

ENVIRONMENT DAY 2026





KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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Beyond the ditch: creating new traditions

Sarah Fowler
Chief Executive



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For wetlands. For life.





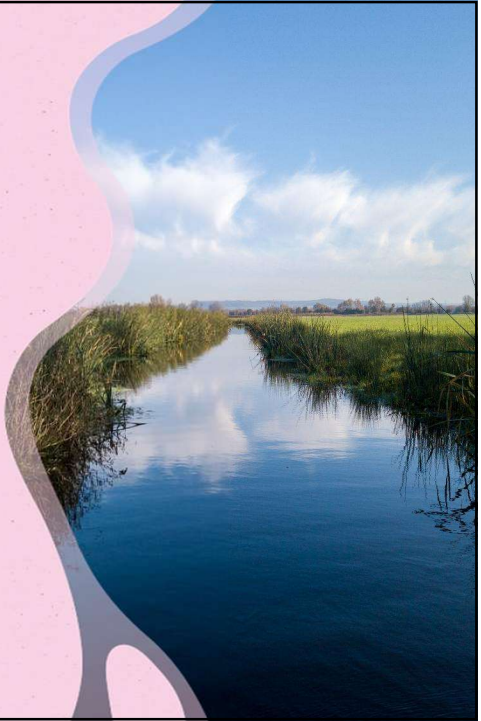
The power and history of land drainage

- "Reclaiming boggy ground."
- As old as agriculture itself.
- Between 1840 and 1890 c 12m acres of land drained in the UK.
- IDBs cover 10% of England & Wales.
- 64% of grade 1 agricultural land is within IDBs.
- Protect 6M properties & infrastructure.
- 27,923 has of SSSI are within IDBs.



Why wetlands?

- Nature-bursting
- Climate resilience
- Carbon-storing
- Water-purifying
- Mood-boosting
- Life-giving



Why wetlands?

We have lost 87%
of wetlands across
the world



Why wetlands?

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National nature security assessment says
about food security.... protecting and
restoring ecosystems is easier, cheaper
and more reliable than many technologies

Working in the place where land meets water.

IDB language:	Wetland engineer language:
Drain	Manage
Clean	Richness
Keep them tidy	Full of life
Quiet unseen service	Superpowers
Not shiny or concrete	Nature's infrastructure

Upgrading drainage infrastructure with wetlands

- Creating 'Natural Sponges' for peak flow management
- Reducing maintenance and capital costs
- Enhancing water quality and compliance
- Building resilience against extremes
- Unlocking new funding streams

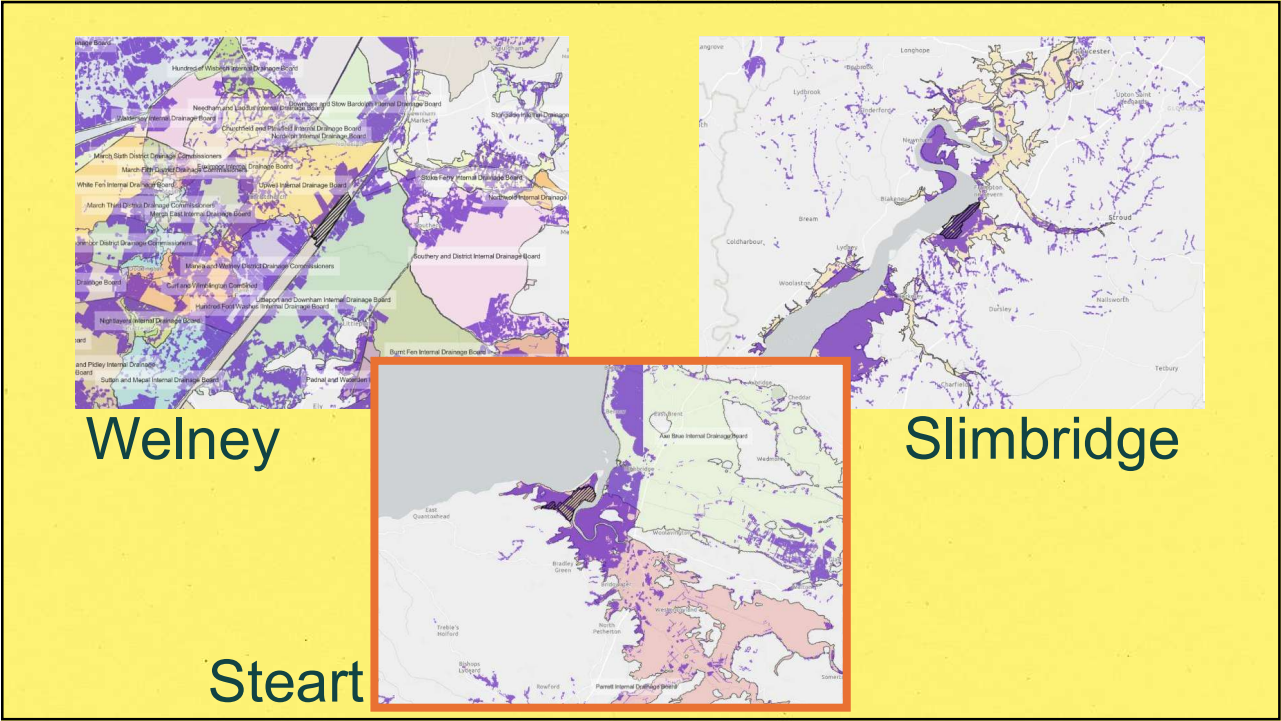


SPATIAL OPPORTUNITY


- WWT investigated the potential of restoring 100,000 hectares of wetlands around the UK and mapped the potential.
- Our first goal is to restore 20,000ha.
- And these are our priority waterscapes.

[Using data to put wetlands to work | WWT](#)





Thank you.



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