

Tomorrow's Fenland: carbon, soils and livelihoods conference, Thorney, Peterborough 5 March 2020

Notes by Peter Landshoff

Defra has convened a Lowland Agricultural Peat Taskforce to deliver recommendations for a new, more sustainable future for agriculture on lowland peatlands in England. It will set out a strategy later this year. An [update](#) by an IUCN enquiry sets out the many problems and suggests some solutions.

Maps by the [UK Soil Observatory](#) and [UK Soil Map](#) are more than 30 year old and up-to-date information on the extent and depth of the peat is badly needed. Wastage varies from 10 to 25mm per year, depending on dainage and other factors, but these are not recent estimates.

About half of the CO₂ emitted by UK farming is estimated to come from peat soil. Increasing the water table would have a big impact, which is not easy in areas of varying land level, but not too much as that would cause methane emission. N₂O emission is also a problem, from unspent fertiliser.

Although the area is so dry, a large number of pumping stations provide more water resilience than elsewhere. There is scope to feed more into farm reservoirs, and possibly to use water courses as linear reservoirs.

Trials are underway in Lincolnshire of growing biomass on road verges. Those who use it are willing to collect it without charge.

The producer organisation G's has adopted a "whole farm approach". This includes reducing soil cultivation, using green manure and avoiding bare soil in winter, using sheep to help manage biomass, deploying probes and sensors to minimise irrigation and ensuring feeding only what the plants need, irrigating at night to reduce evaporation, providing wildlife corridors on less productive land.

There was discussion of growing sphagnum and cattails, and the wide range of uses to which they can be put.

Climate change is a danger to bluebell woods.