

This is a national project sharing learning from four areas: Lake District, Shropshire Hills, Dartmoor and the following commons here in the Yorkshire Dales:

Brant Fell

Grassington Moor

Ingleborough Commons

Our Upland Commons in the Yorkshire Dales

28% of the Yorkshire Dales National Park is common land.

Our Common Cause: Our Upland Commons

Our Upland Commons Project is a three-year, £3m, 25-partner project helping to secure the future of upland commons. It's led by the Foundation for Common Land. Centuries old farming practices on commons are unexpectedly relevant to many 21st century challenges, they can deliver nature recovery, flood management, carbon sequestration and wellbeing. But this land management system is under threat. Our project is taking action now, seizing the moment for our commons and turning challenges into opportunities.



Over the course of the project, we will be working with commoners, conservation organisations, volunteers and the public to build on the collaborative tradition of commoning, demonstrating how farming and nature can work together to produce the food, landscapes, and habitats we all know and love.

Claire Hodgson - Yorkshire Dales Project Officer

Claire returned to the Yorkshire Dales 17 years ago and has worked for the National Park Authority for the last 10. As well as organising the last UK National Parks Conference she has been involved in the 2016 extension of the National Park, Dark Skies and welcoming visitors back post Covid.

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www.foundationforcommonland.org.uk





Photograph courtesy of Rob Fraser



What are commons?

Commons are privately owned spaces. Their owners include individuals, families, private estates and organisations like the National Trust. They are shaped by geology, the natural environment and centuries of management by commoners and others.

All common land is open access, which means we all have the right to enjoy recreation on foot on commons.

Who are the commoners?

There are over 3900 farmers who are commoners in England. They have the right to graze the land or use its resources - such as firewood, peat or bracken.

Each flock on the commons has an area of land where they stay without fencing, this is known as a 'heaf', 'heft' or 'lear'. This way of shared land management is called commoning and has protected some of the UK's most spectacular landscapes for a thousand years.

Why do commons matter?

These productive landscapes help us grow food, absorb rainfall, clean water, nurture wildlife, and take pleasure from recreation.

The management of common land, when at sustainable levels, has ensured the survival of ancient monuments and rare wildlife, plants, birds and butterflies. Careful grazing can maintain the balance of delicate upland ecosystems on huge stretches of open landscape.

Why do we need this project?

There are serious threats on the horizon that could impact on the future of these ancient spaces, and on our access to them. Leaving the EU has led to the biggest disruption to the way common land is managed in 70 years. It has put the economic viability of commoning further into question because of changes to government support and trade deals.

More frequent extreme weather events rising from climate change place the heritage of the commons at risk, and biodiversity continues to decline. We also know that children are accessing nature less, meaning they miss out on all the benefits of greenspace.

Our project aims include:

- Encouraging more diverse communities to enjoy nature and connect with the commons closest to them.
- Helping everyone to understand the multiple benefits that come from commons and the importance of the commoning system.
- Sharing skills that will enable and empower commoners to increase carbon storage, protect historic sites, enhance wildlife and habitats, and maintain the ancient practice of commoning.
- Equipping participating organisations so they can better secure this heritage over the long-term.

Rights of Common were first enshrined in

1215

in the Magna Carta to protect the landless rural poor

10%

of Scheduled Ancient Monuments are on commons

Since 1550, common land has reduced from

50%

to

3%

of England

82%

of commons are in National Parks or AONBs and

21%

of England's SSSI area is common land

Earmarking and collective gathering of sheep are a living part of this millennia-old cultural heritage

39%

of England's Open Access land is common land