

NCA 8 Cumbria High Fells

Overview

The Cumbria High Fells NCA covers the north and central Lake District and is almost wholly within the Lake District National Park and within the English Lake District World Heritage Site. It is an upland landscape, of peaks, ridges and open moorland, separated by glaciated U-shaped valleys and a radiating pattern of lakes and rivers, and is included within the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type. Farming across most of the NCA is dominated by stock farming, particularly sheep. The open and unenclosed high fells and the large, regular parliamentary-period, stone walled enclosures of the lower fells and moors are mostly managed as common grazing. The in-bye lands of the valley bottoms have small, irregular fields, many of medieval origin, enclosed by stone walls with some hedgerows and fences. On the valley sides, there are larger, more regular intake fields, many now reverting to rough moorland. The northern fringes of the NCA has a lower lying and more gently rolling landscape. The NCA has the most biologically diverse range of upland habitats in England. Woodland covers 9% of the total NCA area, with around 2% being ancient woodland, although nearly half of this has been replanted. There are large-scale commercial coniferous plantations on the slopes of the north-western and western fells. Woodland is found mainly on lower slopes and valley bottoms, with a few isolated woodlands and gills on the fells, with scattered trees and juniper scrub replaced by dwarf willow at higher altitudes. There are areas of wood pasture especially in parkland, and around some of the lakes. There are more extensive broadleaved woodlands the valleys of Borrowdale, Duddon and Longsleddale, and around lakes such as Derwent Water, Ullswater and Haweswater.

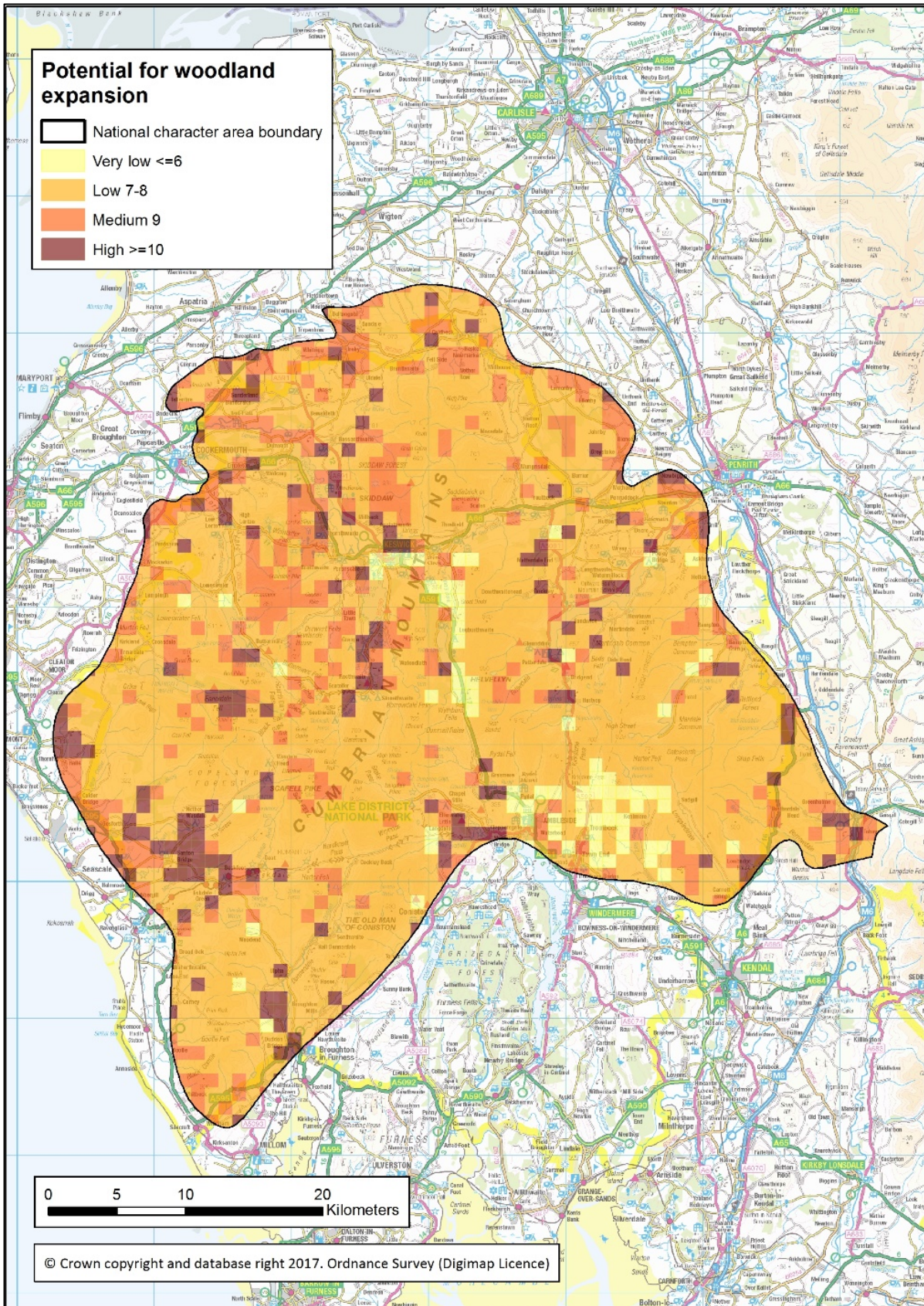
The Historic Environment Character

There is evidence for human activity from the early Neolithic period in the Lake District, when stone from the central Lakes was exploited to manufacture high quality stone tools, which were traded widely across England, Scotland and Ireland. On the lower fells, extensive cairnfields indicate clearance of land for grazing and cultivation possibly from the end of the Neolithic, but particularly from the Bronze Age. In many cases, these are associated with field systems and in some places ceremonial monuments such as stone circles and cairnfield cemeteries. Roman military sites extended across the Lake District, for example the Roman road which ran between the fort at Ambleside, through the passes in the high fells at Wrynose and Hardknott, where there was another fort, down to the coast at Ravenglass. Evidence for early medieval occupation is scarce, though some farmstead sites have been identified in the Lake District valleys. Surviving Norse place names such as 'thwaite' and 'scales' may indicate 10th century settlement, although both place names remained in common use into the later medieval period. In the later medieval period, the area covered by the NCA was divided amongst several large baronies, and much of it was managed under forest law. The rugged upland landscape meant that farming has always been dominated by pastoral farming, although the field systems in the north of NCA indicate more arable farming. From the 18th century, tourism grew increasingly important to the central fells, driven by the Picturesque and then Romantic movements. Settlements grew around the lakes with the development of villas and designed landscapes with exotic woodland plantings. Industry has always had a major influence on the landscape of the NCA, with large-scale quarrying and mining of various minerals alongside metal ore processing, and

slate quarrying and mining in the northern part of the Lake District. From the end of the 20th century, the area has provided drinking water for the industrial towns in Lancashire, and lakes and reservoirs such as Ennerdale, Haweswater and Thirlmere have been planted with large-scale plantations around their margins.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of natural and historical environment attributes indicates only a low potential for woodland expansion within the NCA, reflecting the extensive areas of high fell and moorland where tree growth is restricted. The NCA profile recommends the management and enhancement of woodland in the valleys, to improve and connect habitats. It also suggests restoring and expanding native woodlands to help deliver climate change adaptation and mitigation, protect soils, improve water quality and supply wood fuel and other wood products. Climate change mitigation is a prominent issue within the Cumbria High Fells, as extreme weather events in recent years have led to considerable water run-off and erosion, leading to massive flooding downstream in Carlisle, Penrith, Cockermouth and Workington. From the distribution of areas where there is potential for new woodland, it supports the approach of the NCA profile, in expanding existing areas in the valleys and on the valley sides. Any woodland expansion, however, should take into account the highly sensitive nature of archaeological sites, traditional field patterns and the designed landscapes around the lakes. Of particular note are the industrial monuments, many of which are scheduled, including extensive areas of waste products on valleys sides as well as ephemeral processing sites.



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