

CLIMATE SOLUTION: PROTECTING PEAT

'Restoring all of the UK's peat would deliver carbon benefits alone of £109 billion and would outweigh the costs of doing so by an estimated 5 to 10 times.' **England Peat Action Plan, 2021**



THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

UK Churches and Christian organisations own or manage around 500,000 acres of land and control over £20bn of investment assets. This booklet will explore how:

- Local churches can take actions to protect peat to benefit climate, nature and people.
- Larger Christian landowners, including national and regional Church bodies, can protect peat on a larger scale.
- Churches and Christians can invest in climate solutions including peatland restoration and protection.

WHY PROTECT PEAT

For climate: Healthy, wet peatland is an important carbon sink, but when it's dried out and degraded the opposite is true and it becomes a greenhouse gas emitter. The majority of peatland in the UK is currently degraded and released 15.2 MtCO₂eq.* in 2022 - nearly 4% of UK total emissions according to the [Dept for Energy Security and Net Zero](#).

For nature: Healthy peatland supports biodiversity including rare bitterns, short-eared owls and sphagnum mosses.

For people: Practical benefits of peatland include supporting water cycles, controlling pollution and flood resilience.

* This refers to the equivalent of 15.2 million tonnes of carbon dioxide but includes other greenhouse gases e.g. methane.

PROJECT DRAWDOWN

[Project Drawdown](#) identifies peatland protection and rewetting as the 13th highest potential climate solution worldwide - **13) Peat protection and rewetting** (25.40 Gt**)

They state: 'The extremely high carbon stocks of peatlands, combined with peatlands' relatively tiny global extent, indicate that their protection should be an extremely high priority for climate mitigation.'

** This is the additional CO₂eq. in gigatonnes that could be sequestered globally by peatlands over 2020-2050, based on 'Scenario 1' which involves limiting warming to 2 °C by 2100.

TOP CAMPAIGN AIM:

Denominations and dioceses which own peatland should be ensuring climate resilience, and restoring/rewetting 100% of degraded peatland by 2030 or as soon as legally possible. (See [Church Land Use Campaign](#))

LAND IN THE BIBLE

'The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.'
Genesis 1:12 NIV

'The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.'
Isaiah 35:1-2 NIV



Eco-Congregation Scotland Chaplain David Coleman

From [Peat Prayer 03 on Rannoch Moor](#)


God our sustainer. Take us outside what we have thought of as holiness, out to where insects bite and bogs capture carbon. Show us a faith in Christ which, in the face of such bad news as what our species has caused for this planet, nonetheless becomes a path to hope, to joy, to healing of what is already damaged, but yet can be helped.


LOCAL SCALE - PROTECTING PEAT


ASSESSING

WHERE MIGHT YOU USE PEAT

Most local churches are unlikely to own peatland but you could check a map [here](#) to see if you are situated in a likely peat area. However, you could inadvertently be harming peatland by your purchases:

 Compost for horticulture has historically contained peat although peat-free composts are now much more available.

 Some plants are typically grown on peat, most commonly [mushrooms](#), [leafy salads](#) and [houseplants](#).


 Some whisky production uses peat burning to give a characteristic 'smoky' flavour.

Check for peat-free alternatives, and take action through joining the campaigns below.

CAMPAIGNS TO JOIN

The former UK government announced in 2022 that it would ban the sale of bagged peat compost in England by 2024 but this legislation was not prioritised and lapsed. Although it was mentioned by Labour before the 2024 election, the ban was not in their initial King's Speech.

 [Peat-Free Partnership](#) are calling for new legislation to ban peat sales.

 The Wildlife Trust has a [Hidden Peat](#) campaign raising awareness and requiring transparency about peat-based products and calling for more government action.

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EDUCATION

DIOCESE OF ST ASAPH, CHURCH IN WALES

Children's chaplains Jon and Esther Andrews worked with Shropshire Wildlife Trust to make a [video](#) which explains the value of Peatland habitat within their 'Earth, Wind, Fire and Water' series. The 'Earth' video features the Marches Mosses which were made a National Nature Reserve in 1990. The video was shown in 52 diocesan schools in Wales.



Photo: Natural England

NATURE RESTORATION

WYBUNBURY MOSS, CHESHIRE

Wybunbury Moss is a rare floating bog or 'schwingmoor' where a raft of peat floats on an underground lake. It is a haven for rare wildlife such as carnivorous sundews and rare invertebrates including a leaf beetle not found anywhere else in England.

The Church Commissioners own two fields adjacent to this site and they have leased these to Natural England to return the fields to a more natural state and protect the rare habitat. They plan to reintroduce livestock grazing, increase grass and wildflower diversity and restore hedges.

“ Zara Gower, farmland portfolio asset manager at landowners the Church Commissioners for England, said:

'We are excited to see the arable reversion on this land take place which will have a myriad of benefits, from restoring and extending the biodiversity from the moss, to providing local residents with improved access to nature.'

'We look forward to our continued work with Natural England here at Wybunbury Moss and other sites as opportunities for partnership arise.'

LANDSCAPE SCALE - PROTECTING PEAT



CHRISTIAN RETREAT CENTRE

ABERNETHY KILMALIEU, WESTERN HIGHLANDS

Over the last year the Abernethy Trust, A Rocha UK and expert partners have been undertaking a thorough survey of their 3,000 acre site at [Kilmalieu](#), assessing how best to protect and enhance the biodiversity of this former Atlantic rainforest.

Across diverse habitats including blanket bog and smaller areas of peat they recorded many rare species, particularly lichens, mosses, birds and butterflies.

The assessment made recommendations towards peatland restoration, some of which will require advice from a hydrologist. The team is proceeding with wise caution, being mindful of potential impacts on the wider ecosystems.

“Centre Director Steve Aisthorpe said:

“Every day we’re taking time to notice what’s going on here. We are eager to see nature thriving here and biodiversity optimised, but we are not in a hurry and are resisting the temptation to rush into intervention.

This intentional ‘noticing’ is important to us, a part of our vocation. As well as growing our understanding and informing our decisions, it is also changing us and impacting the lives of the guests who come here, as we encourage them to join us in intentionally paying attention to nature.”

NATIONAL CHURCH

C OF E CHURCH COMMISSIONERS



The Church of England Church Commissioners own around 5,000 acres of peatland and peaty soils within the Fens in Cambridgeshire. This valuable farmland is being badly degraded by complex climate issues linked to the historic drainage of the land. The Church Commissioners are members of Fenland SOIL, a not for profit group who are researching and working together to understand more about peatland issues. This has included installing a flux tower on Commissioner-owned land to measure emissions. We hope to hear of more action to protect this peatland as it is greatly needed. Peatland protection is an important area to include in the Commissioners’ upcoming Nature strategy which must include more targets and transparency.

PLANNING

ASSESSING YOUR LAND

Regional and national Church bodies sometimes own considerable areas of land. Early steps include mapping your land and creating a land management plan. The Diocese of Oxford share how they went about the mapping task in the CofE document, [‘Managing Glebe Land for Climate and Biodiversity’](#).

Peatland restoration is a specialist area and working in partnership with local Wildlife Trusts and specific peatland projects such as [Yorkshire Peat Partnership](#) or [Great Fen](#) can be a good way to access expertise.

DEFRA-funded schemes linked to the England Peat Action Plan are already underway but there will be further funding via the Sustainable Farming Incentive, Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery ELM schemes. A [progress report](#) was published by the IUCN UK Peatland Strategy in September 2024.

COMMUNION FOREST

Larger peat protection projects could join in the Anglican Communion’s Communion Forest, which includes actions to restore ecosystems. They have many inspiring stories from around the world.



INVESTMENT - PROTECTING PEAT

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

FIIND IMPACT HOW TO INVEST IN CLIMATE

FIIND Impact Foundation's Faith Impact Project published a report in 2021 on '[How to Invest in Climate](#)'. This report identifies the most investable climate solutions from Project Drawdown's top climate solutions which includes peatland restoration within the 'Land Sinks' category.

They discuss venture capital, private equity, private debt, and real assets investing in land sinks. They found 19 funds and strategies investing mainly in land conservation or land sinks-focused raising \$4.6 billion.

GREEN INVESTMENT DECLARATION

Is your Church body starting or making progress on investing in Climate Solutions? Join our [Green Investment Declaration](#) to recognise the steps you are taking and encourage others to do more too!



RESOURCES

Find more resources and actions to take on Protecting Peat [here](#).



INVESTING IN PEATLANDS

LANDSCAPE FINANCE LAB

Landscape Finance Lab and partners have created this report on '[Investing in Peatlands](#)' which sets out why it is so important. Dianna Kopansky, Global Peatlands Initiative Coordinator, United Nations Environment Programme said: 'Getting this report into the hands of decision-makers and investors everywhere is critical!'



RESPONSIBLE OFFSETS

PEATLAND RESTORATION

Offsets should only be a last step after making every effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but a small proportion of high quality offsets can be a responsible way to address final, hard-to-reduce emissions.

The [Peatland Code](#) is a voluntary standard for UK peatland projects wishing to market the climate benefit of restoration. The [Peatland Code Registry](#) shows available projects or alternatively buyers can use the services of a specialist carbon broker to actively search for a suitable project on their behalf.

Listed peatland projects are run by companies, Wildlife Trusts and charities such as the RSPB and the National Trust. The majority are in Scotland, Wales and upland areas of England but there is at least one in the Cambridgeshire Fens ([Wicken Fen](#)).

“ From the National Trust website:

'Without action, most remaining peat in the Fens could be lost within 30 years, emitting harmful carbon as it degrades. Across Wicken Fen, a project is afoot to restore peat, retaining rainwater and managing water tables. Keeping peatlands in a healthy, saturated state enables them to store carbon, help control flooding, reduce wildfire risk and drought, and provide important habitat for rare wildlife including waterbirds.'