

Helping protect the world's wetland landscapes

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Boy on boat in Vietnam.

Action to help preserve some of the world's most valuable ecosystems is behind a major international project, led by the University of Essex.

The culmination of the five-year project has been the development of an integrated action planning toolkit on wetland conservation and management, which can be adapted to help provide bespoke solutions to

protect valuable ecosystems around the globe.

Launched today at events in China, India and Vietnam, the Wetland Resources Action Planning (WRAP) toolkit offers researchers, technical planners and policymakers a systematic approach to conserve and to sustainably manage [wetland ecosystems](#) and biodiversity.

Wetlands cover a wide spectrum of environments – from areas of marsh and fen to reservoirs and mountain lakes – and the toolkit provides a suite of methods and practices, together with insights from lessons learned, to better inform potential users about the opportunities and limitations to adopting such an approach.

Rather than offering a prescriptive approach to protecting the biodiversity of these areas, the WRAP toolkit offers ideas and principles which help formulate integrated action plans to promote [biodiversity conservation](#) through sustainable use of any of these wetland types, irrespective of site scale or location. It is then hoped that [local communities](#) can embrace the principles of the toolkit to develop their own bespoke solutions to protect their ecosystems.

Biodiversity in the world's ecosystems is declining at an alarming rate due to increased human activities. This loss of biodiversity has a significant, detrimental effect upon the state of the natural environment upon which human communities depend. When undertaking an assessment of ecosystem services, the WRAP toolkit will help users consider the people who directly depend on the ecosystem for their livelihoods alongside preserving their socio-cultural heritage.

The tools have been developed and tested over five years at sites in China, India and Vietnam through the Highland Aquatic Resources Conservation and Sustainable Development (HighARCS) project.

This major initiative focused on highlands in Asia as they often harbor endemic species not found elsewhere or species threatened with extinction globally, such as the marbled eel in China and the golden mahseer and snow trout in India. What is concerning environmentalists is that these valuable ecosystems are increasingly under pressure from deforestation, land-use change, overfishing, flooding and worsening climate change impacts.

Closer to home, Dr Stuart Bunting, coordinator of the HighARCS project, from the Essex Sustainability Institute and School of Biological Sciences at the University of Essex said the toolkit was a valuable resource for policymakers.

"In the context of the UK and Europe the WRAP toolkit could make a significant contribution to better planning and coordinating the management of wetlands, catchments and coastal zones in line with requirements established under the European Union Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 and Water Framework and Marine Strategy Framework Directives," explained Dr Bunting. "Integrated action planning could assist wetland managers, and, in particular, those responsible for nature reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in reconciling [biodiversity](#) conservation with continued access by the public and other user groups."

The integrated action planning approach devised in the HighARCS project cuts across disciplines and sectors, builds cooperation in the field and develops new forms of partnership with poor communities. Research teams at field sites worked in collaboration with local communities and other stakeholder groups as part of the project.

Provided by University of Essex

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