

CUMBRIAN WHITE-TAILED EAGLE PROJECT

Background Information

White-tailed eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*, also known as ‘sea eagles’) went extinct in Britain in 1918. Reintroductions started in the 1970s and have since reinstated subpopulations in Ireland, Isle of Wight and Scotland. A reintroduced population in Cumbria would act as a stepping stone population within a wider British Isles network and could result in ecological, economic and social benefits locally.

The Cumbrian White-tailed Eagle Project (CWTEP) is led by The Lifescape Project charity and supported by a steering group including the University of Cumbria, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, RSPB, the Wildland Research Institute, Lake District National Park Authority, the National Trust, and local estate owners and managers. The steering group would support a reintroduction if the conditions are right – if there is an area in Cumbria where white-tailed eagles can live, if it’s practically possible, and if local people are accepting of the bird back in the landscape.

Our ecological research has shown that Cumbria and the surrounding areas (the ‘project region’) has suitable habitat for white-tailed eagles as well as plenty of food, and that reintroduced birds would be able to grow into a healthy population. Wider ecological assessments and heritage impact assessments are ongoing.

Over a 13-month period, the project listened to people’s opinions on a white-tailed eagle reintroduction via questionnaires, community workshops, interviews and focus groups.

Over 24,800 people were engaged and consulted in the social consultation process. 2,392 people completed the individual questionnaire, with 1,938 of these respondents living in the project region. Our results from the individual questionnaire show that overall, there is a high level of support (78%) and positive attitudes towards a white-tailed eagle reintroduction amongst individuals within the project region. For more detail, please read the CWTEP Social Consultation Report.

The next step is to collect and collate organisational views from stakeholder groups.

Section One - About your Organisation

This section collects data to explore the demographic information of organisations that have completed the questionnaire.

1. Name of your organisation: National Sheep Association

2.a. Which geographical area(s) does your organisation cover:

Select ALL that apply

- **United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland)**

- Great Britain (England, Scotland, and Wales)
- Mostly England
- Mostly Scotland
- Mostly Wales
- Mostly Cumbria
- Other – please specify: _____

2.b. How are you representing your organisation?

At a:

- Local level
- Regional level
- **National level**

2.c. Are you representing a division within your organisation?

- **No**
- Yes. Please specify: _____

3. What is the purpose of your organisation?

NSA represents the views of its sheep farmer members and is the only body solely working for the sustainable future of the sheep sector. NSA staff work as a bridge between farmers, researchers, policy makers and executive bodies, advocating for pastoralism and sheep keeping. A key focus is health and welfare and driving improvements in both. Farmer to farmer learning is another thing we facilitate.

4. Please describe your organisation's previous experience(s) with species reintroductions (including as an impacted stakeholder group).

Formed in 1892, the NSA has been a voice for the sheep sector through the introduction of the White-Tailed Eagle to Scotland. Furthermore, NSA has collaborated with those working on introducing the Lynx to Northumberland, and efforts to gauge the viability of Lynx in the Highlands. This has included study trips to Switzerland. Latterly, NSA has

represented members on English and Scottish Sea Eagle management panels with arm's length bodies. This includes consultation on the proposed Norfolk release of the bird and representing farmers on the Isle of Wight steering group.

5. The Cumbrian White-tailed Eagle Project's steering group undertook a mapping exercise to identify and define stakeholder groups.

Many stakeholder groups overlap with different areas of interest.

Please select up to THREE relevant interest group categories of your organisation.

- Local community group
- Environment and conservation
- Farming and landowning
- Forestry
- Hunting / shooting game / angling / fishing
- Heritage, tourism, and recreation
- The scientific community
- Regulatory bodies
- Other (please specify): _____

6.a. The Cumbrian White-tailed Eagle Project's Social Consultation Report was shared publicly on 12th February 2026.

Have you read the Social Consultation report?

- Yes
- No

6.b. If you answered 'Yes' to question 6.a., please write below any thoughts or feedback you have on the social consultation report.

We welcome the engagement you have had and the effort put into finding out how people feel about the release of White-Tailed Eagles. However, we feel that your claim that 78% of people support the release out of 1,938 responses is artful and misleading. This could be true, but we do not know given the statistics. There are more than 500,000 people living in Cumbria. NSA feels some really good conversations could have been

had if Lifescape had attended the farmer meeting. Stating a clear case for the bird is really important to win over hearts and minds, especially if there is a chance that the bird could impact on the livelihoods of people. We also feel mitigation strategies and the funding and design of those initiatives could have been explored. Given the predation seen in Scotland, NSA feels it's vital to gauge what enthusiasm there would be for community support trusts and contingency plans to support affected businesses, should it be needed. It is welcome that you spoke to close to 300 farming stakeholders who raised the issue of mitigation and support.

Section Two – Impacts of a Cumbrian white-tailed eagle reintroduction

7. What does your organisation think the main impacts of a white-tailed eagle reintroduction in Cumbria would be?

Predation – Scottish farmers and crofters report 20-30% losses in areas where birds have gone “rogue” and adapted to hunt lambs and sheep. A full risk assessment done on the impact to Cumbria’s sheep and wider farming sector would be beneficial. Transparent, peer-reviewed evidence of predation levels in comparable upland systems must be undertaken as part of a diligent, responsible assessment. Given Cumbria’s parallels with Scotland (upland, extensive, outdoor lambing, hefted flocks), it is a reasonable fear to say there is a chance that birds could predate flocks to the extent they do in Western Scotland. We know rogue birds adapt to hunt flocks of sheep. The bird is adaptive and efficient and lambs represent an easy kill.

Tourism - We feel the tourism claim is questionable as Scottish members are very cynical of the claims made around Mull and tourism impact. Does tourism really fit into the spirit and intentions of rewilding and ecological work?

Ecology - An apex predator may impact on ground nesting birds and other species Lakeland farmers have worked with state funded programmes to support.

Mental health impact - This cannot be understated. When making decisions about introducing an apex predator into a farmed environment a duty of care is needed.

8. What considerations does your organisation feel should be addressed in the project planning process for any future white-tailed eagle reintroduction?

Cultural impact A UNESCO world heritage site home to 90% of the Herdwick breed, as well as a stronghold of the Rough Fell, the Lake District National Park is a cultural landscape of global importance. Food production, rural employment, landscape preservation and mental wellbeing of farming families must all be

considered. Introducing an apex predator represents a massive risk to an already fragile upland community. Predation seen at the level it is in parts of Mull, Argyllshire, Skye and Wester Ross, would threaten the genetic merit and diversity of the Herdwick breed.

Nature knows best If there is adequate habitat and food to sufficiently support a population, the White-Tailed Eagle may establish itself in Cumbria. However, this is not a given. Considering the destructive impact rogue birds can have on young lambs, and even some adult sheep, is it not more responsible to let nature take its course rather than risk having the serious economic impact on farmers' businesses on the conscience of wildlife enthusiasts? The Osprey managed to arrive naturally, with some nest building assistance.

Monitoring period 45 birds have been released on the Isle of Wight and have not preyed on sheep yet. No reports of domestic animal predation have been made to date. However, the first birds released in 2019 are only of breeding age in the last couple of years. This means it is far too early to draw meaningful conclusions about the safety of south coast flocks as the chick rearing is often a key time at which adult birds look for easier meals to satisfy their young. Scotland's introductions - in 1975 and the 1980s - took 20 or so years before significant numbers of viable lambs started disappearing mysteriously and rogue birds started to become fearless around humans and sheepdogs. We suggest any introduction should be accompanied with an ongoing monitoring scheme, with various management strategies written into the requirements of the release. There are now more than 200 breeding pairs in Scotland. The south coast has one pair in West Sussex (five chicks over three years), one pair in Dorset (reared one chick), and a pair on Isle of Wight expected to breed this summer. The numbers on the south coast have yet to reach a comparable level.

UK discussion Please engage with NatureScot and Andrew Kent. They are doing world-leading work on managing and mitigating White-tailed Eagles. The Sea Eagle Management Scheme funding rose to £970,000 this year. Lessons from the Isle of Wight can also be brought into the discussion.

9. Please add any additional comments here.

For example, if your organisation would like to state their level of support towards a white-tailed eagle reintroduction, please add this to the box below.

We recognise the ecological importance of species restoration to legally binding biodiversity targets and acknowledge the historic presence of the white-tailed eagle in the UK. This bird is a native species to the British Isles. NSA does not support and is in fact opposed to the relocation of White-tailed Eagles in Cumbria due to the decades of proof in Scotland of the bird attacking and killing sheep. The animal health and welfare

impacts of this and subsequent risk to farmers' mental health and business viability is reason, we feel, that it is irresponsible to introduce the bird to Cumbria.

NSA is keen to engage with Lifescape on its aspirations to introduce the bird to Cumbria through relocation projects should they be approved. Maintaining constructive dialogue is key and we welcome the opportunity to learn with you. There are several mitigation issues and management strategies such as regional, farm-level, and national White-Tailed Eagle plans we would be keen to contribute towards.

However, we have serious concerns regarding the proposed introduction of the White-tailed eagle to Cumbria and the potential consequences for sheep farming businesses. We feel the best way for the bird to come into the area is naturally via "organic" spread. If food stocks and habitat are suitable, we feel the bird will spread naturally. It is not a given that this will happen. Ospreys returned to the Lake District naturally after 150 years, albeit with significant support and conservation effort, such as artificial nesting platforms.