

NCA 18 Howgill Fells

Overview

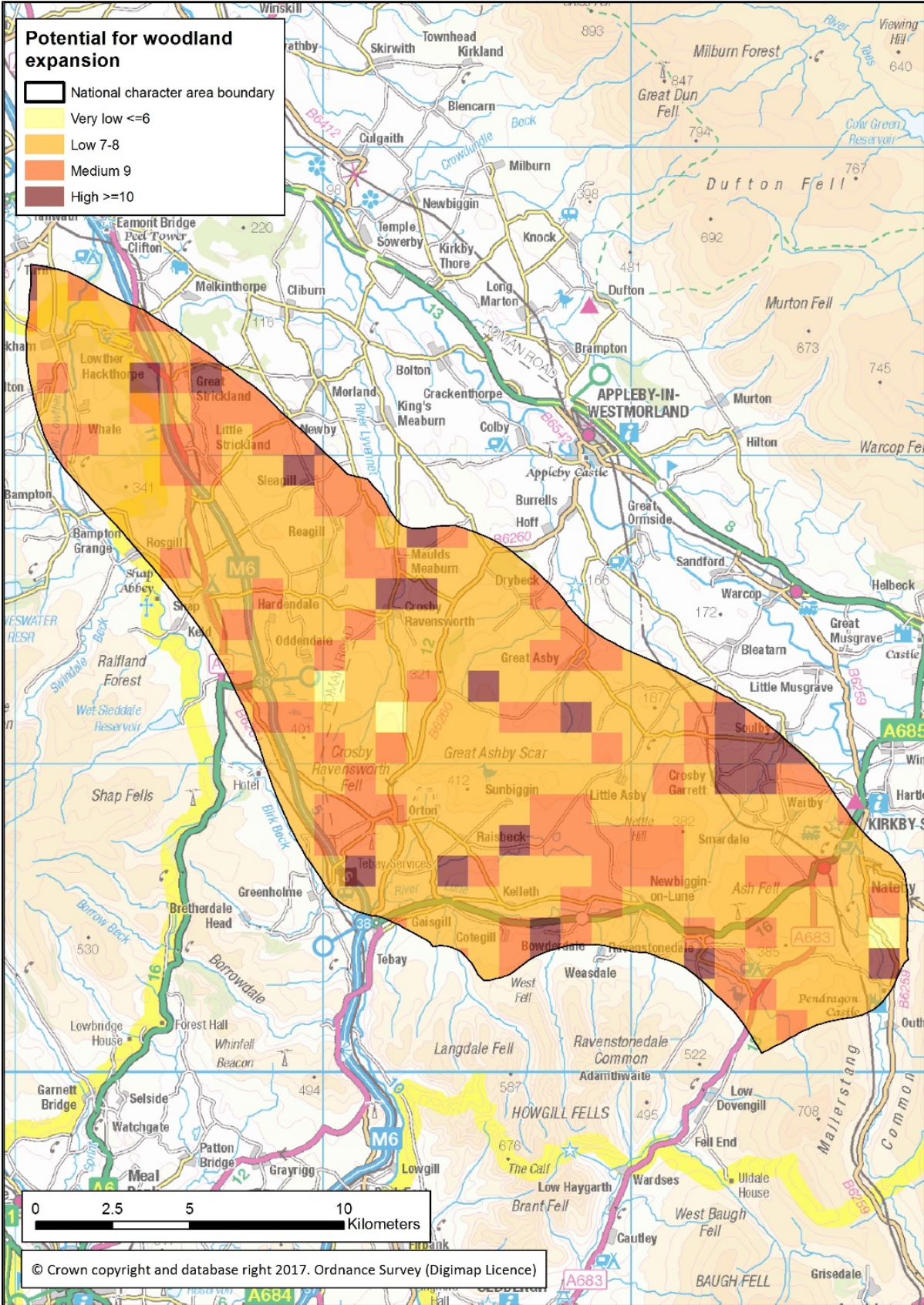
The entire area of the Howgill Fells NCA lies within the Yorkshire Dales National Park. It comprises a distinctive block of high, smooth, well-defined, rounded hills, divided by deep, steep-sided valleys, and it is included within the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type. The smooth fell tops and sides are dominated by open moorland heavily grazed by sheep, cattle and Fell Ponies, whilst on the valley sides are screes and some crags, with active erosion on some steeper slopes. The edges of the NCA to the west, east and south extend into the enclosed valleys, where irregular fields are bounded by drystone walls and hedges. Apart from the small market town of Sedburgh, the settlement pattern is one of scattered farmsteads and small hamlets ranged around the foot of the hills. Road access is very limited, and the only communications corridor is the valley of the River Rawthey and its tributary the Sally Beck, which carries the A683 from Sedburgh north over a pass to Kirkby Stephen. There is very little woodland, covering only 2% of the total area. Woodland occurs along the gill sides, and there are some small copses and broadleaved woodlands along the valley sides of the Rivers Lune and Rawthey.

The Historic Environment Character

There is little archaeological evidence for human activity on the higher unenclosed slopes, though on the lower moorland there are shielings, or seasonal dwellings, dating from the medieval period. As well as summer grazing, the hills have been exploited historically for peat, heather and bracken bedding. Around the foothills, there is evidence for prehistoric and Romano-British settlement in the form of hut circles. Medieval settlement was in the form of individual farmsteads strung along the base of the hills, a pattern which still dominates. In the post medieval period, piecemeal enclosure, in the form of intakes, was carried out on the lower hill slopes.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that opportunities for woodland expansion are limited, and this is reflected in the NCA profile. The profile emphasises the importance of maintaining and enhancing the open moorland character of the NCA. Gill woodland can be expanded to increase connectivity and reduce soil erosion. The attribute mapping highlights areas around the most extensive gill woodland at Cautley Spout and Armathwaite, but there may be opportunities to add to other, smaller areas of valley side woodlands around the edges of the Howgill Hills.



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