

## NCA 7 West Cumbria Coastal Plain

---

### *Overview*

The NCA forms a band, varying in width, between the Lake District massif to the east and the Irish Sea to the west. The southern end of the NCA borders the northern part of Morecambe Bay. Although the NCA lies beyond the western end of Hadrian's Wall, it includes individual forts and milefortlets that form discrete parts 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 coastline varies from dune systems, estuaries, mudflats, shingle and pebble beaches to the sandstone cliffs of St Bees Head. The coast and the rivers have many national and international nature conservation designations. Along the coast, the landscape is fairly open and windswept, but further inland it is dissected by valleys of the rivers Derwent, Ehen, Irt, Mite, Esk and Duddon, which originate in the Lake District fells. It is included under the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, and much of the agricultural landscape inland is dominated by pastoral farming, though there is more arable cropping on the coastal plain. The area between Ravenglass and Kirksanton is within the Lake District National Park, and is thus also within the English Lake District World Heritage Site. Settlement is mixed throughout the NCA, including historic towns and ports such as Egremont, Maryport, Workington and Whitehaven, industrial towns and villages such as Cleator Moor, Distington, Millom and Barrow, more traditional settlements such as Gosforth, and historic hamlets and farmsteads. The NCA forms a narrow strip of lowland landscape to the west of the Lake District massif, and is thus an important communications corridor for the main roads and railway line that connect the area to the rest of the county and beyond. Woodland cover within the NCA is low, at around 6% of the total area. Of this, broadleaved woodland accounts for only 3% and ancient woodland covers less than 1% of the NCA. There are remnants of ancient woodlands along the river corridors, and small plantations, and shelterbelts, are scattered on the lower fringes of the Lake District fells. Plantations also feature on areas of reclaimed land from mining, open cast coal extraction and on former industrial land, especially around Workington.

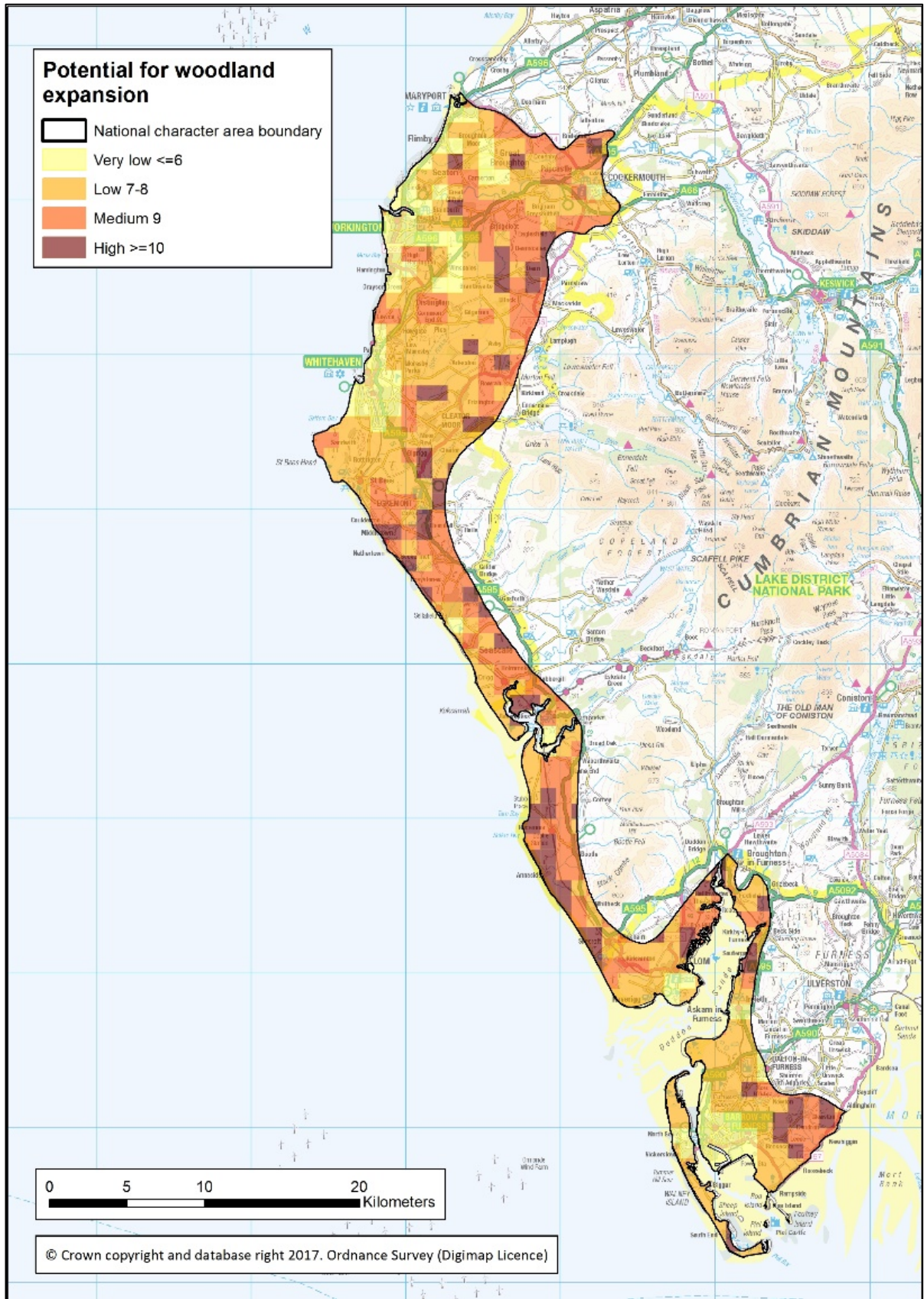
### *The Historic Environment Character*

Evidence for prehistoric activity is scattered across the NCA and includes stone circles and alignments such as at Lacra on the hillsides above Millom in the south, and Neolithic settlement at Ehenside Tarn. The significance of Roman occupation is reflected in the extension of the Hadrian's Wall frontier zone into the NCA, as far south as Ravenglass. Evidence for early medieval occupation is found in the form of stone sculpture, at St Bees, Beckermeth and Gosforth for example. The area was divided between important baronies in the later medieval period, which have left a legacy in the form of castles and other fortified buildings at Egremont, Muncaster, Millom and elsewhere. The medieval landscape was dominated by extensive monastic holdings belonging to St Bees, Calder Abbey, Furness Abbey and other smaller institutions. One of the most obvious landscape impacts was left by large-scale industry from the post medieval period, particularly coal and iron mining, but also the extraction of stone, and the development of iron and steel industries. Coal and iron mining ceased in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, but in the latter half of the century there was extensive open-cast coal extraction. This, too, has now ceased, with the land reclaimed and restored. One of the main landscape impacts was the development of planned towns,

beginning with Whitehaven in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, where purpose-built ports exported industrial products and imported goods from Britain's overseas possessions. Barrow in Furness was a late example of this process, developing as a port to export goods from the iron and steel industry, and later transforming into a major ship building and railway centre. From the 1950s, a nuclear industry developed at Calder Hall, followed by nuclear reprocessing at Sellafield.

#### *Opportunities for Woodland Expansion*

The mapping of natural and historic environment features indicates that this NCA has a medium level of potential for new woodland planting. The NCA profile identifies the need to extend woodland cover to connect and buffer habitats, alongside the better management of existing woodland, particularly along watercourses to improve water quality, reduce erosion and flooding. Areas of potential new woodland highlighted by the mapping are located on the eastern edge of the NCA, within the Lake District massif foothills. Other areas with high potential for woodland lie along the river courses, with some areas along the coastal plain. One such area lies within the Lake District National Park around the estuary at Ravenglass southwards to Kirksanton, though the open and windswept character of the landscape lies within the English Lake District World Heritage Site, and is unlikely to be considered suitable as an area for extensive new woodland planting.



NCA 7 West Cumbria Coastal Plain