

Job Description - Protected Sites and Species Programme Manager (PB3)

Job summary

You will provide strategic leadership for Forestry England's approach to nature conservation across protected sites and species, with wider programme management responsibilities. The role includes overseeing our national processes for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) screening and Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs). You will shape and direct our conservation strategy for protected sites, including our 68,000 ha of SSSIs and European designated sites, ensuring that our actions are evidence-based, legally compliant, and aligned with national priorities.

You will lead the implementation of operational guidance for protected species, including European Protected Species (EPS) and Schedule 1 birds, ensuring that our operations support species recovery while enabling sustainable land management. You will be responsible for Forestry England's delivery of Species Conservation Strategies under the Environment Act and will explore innovative approaches to streamlining operations, such as organisational licences, to further our nature recovery ambitions. You will be willing to challenge established norms in protected site and species management, influencing the regulatory environment, advocating for a more proactive and ambitious approach to nature recovery.

Protected sites will be positioned at the heart of wider nature recovery networks, and your leadership will help ensure Forestry England moves beyond passive observation of ecological decline, instead driving bold, evidence-led action to reverse it. You will play a key role in proactively pushing Forestry England to be a leader in protected site and species conservation.

Key responsibilities & accountabilities

- Provide leadership and programme management oversight for nature restoration work on protected sites, including SSSIs and European designated sites.
- Manage national processes for SSSI screening and Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs), including supporting delivery teams to implement these effectively through the development and delivery of training.
- Help meet the statutory target of 50% of SSSIs with actions on track by January 2028.
- Oversee the strategic distribution of funding for SSSI recovery, ensuring transparency, impact, and alignment with conservation priorities.
- Lead on protected species policy, including supporting delivery teams in applying and delivering operational guidance, including European Protected Species and Schedule 1 birds.
- Lead the implementation and interpretation of this guidance to streamline operations and promote species recovery.
- Solve operational problems relating to protected sites and species, providing practical, evidence-based solutions.
- Explore and develop options for streamlining operations to support nature recovery, including organisational licences.
- Lead Forestry England's implementation of Species Conservation Strategies and Protected Sites Strategies.
- Build strong, constructive relationships with key internal and external stakeholders, including being Forestry England's representative on the SSSI Major Landowners Group, working collaboratively to deliver shared nature recovery goals.
- Be willing to challenge established approaches where needed, encouraging innovation and ambition in protected site and species conservation.

- Contribute to wider nature recovery activities across Forestry England, as opportunities arise.

And any other tasks, reasonably requested by your line manager.

The duties of this post require the applicant to sometimes travel to remote locations that are not accessible by public transport. You will therefore need to hold a full and current driving license that enables you to drive in the UK. We are willing to consider any proposals put forward by applicants that would allow them to do the job by other means.

Skills, knowledge & experience

Essential professional and technical experience

- Ability to lead complex nature restoration programmes.
- Good knowledge of protected site management and implementing protected species guidance.
- Good knowledge of UK environmental legislation and regulatory frameworks, particularly relating to protected sites and species, and its practical application to land management.
- Strong communication and analytical skills, with the ability to interpret policy and evidence, and translate it into clear, actionable advice.
- Conservation, Ecology or environmental degree, or equivalent professional experience.

Desirable professional and technical experience

- Understanding of the UK forestry sector and its role in nature recovery.
- Experience in developing or managing organisational licences.
- Experience contributing to national reform programmes or policy development.
- Competence in GIS and ecological data analysis tools.
- Member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.
- Association of Project Management qualification or similar.
- Protected Species licences.

