

NCA 34 Bowland Fells

Overview

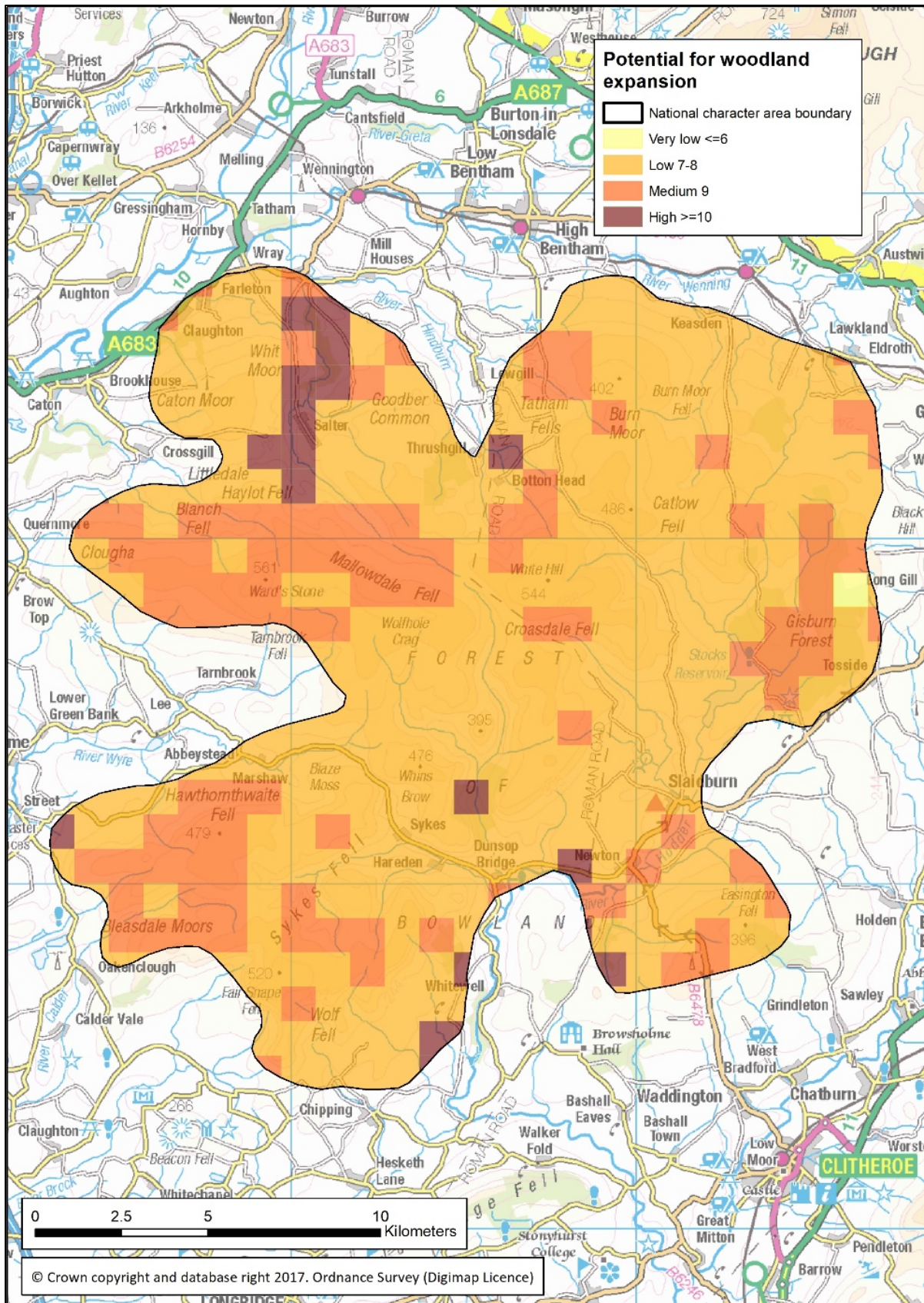
The NCA is dominated by gritstone fells with extensive tracts of heather moorland and blanket bog, and incised by deep valleys. It is included within the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type. The fells are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and as a Special Protection Area (SPA), and almost the whole of the NCA lies within the Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Substantial areas of heather are managed for grouse shooting. The open fells are cut by steep-sided valleys. The sparse settlement is largely confined to the valleys, and is dominated by small villages with some scattered farms. The valley bottoms are enclosed into semi-improved pastures in small- to medium-scale irregular fields, and their upper slopes have enclosures of rough pasture up to the moorland edge. The field boundaries are mainly mixed hedgerows and drystone walls, the latter particularly in the upland pastures. Woodland cover is low within the NCA at only 8%, of which just over 8% is broadleaved woodland. Most of the woodland is accounted for by coniferous and broadleaved plantations. The largest coniferous plantation is Gisburn Forest, which is associated with Stocks Reservoir. Ancient woodland is largely confined to the steeply incised cloughs. Areas of acid oak and birch woodland are also present in some areas, notably on the northern side of the Fells.

The Historic Environment Character

The Bowland Fells were part of the Royal Forest of Lancaster in the later medieval period, thus it was managed under forest law for hunting. Vaccaries (or demesne cattle farms) were also established, utilising the fells as summer grazing pastures. The vaccary centres in the valleys later developed into the pattern of small villages that can be seen today. Large-scale enclosure began in the early post medieval period, converting moorland and woodland waste to meadow and permanent pasture. Around farms this was piecemeal, leading to irregular-shaped fields, but in upland areas systematic divisions of the majority of the commons resulting in regular enclosure, for example around the Hodder Valley and extending onto the fells. Some moorland enclosures reverted to moorland after the mid-19th century.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that the opportunities for woodland expansion are low. The importance of the moorland habitats restricts the areas where new woodland may be planted, though the mapping does suggest a few clusters of higher potential on the fringes of the area and around the clough woodlands on the steep valleys sides of the River Roeburn, in the north of the NCA. The NCA profile emphasises the importance of the open moorland and prioritises the rewetting of areas of degraded blanket bog, in order to retain water, promote peat formation and carbon sequestrations, and to prevent erosion. The NCA profile does, however, support opportunities to manage existing woodland, to extend it and to create new woodlands within the valleys, on the lower hillsides and on the moorland fringe.



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