recognition	✗ Designation
✓ Voluntary and bottom-up	✗ Compulsory and top-down
✓ Biodiversity value equal to Protected Areas	✗ Biodiversity value lesser than protected areas
✓ Championing good management underway	✗ Comes with additional burdens
✓ A new approach alongside Protected Areas	✗ Sites earmarked to become a Protected Area in the future
✓ Iterative and supportive nomination process	✗ A static, unsupported nomination process
✓ Flexible and adaptive, but robust, approach to conservation	✗ Vague approach allowing for greenwashing

Biodiversity values

The biodiversity that Nature30 sites will support or enhance is of equal importance to that of traditional Protected Areas but with broader representation.

By delivering effective in-situ conservation of biodiversity, Nature30 sites can contribute to ecologically representative and well-connected conservation systems, integrated within wider landscapes, and in doing so, generate a range of positive conservation outcomes, such as:

- Conserving important ecosystems, habitats and wildlife corridors;
- Supporting the recovery of threatened species;
- Maintaining ecosystem functions and securing ecosystem services;
- Enhancing resilience against threats; and
- Retaining and connecting remnants of fragmented ecosystems within developed landscapes.



Recognition

Nature30 recognition is determined by a voluntary assessment against the criteria. This assessment will cover aspects including biodiversity values, management and effectiveness, long-term commitment, governance, and being geographically defined. To be recognised as a Nature30 site, the area needs to meet all the criteria.

Nature30 recognition is not a 'stepping-stone' towards designation as a protected area. However, where a landowner wishes to instead have their land formally designated as a Protected Area, NatureScot are available to assist.

Why seek Nature30 recognition?

There are many different reasons why someone may wish to seek recognition for their land as a Nature30 site including:

- Formal acknowledgement, and internationally recognised accreditation, of a landowner's effective management resulting in biodiversity conservation
- An enhanced ability to attract investment and funding to support management from public and private sources
- Recognition of different approaches to conservation including integrated land management that demonstrates high value biodiversity outcomes in addition to other objectives (e.g. food, materials, tourism, improving water quality, flood risk management etc.).

Assessment

NatureScot will be actively seeking to assist those interested in recognition, providing support and guidance with the process. Assessment will check that a site meets the requirements of all the criteria. The full list of criteria and details on pages 7-9.

This criteria and assessment has been based on the International Union for Conservation of Nature ([IUCN guidance](#)) to ensure it aligns with international approaches to OECMs, and informed by a Working Group, consisting of a variety of stakeholders, to tailor it to the Scottish context. It was then piloted with 11 sites across Scotland to see what it was like to work through the assessment in practice, with real world examples of potential areas. Together this has helped developed an easy to understand self-assessment form that captures the necessary supporting evidence – finding a balance between level of onerous on the applicant and ensuring a robust process. Wherever possible existing information (e.g. pre-held biodiversity data or management plans and monitoring arrangements) will be used.



Managed and effective

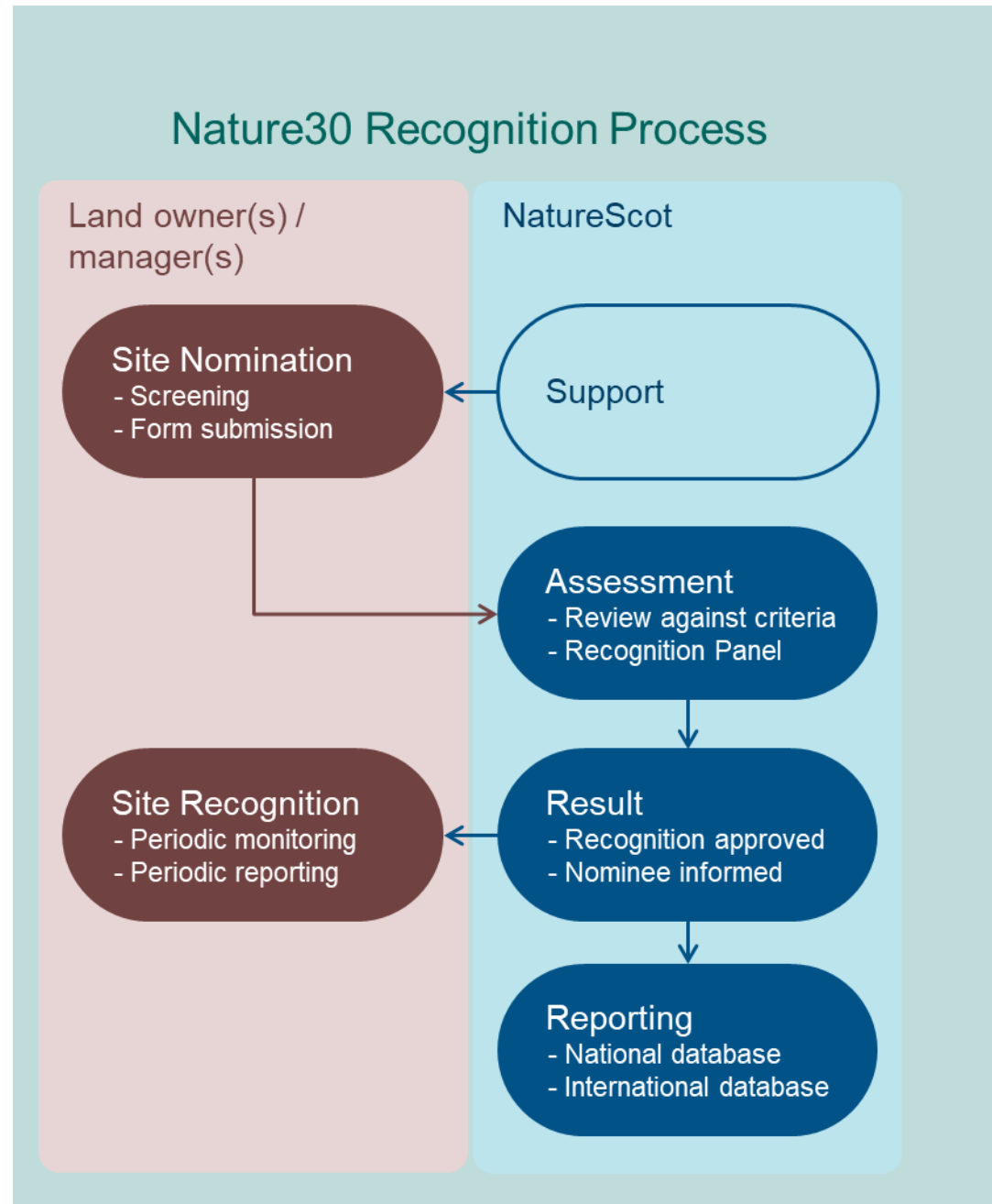
Nature30 sites must have management that effectively benefits biodiversity in place and regular monitoring carried out by the landholder/manager or a suitable third party acting with consent on behalf of the landholder. Given the long-term nature of Nature30 sites, management arrangements must be adaptive, periodically reviewed based on the results of the monitoring, and be able to respond to emerging threats and pressures.

Where existing monitoring is in place the results can be used to demonstrate management effectiveness. NatureScot will work with owners/managers of nominated Nature30 sites where there is no existing monitoring, or it does not provide sufficient information, and support the plugging of any gaps.

Reporting

Once recognised as Nature30, sites will contribute to the national and global 30 by 30 target and their boundaries will be reported on in the appropriate national and international databases ([SiteLink](#) and [World Database of OECMs](#)).

Periodic monitoring reporting will be required to NatureScot in line with the sites agreed monitoring cycle (which does not need to be annual) to ensure the effectiveness of ongoing conservation of the biodiversity values. Changes in site status will be reported in the above databases.



Nature30 Recognition Criteria in Scotland

Criterion 1: The site is not a Protected Area

A site cannot be both a Protected Area and a Nature30 site. Therefore, the below cannot also have Nature30 recognition:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Special Protected Areas (SPAs)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- Ramsar sites
- National Nature Reserves (NNRs).

For the purpose of 30 by 30, National Parks are not recognised as a qualifying Protected Area type. Therefore, areas within them can still have Nature30 recognition provided they meet all the criteria and are not already designated as a Protected Area (See [30 by 30 Framework](#) for more info).

Criterion 2: The site has a legitimate governance authority

Good governance is vital to allow sites to be effective and provide sustained benefits for biodiversity. The following governance authority types are recognised and acceptable by themselves or in combination as shared governance: government bodies, private individuals/companies or organisations (including charities), local communities.

Consent

Recognition is voluntary, based on the free, prior, and informed consent of those managing an area. Consent confirms that the governing authority, local communities, and (as appropriate) other rights-holders have agreed to Nature30 recognition. Where the governing authority is not the landowner it must have the informed written consent of the landowner. Where the entity (organisation/group/individual) leading the assessment is not the governing authority or the landowner the informed written consent of the governing

authority and/or landowner must be provided. This includes consent across multiple landowners for Nature30 recognition where applicable. This consent can be withdrawn at any time and the site would cease to have Nature30 recognition (note, existing obligations under long-term assurances would be subject to their own requirements).

Mandate

The governance authority must have the necessary authority, consent and right to make decisions on the overall management and use of the site. This must ensure the authority to govern activities that impact biodiversity conservation outcomes, and their intention must be to manage and control present and future threats to biodiversity. This applies whether biodiversity outcomes are a primary, secondary or ancillary objective.

Criterion 3: The site is geographically defined

The boundary of a Nature30 site must be clearly mapped and cover the area over which there is consent and agreement for management. There is no minimum or maximum size, but the size must be sufficient to achieve the long-term conservation of the identified biodiversity values. Small intensively managed areas with limited conservation value such as field margins, roadside verges, hedgerows, or firebreaks will not qualify. The boundary can be defined by ecosystem type limits (e.g. woodland, heathland), geographic or identifiable features on the ground, customary or administrative boundaries.

The boundary can cover part of a holding, a whole holding, parts or whole areas of land under different ownership or control, or areas combined, under multiple different ownerships.

It is recognised that small changes to boundaries are commonplace. Minor changes to site boundaries will be recorded but will not automatically trigger reassessment of the site.

Nature30 only covers terrestrial areas, including inland waters and coastal areas.

Criterion 4: The site is of importance for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity values

Nature30 sites will have documented biodiversity values for which the area is considered important. The biodiversity values may change over time, whether due to design or external factors. Adaptive management approaches will be used to ensure that the site continues to deliver against one or more of these values in the long-term.

The site must support, or be effectively managed to deliver, at least one of these listed biodiversity values:

- Ecosystems supporting rare, vulnerable, threatened, or endangered species and habitats
- Ecosystems that are under-represented in protected areas networks including those under restoration.
- A high level of ecological integrity or intactness, including areas under restoration
- Significant populations of range-restricted ecosystems or species.
- Important species aggregations and life stages, such as feeding, moulting, breeding, spawning, and migration
- Areas of importance for ecological connectivity.

Restoration sites

Not all damaged or degraded ecosystems will meet the biodiversity value requirements above. Sites with restoration as an objective, that demonstrate effective management, secured for a suitable timeframe to deliver the desired biodiversity values from the area, are likely to meet the criteria. Sites degraded to the point that ecosystem function and biodiversity values have been lost will not qualify until there is effective management in place towards restoring biodiversity values.

Such restoration efforts must address the cause of the original degradation and biodiversity loss and employ long-term adaptive management to safeguard against future threats.

Criterion 5: The governance and management of the site is expected to be sustained long term

All sites will demonstrate a clear and secure long-term commitment to the continuation of the sites management arrangements that are delivering in-situ biodiversity conservation outcomes.

This will be supported by a means of long-term assurance such as contractual agreements, title conditions or other effective means of assuring long-term commitment, in place for a minimum of 25 years. Many sites will be secured for much longer periods or in perpetuity and this is strongly encouraged.

A list of existing mechanisms to provide long-term assurance of at least 25 years will be included in the guidance and continually updated as other mechanisms become available e.g. carbon codes and credits, planning conditions or obligations, and management agreements, where they exceed 25 years. NatureScot will look to work with those keen to explore Nature30 recognition to find the means of securing long-term assurance which works best for them.

Ancillary and secondary sites may already have suitable long-term protections applied as a by-product of their primary objective (e.g. MOD Defence areas or water catchment protections).

Criterion 6: The site is managed, and evidence is available that the management of the site is effective in delivering positive and sustained outcomes for biodiversity conservation

Management

Whilst conservation of biodiversity does not have to be the primary objective of the site or its management there must be a direct causal link between the area's overall objective and management and the in-situ conservation of

biodiversity over the long-term. 'Managed' can include a deliberate decision to leave the area untouched.

Where the site has management for alternate objectives, biodiversity objectives must not be compromised, and the surrounding areas should not be negatively impacted. In certain circumstances Nature30 may be considered where there are both positive and negative outcomes for biodiversity, but the overall outcome must be positive.

Nature30 sites will have documented objectives for the restoration, conservation or enhancement of biodiversity values on the site (see Criteria 3). They will also have documented management arrangements, regardless of their primary purpose, which are responsible for conservation of this biodiversity. This includes sites where the management decision is to leave the area untouched, with such sites still requiring a management system that would allow emerging risks or pressures to be identified, and a management response to be implemented.

Documented site management (that may be an existing management plan or statement) should include:

- The biodiversity values for which the site is important
- The conservation objectives
- Known threats (including onsite and offsite/landscape scale pressures such as herbivore pressure)
- The detailed management measures that address the known threats and pressures or the biodiversity conservation/enhancement measures where threats and pressures are not currently present
- Recognition and involvement of all relevant authorities, rightsholders and stakeholders responsible for management
- Detail on how monitoring results will be evaluated, to allow appraisal of existing management against the targets for biodiversity and to enable adaptive management.

Management arrangements should be dynamic, adaptive and responsive and reviewed periodically (at a minimum every 5 years) to allow flexibility for

adapting and responding to changing circumstances and allowing threats and pressures to be effectively identified and responded to (such as climate change).

Collaborative management is strongly encouraged, being integrated with the wider landscape and neighbouring protected or conserved areas and [Nature Networks](#) where possible. Collaborative management must be clearly demonstrated where there is mixed governance and partnership working.

The integration and management of Nature30 sites through Rural Land Use Partnerships (RLUPs) and Local Place Plans could be an effective means of promoting strong collaboration and representation.

Monitoring

Nature30 sites must have appropriate monitoring to ensure they are effective. Site owners or managers can undertake their own monitoring or may already be carrying this out. However, there needs to be confidence that this monitoring is robust and reliable, informing management and appropriately aligned to the biodiversity values of the site.

At the most basic level, monitoring will need to be able to demonstrate that the management proposed is taking place and that it is being effective at reducing pressures on the site and delivering the desired outcomes for nature.

NatureScot are developing a new approach to protected area monitoring, called **Delivering Healthy Ecosystems** (DHE) (See Annex I), which participants may wish to consider, and NatureScot staff can discuss if and how this approach could be applied to their site.

Annex 1: Monitoring for Delivering Healthy Ecosystems

The monitoring for Delivering Healthy Ecosystems (DHE) approach is currently under development within NatureScot and will be updated to reflect any necessary changes.

The components necessary to allow assessment under the DHE approach are:

1. The monitoring plan must detail baseline conditions, known pressures and threats, the site's potential for recovery using science based local information, and state the desired outcomes and goals
2. Management targets and actions should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound)
3. Monitoring must directly measure the management targets using consistent and reliable methods that allow tracking of changes over time
4. Monitoring should address nature recovery where pressures have been reduced (e.g. is the grazing pressure reduction delivering nature recovery and addressing the site goals?)
5. Site monitoring should identify emerging pressures and threats, which can inform management strategies as needed
6. There should be high confidence there will be enough resources for ongoing management, reporting, and monitoring throughout the life of the Nature30 site.
7. Aggregated reporting should be publicly available, high-quality, and follow the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable), ensuring that data is easy to use and meets robust quality assurance standards
8. Reporting should be consistent and guide future management and monitoring efforts, recognising that monitoring needs may change over time
9. It is important to establish clear governance and accountability for ecological performance at the site.