

NCA 143 Mid Somerset Hills

Overview

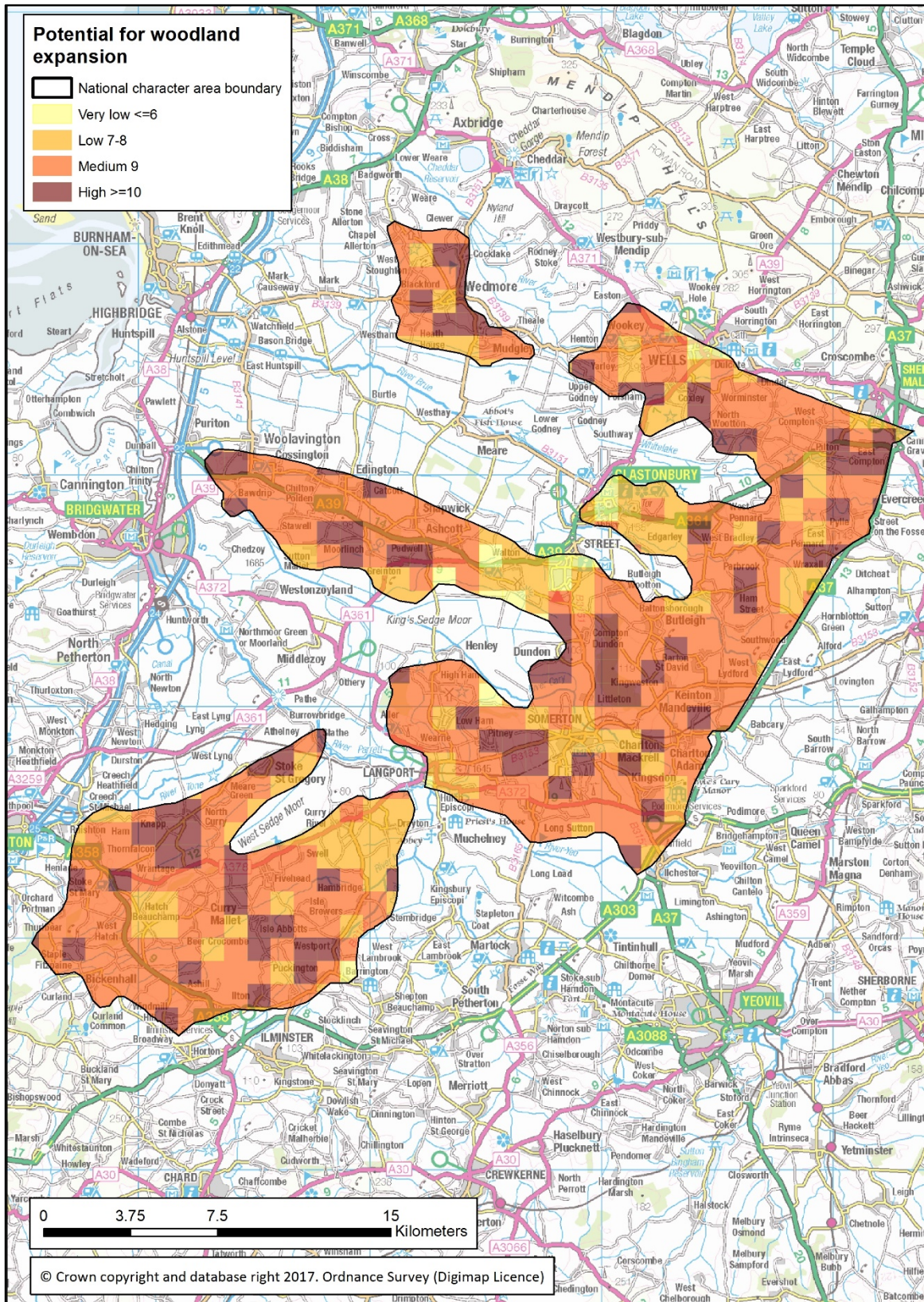
The Mid Somerset Hill NCA comprises three areas of low Limestone and Mudstone Hills, included within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type. The hills extend into the Somerset Levels and Hills in a series of ridges, extending from Shepton Mallet in the north to Muchelney in the south. The ridges are separated by the valleys of the Rivers Brue, Cary and Parret, which form part of the Somerset Levels and Moors NCA. As well as the main part of the NCA, there are two discrete areas: Wedmore Hill within the levels and moors, and an area south-east of Taunton, separated from the main part of the NCA by the Parrett valley. It is an overwhelmingly rural area, predominantly pastoral with small irregular fields divided by hedgerows. There are small towns, such as Langport, Glastonbury, Street and Somerton, but the main settlement pattern is one of small nucleated villages. The road system is almost entirely a local network of minor roads and lanes, with the few 'A' roads linking the local urban centres. The main London to Exeter rail lines crosses the NCA. Woodland cover is very low, at only 5% of the NCA, of which over a third is ancient woodland. Woodland is scattered across the NCA, and the only concentration is around Somerton, with a large block of mixed woodland to the north.

The Historic Environment Character

There is evidence that the Mid-Somerset Hills provided suitable areas for settlement, with easy access to the rich resources of the levels and moors in prehistoric, Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods. Langport appears to have been an important Saxon settlement, being a burh with a mint in the 10th century. It was a borough in 1086. Glastonbury, too, was an early settlement, developing around the Anglo-Saxon abbey. The Abbey played a key role in transforming and reclaiming large parts of the wetlands in the later medieval period. The area had a rich agricultural economy in the medieval period, based on cereals and wool, at first driven by monastic institutions such as Glastonbury, but then by lay families following the Dissolution of the Monasteries. In the post medieval period, the area was known for leather-working, and Street became a centre of shoe production.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a medium level of potential for woodland expansion within the NCA, with clusters of high potential scattered across the area. The opportunities to create new woodland are highlighted within the NCA profile, with an emphasis on wet woodland and reconnecting existing habitats through the creation of corridors. The profile also highlights the potential for the significant expansion of broadleaved woodland, as a national priority for native trees, but also to help reduce soil erosion and increase water infiltration, as well as linking existing ash and maple woodlands currently found on ridge tops. New plantings should take account of the historic field pattern and, where possible, use cartographic and place-name evidence to replant areas that were once wooded.



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