



Water Level Management Plans

Introduction

Water Level Management Plans or WLMPs are an initiative from DEFRA (formerly MAFF) developed in 1994. The plans provide a means by which the water level requirements for a range of activities within a particular area, including agriculture, flood risk management and conservation, can be balanced and integrated.



Reed warbler

IDBs are required to produce plans for all SSSIs within their districts where their activities can affect the wildlife interest. In practice this means all SSSIs where the Board manages a main drain, a structure or a pumping station which may influence the site. In a wildlife rich area such as the Broads, this has meant most districts are now covered by a WLMP.

Who Needs to Know About WLMPs?

Members of Internal Drainage Boards should be aware of the WLMPs that have been produced for their district.

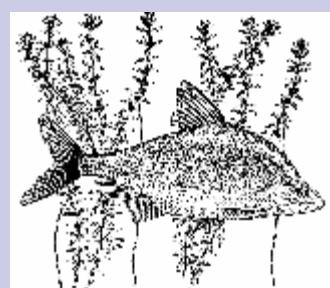
This series of Information Sheets may also be of use to others who have an interest in the management of the water environment.

What Are WLMPs?

Although a bit of a mouthful, the name Water Level Management Plan is a good description of what these plans aim to achieve. The plans explain the way the water levels are operated within an area and how the water system works. They go on to try to balance the needs of the agricultural and conservation interests in the areas. An action plan is produced which sets out the investment the Board needs to make to address these problems, allowing the Board to plan for grant aid applications and staff time.

Just Another Report?

WLMP are working documents, not glossy reports. They are changing the way IDBs plan their work. Boards will always be required to react quickly to changing situations on the ground, but they also need to take a more strategic approach to planning investment within their districts. This will ensure their responsibilities under the Habitats Regulations, other new legislation and the aspirations and changing needs of ratepayers are met. WLMP provide an overview of the issues which need addressing within IDB districts.



Line drawings reproduced courtesy of Natural England

Bream

Who Pays?

Production

Most IDBs have not had the expertise required to produce WLMPs in house, so they have employed consultants to undertake the work. As no national grant aid was available for production of the plans, this has placed a financial burden on some Boards.

The Alliance is grateful to the Broads Authority for their contribution towards the cost of producing WLMPs in the Broads.

Implementation

Once capital works are identified in an agreed WLMP, the Board may be eligible for grant aid from DEFRA. If the works are required to protect a priority SSSI(a SAC) then 100% grant aid is available. If the site not a priority SSSI only, then the grant aid is 80%.



Frog

Several Boards have already taken advantage of this generous rate and are implementing works highlighted in WLMPs with the help of money from DEFRA/EA.

The Alliance is also grateful to Natural England who have contributed to the cost of implementing several plans. Unfortunately due to 'double funding' rules, any contribution

from English Nature must be deducted from the total before the DEFRA grant aid is calculated.

Consultation

Consultation is a fundamental part of the WLMP process. All landowners within a plan area are consulted before the plan or review is started and invited to provide information on current water management and aspirations for the future. A draft plan is then drawn up and sent to the statutory consultees. These are English Nature and DEFRA, and in the Broads only, the Broads Authority. Consortium staff will also send a draft to other relevant bodies and individuals.

The Chairman of the Board will also be sent a copy of the draft plan. To keep production and postage costs to a minimum it is not possible to consult individual Board members at this stage, although members may ask to see a copy at any time.

After the changes have been made and agreed to the satisfaction of all parties, the final plan is drawn up. This is sent to statutory consultees, Chairmen and key landowners. The DEFRA office in London and the Regional Engineer hold copies as does the regional Environment Agency office.



Stickleback

Carrots and Sticks

Implementation of WLMPs now forms one of the Outcome Measures produced by DEFRA which IDBs are required to meet. This demonstrates the importance attached to these plans by DEFRA.

Review Period

Some plans within Norfolk are approaching their first review. WLMPs are 'live' documents which need to keep up with what is happening on the ground, and changing legal requirements. The review is a chance to check that the actions from the last plan have been implemented successfully. Plans will usually be reviewed after 5 years.

Produced on behalf of the Water Management Alliance

Further information on how IDBs can help wildlife can be obtained from the Environment Officer, Water Management Alliance, Kettlewell House, Austin Fields Industrial Estate, King's Lynn, PE30 1PH (01553) 819600 e-mail lou@wlma.org.uk