

## NCA 5 Border Moors and Forests

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### *Background*

The NCA spans the county boundary between Cumbria and Northumberland, crossing the watershed between the Rivers North Tyne and Rede and their tributaries, which drain eastward, and the Rivers Irthing, Lyne and Liddel Water with their tributaries, which drain west into the Solway. It is dominated by rolling upland with some craggy outcrops, and is included under the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type. The Northumberland National Park extends into the NCA, covering a total of 39% of the area. The NCA also includes part of the transnational Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site (Hadrian's Wall), which also includes the German Limes and the Antonine Wall. The moorlands have a variety of internationally important mire habitats and upland grassland grazed by sheep and cattle. It is very sparsely populated and crossed by mostly minor roads. The farmsteads and small hamlets are surrounded by mostly improved farmland, dominated by stock farming. The NCA includes two military training areas, Otterburn and Spadeadam. The dominant landscape character of much of the NCA is commercial coniferous forestry planted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The forest plantation includes Kielder, the largest planted coniferous woodland in northern Europe, centred on Kielder Water, a large reservoir that supplies drinking water and is also a centre for recreation and tourism. The commercial forestry extends across the county boundary into Cumbria, with Kershope and Spadeadam Forests. Although there is some private commercial forest, most is in the ownership of the Forestry Commission and is publicly accessible. The forests are a patchwork of felled trees and different ages of non-native conifers. In total, there is 43% woodland cover, reflecting the extensive plantations. Broadleaved woodland covers only 1%, and ancient woodland accounts for less than 1%.

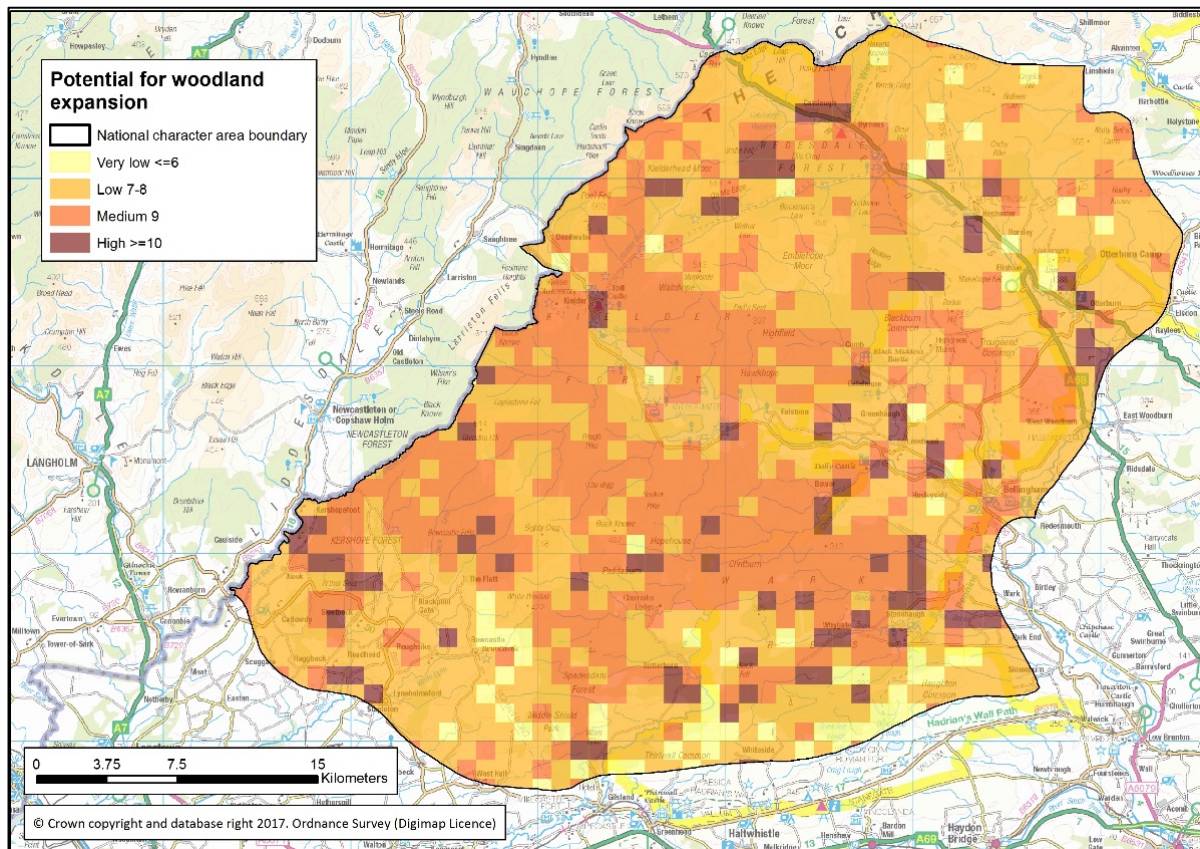
### *Historical background*

The moorland character and permanent pasture of the NCA has allowed good preservation of archaeological remains from prehistory onwards. There is abundant evidence of prehistoric land use, cup and ring marked stones, burial cairns and settlement in the form of hill forts, enclosures and enclosed farmsteads, especially from the Bronze Age to Romano-British periods. The evidence for Roman occupation is internationally significant. In Northumberland, the modern A68 mostly follows the course of Dere Street, through the Redesdale Valley, with a series of Roman marching camps along its course and a fort at High Rochester. In Cumbria, there is a second fort beyond Hadrian's Wall, at Bewcastle, linked to the Wall and Birdoswald fort by the Roman road known as the Maiden Way. Little is known of settlement in the area during the early medieval period, but a 7<sup>th</sup> century Anglian cross suggests that Bewcastle became a focus of Christianity. The remains of 'shieling' settlements suggest that the uplands were the focus of stock farming with seasonal pastures during the medieval period. The settlement pattern of small farms and hamlets was established by the later medieval period and the remains of field systems and deserted farmsteads suggested there was arable farming alongside stock rearing. The position of the NCA on the Anglo-Scottish border has left a legacy in the number of castles, defended farmsteads, tower houses and bastles which survive as standing structures. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, there appears to have been settlement and landscape reorganisation, with waves of enclosure and improvement. There was also some industrial exploitation, with small-scale coal mining.

The expansion of rural sports with shooting lodges, for example, at Kielder for the Dukes of Northumberland, also left its legacy on the landscape. The strategic importance of the border area has had a marked influence on the landscape.

### *Opportunities for Woodland Expansion*

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes suggests this area has only a low potential for woodland expansion. In part, this is the result of the already extensive areas of commercial forestry plantation. The mapping shows that small areas of potential expansion relate mainly to the extension of already wooded areas. This is in accordance with the identification of environmental opportunities in the NCA description, which recommends increasing the range of species within conifer plantations. Elsewhere, the greatest potential lies in expanding areas of native woodland, particularly along river valleys. The NCA profile identifies the Lyne and Irthing valleys as having the potential for expanding wet woodland. Care should be taken, however, to avoid archaeological remains, which are not well understood and there are many sites that are not protected through designation.



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