

## The Environment Bank Newsletter – Autumn/Winter 2009



### Habitat Banking: Moving forward

Habitat banking continues to attract huge interest, both in the UK and in Europe, as a mechanism where the true cost of the use of land is accounted for, ensuring that impacts from development and losses to ecosystem services are replaced by a net gain in biodiversity and ecosystem function in the wider countryside.

Several scoping studies and workshops investigating a biodiversity trading system herald the benefits to biodiversity. A DEFRA commissioned study of biodiversity offsets, that Environment Bank contributed to, reports that offsets could benefit biodiversity in an English context and outlines implementation options (see [DEFRA Biodiversity Offset Scoping Study](#)). Amending existing policy frameworks, developing incentives and giving more guidance was perceived as the way forward.

Business and Biodiversity Offset Programme (BBOP) completed Phase I producing a statement with 10 principles of Biodiversity Offsets along with supporting information on offset design, potential cost-benefits and implementation), and has now embarked on Phase II.

The first French biodiversity bank, CDC Biodiversité, launched in 2008 has announced the acquisition of their first site; 357 hectares intended to be developed as a reserve and house IUCN Red List Threatened species such as the Little Bustard, Ocellated lizard, Pin-tailed Sandgrouse and Stone curlew.



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The 'Habitat banking in the EU' workshop (DG Environment, Brussels) held in September 2009 proposes habitat banking as a useful instrument, with the creation of market incentives able to stimulate private investment in biodiversity conservation. There is a current focus on developing best practice guidelines and implementation options so it is just a matter of time before the policy is in place in the UK.

### Environment Bank Press

We are pleased to have had an article on habitat banking published by the Guardian online (to read the article see "[Habitat banking is the future of nature conservation in the UK](#)"). The article was published alongside a piece on Conservative party plans for a conservation credit scheme (to read follow the link [Tories reveal plans for 'conservation banks'](#)).

### **Ramsar recognises US wetland bank**

Proving that habitat banking is an effective mechanism for restoring habitats and wildlife, a wetland mitigation bank has been certified as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. The Wetlandsbank Group's Panther Island Mitigation Bank project contributed over 1,100 ha of restored lands together with management funding in perpetuity, creating wetlands essential to birds and wildlife whilst also providing natural flood protection.

### **Conservative Conservation Credit Scheme**

Proposals for a Conservation Banking scheme designed to ensure remuneration by developers to contribute to the protection and restoration of wildlife and habitats were first outlined in April this year. Shadow environment secretary Nick Herbert said that these proposals are to be central to their environmental agenda. Conservation groups, members of the Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link), have recognised that a conservation credits mechanism could yield real gains for conservation at both a national and local scale. The Conservative party will make public the detailed plans for the scheme early next year. The Environment Bank has contributed to the proposals and welcomes the positive statements from NGO's.

### **Not a 'license to trash'**

One of the main concerns surrounding the introduction of a 'bio-banking scheme' is that developers would gain a license to trash through paying credits – this is not the case. A habitat credit scheme would work within the existing protection framework afforded to biodiversity and habitats through the Habitats and Birds Directives, Wildlife and Countryside Act and Planning Policy Statement 9. With these established regulatory mechanisms, significant impacts on biodiversity have to be avoided. Further support for this approach was gained in a recent law case (Woolley v Cheshire East Council) which established that by law Local

Planning Authorities need to consider in applications whether development plans are meeting stringent requirements which include overriding public interest, consideration of alternative options and offering mitigation strategies to maintain favourable conservation status of habitats or species affected.

### **Environment Bank Vision**

The Environment Bank has consulted widely with the planning and development control sector and is confident that developers want to make contributions to enhance the natural environment at a large scale, in return for greater clarity in the way applications are approached. A key benefit of habitat banking is the pooling of habitat credits which results in significantly increased funding available for landscape scale projects such as creation of ecological networks. Landscape scale projects aim to work with natural systems and reconnect fragmented habitats to establish environmental protection, recreation, healthy living and sustainable flood management.



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The UK needs to address the future impacts of climate change. Amongst these flooding is a real threat and the creation or restoration of wetlands or re-meandering of rivers will play a significant role in flood management solutions. Natural solutions would bring benefits such as reductions in flooding risk, improved water quality for people, and provide habitats for wildlife. A habitat banking scheme will facilitate such landscape scale projects and contribute to the creation of a robust environment, sustainable local development, healthy living together with providing us the ability to meet future climate change challenges.

**2010: International Year of Biodiversity**

2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. November 2009 saw the launch of IYB-UK, a partnership to support the International Year of Biodiversity which aims to halt degradation of ecosystems and raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity.

In our next newsletter we will outline the work we are doing to determine the shape of the habitat banking model. We have put together a high level group of people including developers, landowners and planners, in order to shape the model that these sectors would sign up to. We will keep you posted.

**The Environment Bank is the first company of its kind in the UK, and provides the mechanism by which effective biodiversity and landscape conservation can be delivered by taking a strategic approach, enabling landscapes of substantial worth to be created, managed and maintained within a long-term framework.**

Visit [www.environmentbank.com](http://www.environmentbank.com) for more information.