

NCA 19 South Cumbria Low Fells

Overview

South Cumbria Low Fells NCA is an area of low fells and hills, stretching from the Duddon Estuary in the west to the Lune Valley in the east. It is included within the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type. The western part of the NCA lies within the Lake District National Park including some of the most popular tourist destinations around Windermere and Coniston Water, whilst the eastern edge falls within the Yorkshire Dales National Park, accounting for over two thirds of the total area. The Lake District National Park is also designated as the Lake District World Heritage Site. The rural landscape is largely pastoral, with a patchwork of small irregular fields interspersed with larger, more regular fields enclosed in the 19th century. The broken hilly landscape, with numerous rocky outcrops, give the overall impression of a fieldscape of irregular enclosures. The eastern section of the NCA is characterised by higher land where the landscape is more open and the fields larger and more regular. The main rivers rise in the higher land to the north, and flow south through the NCA to drain into Morecambe Bay. Land above 300m is rugged, comprising heathland and rough grassland interspersed with rocky outcrops, small tarns and becks. The settlement pattern is a mixed one of villages and farmsteads, with a few larger towns. The main population centres are Windermere and Bowness within the Lake District National Park, along with the main market town of Kendal. The shores of the lakes are lined with country houses and villas, some now in use as hotels, surrounded by designed parkland and distinctive exotic planting of copses and specimen trees. The eastern section of the NCA forms an important communications corridor, including the M6, A6 and West Coast main railway line. Other main roads provide access west into the Lake District and east into Yorkshire. Woodland cover in the NCA is extensive, totalling 18% of the NCA, although woodland and trees are infrequent at higher altitudes. Woodland ranges from extensive conifer plantations and some mixed and broadleaved plantations, to several areas of semi-natural broadleaved woodland and copses on steep stream sides and knolls. There is a concentration of woodland in the western part between Windermere and Coniston Water, where there are significant stretches of broadleaved and ancient semi-natural woodland alongside the Forestry Commission-managed Grizedale Forest. Ancient woodland accounts for around 7% of the NCA and nearly 40% of all woodland cover, though nearly half of that is replanted. The lake shores are characterised by exotic planting within designed parkland landscapes. Outside the Lake District, in the east and far west of the NCA, are remnants of ancient semi-natural woodland, though coniferous shelterbelts predominate.

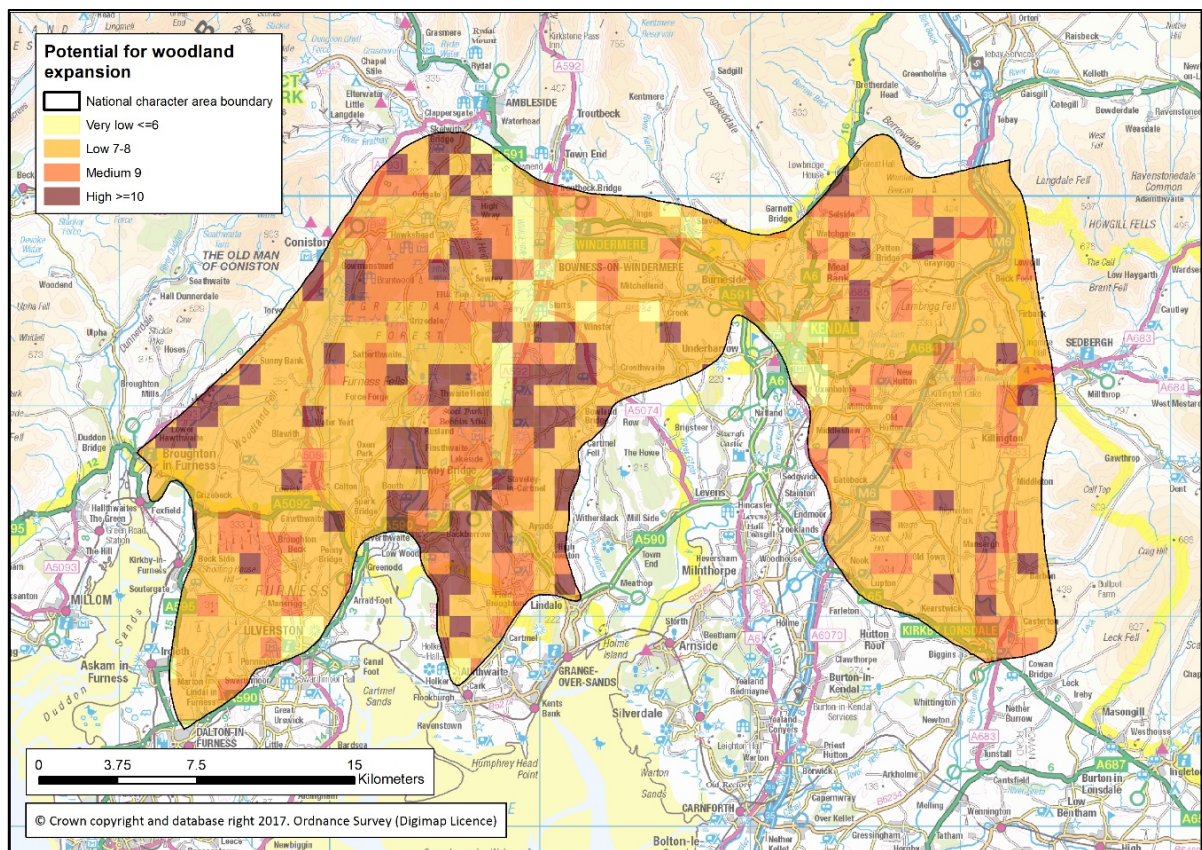
The Historic Environment Character

The character of much of the landscape was shaped in the later medieval period. The medieval settlement pattern in the eastern part was a dispersed one of farmsteads and small hamlets. Kendal was the centre of a barony, and strong lordly control is evident in the number of deer parks in the area. There is evidence that lower lying and more productive lands was farmed as arable, and the enclosed former open fields are still legible as enclosed strip fields, though now much altered. Within the Lake District National Park, the influence of the monastery of Furness Abbey can still be seen in the landscape character, particularly between Windermere and Coniston Water. The widespread survival of ancient woodland here is the result of monastic management, both as hunting grounds and the use of

woodland to fuel the iron smelting industry. This grew in the post medieval period and large areas of woodland were managed as coppice for the charcoal industry, which in turn provided fuel for the blast furnaces in the Duddon Valley and at Backbarrow. Coppiced woodland also led to local crafts industries making wooden tools, as well as bobbin making at Stott Park for the Lancashire textile industry. In the late 18th and 19th centuries, there was extensive enclosure of the commons, and the establishment of new farms across the NCA. The enclosure period landscape is most visible across the glacial drumlin hills and moorlands of the eastern part of the area.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that this area has only a low potential for woodland expansion. In part, this is the result of the large areas already under woodland, particularly in the Grizedale area, but also reflects the historic character of the field systems and open low fells. Where the mapping does indicate clusters of greater opportunity for new woodland, these are almost all in the Lake District National Park, where planting would take the form of the expansion of existing woods. This limited opportunities for woodland expansion are highlighted by the NCA profile, which emphasises the importance of maintaining wetland habitat, the open fells and historic field systems.



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