2024/2025 Impact Report

SALTMARSH SOLUTIONS

WWT
For wetlands. For life.

AVIVA

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WE ARE WWT

THE WETLAND CHARITY

We're on a mission to restore wetlands and unlock their power. Because when wetlands flourish, all life will flourish. In the fight against the climate crisis and nature loss, we must adapt and find solutions. And there is hope. You'll find it wherever land meets water.

Wetlands are super-powered solutions to the problems our world faces. They're flood-busting, mood-boosting, water-purifying, carbon-storing habitats that burst with nature, sustaining livelihoods around the world. But we're losing them at a staggering rate.

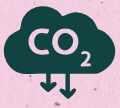
WWT is the voice for wetlands, speaking up for these soul-stirring habitats as campaigners and advocates. We restore, create and manage wetlands ourselves, and we provide the science and guidance to help others to do that too – both here in the UK and internationally.

Aviva's amazing **£21million donation** is allowing us to do something unusual and impactful for the saltmarsh restoration world. We're recreating a rare habitat on the Severn Estuary and conducting research to understand and define what good saltmarsh looks like.

This means measuring the many incredible benefits this habitat can bring for people and nature. Whether it's storing carbon, buffering against the effects of flooding or providing space for the UK's wildlife, saltmarshes can do incredible things if we give them the protection they need.

TURNING THE TIDE ON SALTMARSH LOSS

Saltmarshes provide a whole host of benefits that often go unnoticed. They're bursting with life; from specialised plants and insects to swirling flocks of wading birds. But boosting biodiversity is not the only benefit. They're also some of our most valuable habitats in how they:



Capture carbon:

Coastal wetlands make up less than **2%** of ocean area but account for nearly **50%** of carbon burial in marine sediments.[1]

Buffer against flooding

Around 898 million people around the world live in low lying coastal zones,[2] with coastal wetlands providing them an estimated of $447 Billion per year in protection from storms, as well as saving up to 4,620 lives annually.[3]

Clean our water

Saltmarshes filter and absorb pollutants like pesticides, heavy metals and hydrocarbons.

Lift our mood

Just ten minutes in a wetland setting can increase positive feelings.[4]

Support the economy

Creating **25,000** hectares of saltmarsh around the UK's coastline would deliver estimated benefits valued at **£1.7 billion** over 60 years.[5]

But over the centuries, a massive 652,000 hectares of saltmarsh have been reclaimed for human use around the UK's coastlines – an area about the size of the county of Devon.

This loss, combined with the building of immovable concrete defences around our island, means all the amazing benefits saltmarshes can bring are being gradually squeezed out.

In 2025 the first State of the World's Saltmarshes report estimated that between 2000 and 2019 alone, the world saw a net saltmarsh loss of 143,500 hectares – but that up to 2 million hectares of saltmarsh could be restored.

We're determined to kickstart this saltmarsh restoration revolution by showing how it can be done well and by providing an accurate measure of how much each of saltmarshes' superpowers benefits people, nature and the climate. By building the case for saltmarsh through science, we will inspire others to restore and protect this rare, precious habitat, and value it as the natural powerhouse it is.

“The donation from Aviva has supercharged delivery of WWT’s saltmarsh restoration ambitions. With our first extensive area of land acquired and our work with the local community, on site investigations and design advancing, we are moving positively towards the restoration of a landscape-scale coastal wetland on the Severn Estuary.

We are learning a great deal about the constraints and barriers to this type of work at this scale, but also about overcoming them. This knowledge, combined with the research we have initiated to help understand the numerous superpowers of saltmarsh, will help build the wider case for saltmarsh restoration and support sustainable coastal change going forward.

Kevin Peberdy,
WWT's Deputy Chief Executive

“Saltmarshes are one of nature’s most powerful allies in the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss. Through our partnership with WWT, we’re proud to be helping unlock their potential—not just as carbon stores and flood defences, but as vibrant ecosystems that support communities and wildlife alike.

This work reflects Aviva’s commitment to long-term resilience, and to investing in solutions that deliver real impact for people, nature and the climate.

Leah Ramoutar,
Director of environmental sustainability at Aviva

OUR IMPACT

A total of 18 sites were considered in detail and we spoke with a range of statutory bodies

Reviewing the data

In the first quarter of 2024/25, WWT continued its work to investigate possible sites for saltmarsh restoration, throwing the net out as wide as the coasts of West Wales to the Thames Estuary. We reviewed information on elevation, topography, existing flood defences and other infrastructure, historical and environmental designations, construction requirements, and existing land use types. A total of 18 sites were considered in detail and we spoke with a range of statutory bodies, to understand what consents and licences we would need for the work at different sites.

Land purchase

In September 2024, Aviva and WWT Trustees approved the purchase of land at Awre, in the Forest of Dean, and we completed in January 2025. The area has excellent potential for saltmarsh restoration, and the existing flood defences are no longer being maintained. Because significant flooding has happened on the land before, many members of the community understand the risk to the land if no action is taken. There is a clear case for a planned managed realignment of defences, providing more space for nature, brilliant views from higher ground and huge potential for carbon sequestration.

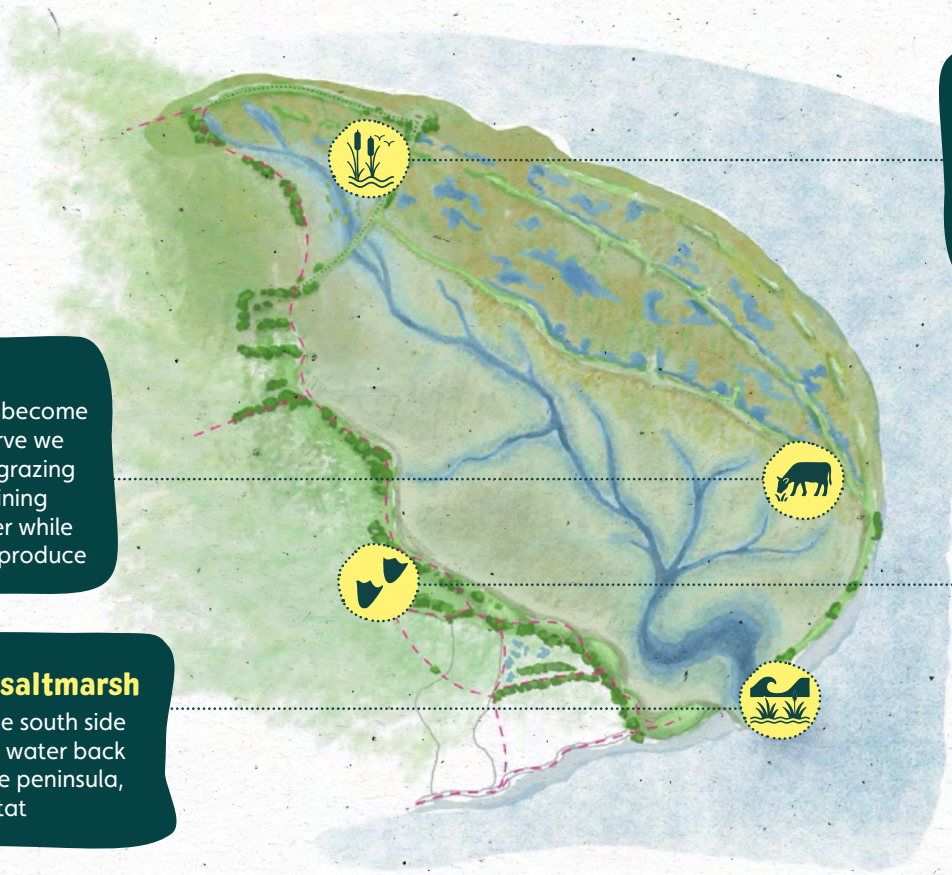
Survey, design and planning

After buying the land at Awre, we moved into the survey, design and planning stage for this reserve. This has involved:

- engaging with statutory bodies;
- surveying wildlife on the land – from newts and bats to wetland birds;
- contracting an engineering consultant to inform the design and development of the reserve; and
- drawing upon our decades of expertise in delivering successful wetland restoration projects

This work has informed an initial design of the reserve. We've presented this concept to the community and will work with them and the experts at JBA Consulting to improve the plan and eventually bring it to life.

OUR VISION FOR AWRE



A series of treatment reedbeds and ponds
will clean and filter the fresh water from higher ground before it discharges into the Severn

Return to grazing
As the saltmarsh plants become established on the reserve we will explore a return to grazing the intertidal land, retaining its agricultural character while producing high quality produce

Improved footpaths
will allow circular walks for locals, taking in spectacular views of both the river Severn and the new saltmarsh

Tidal breach restores saltmarsh
An engineered breach on the south side of the peninsula allows tidal water back onto the lower ground of the peninsula, recreating a saltmarsh habitat

IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

Communications and community engagement

We've organised regular community engagement events, including drop-ins at the village hall and in-depth walk and talks for less formal, outdoor discussions on the land itself as well as direct meetings with the Parish Council. These events have been an opportunity to directly hear and understand any concerns and challenges from the Awre community.

We invited interested community members to sign up to a monthly email newsletter. This helps the community keep up to date on the project, provides a touchpoint for people to find out more and for us to further build relationships with the community.

Our project webpage is regularly updated to answer questions about project milestones, and how the restoration will happen in practice.

Our announcement about WWT's land purchase received positive coverage in The Times, BBC Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire Live and The Forester, with huge support across our social channels.

Saltmarsh code and other research

We continue to contribute to the Saltmarsh Code working group and have run pilots of the Code at two sites, working with the Soil Association as a verifying body at Awre.

Following the completion of our research plan, including baseline sampling at Awre, work has begun to understand the biodiversity value of the existing habitat. We've installed equipment to monitor water levels, current velocities and wave heights, both outside and inside the realignment area.

We have developed the Saltmarsh National Survey to understand the public's views, knowledge and concerns regarding saltmarsh-related issues and saltmarsh restoration.

Finally, we are working on an economic model that aims to determine whether proximity to saltmarsh results in higher property values thanks to their value for flood resilience and as places to connect with nature.

Corporate volunteering

This year we kickstarted Aviva volunteering at WWT Arundel, WWT Slimbridge and WWT London Wetland Centre, which has made a significant contribution towards our work.

90% of 177 attendees rated their overall experience as excellent with the remaining 10% rating it as very good.

To reach our volunteering goals, WWT Slimbridge has added two more dates in 2025, WWT Arundel will add additional dates in September and October and WWT London Wetland Centre in October and November. A trial day is also booked at Steart Marshes for August 2025.

The launch of our off-site volunteering platform is imminent and will offer Aviva staff the opportunity to volunteer with us remotely. Remote volunteers will help us measure the biodiversity benefits of Natural Flood Management by monitoring and counting the abundance of insects at different sites.

CASE STUDY

CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING

We have now hosted Aviva's volunteers at WWT Slimbridge, WWT Arundel and WWT London Wetland Centre.

Twelve Aviva employees visited WWT Slimbridge, splitting into three groups. They cleared vegetation on the Wild Safari route, sanded down our Shepherd's Hut hide on the banks of the Severn Estuary and repaired and made new reed screens for our Duck Decoy hide.

WWT Arundel hosted **six volunteers** from Aviva who spent the day helping to improve one of our grasslands for the many species of butterfly on site. They worked hard to clear invasive plants from chalk butterfly banks and dig out areas of hard rush. The teams' efforts accelerated the completion of the work, benefiting our beautiful butterflies.

Ten Aviva volunteers also spent a day at WWT London Wetland Centre, doing a great job of clearing vegetation in our Tundra bird enclosure and saving the reserve team days of work, which were then spent on other reserve management jobs.

The reserve teams across all sites have praised Aviva's hard work and dedication and pass on their heartfelt thanks for the tremendous help received. Our volunteers are an essential part of WWT's work enabling us to take meaningful action for wetlands.

"

Thank you for an insightful and rewarding day, the highlight of which came from seeing a family of four kingfishers.

Aviva team leader

CASE STUDY

EARLY ENGAGEMENT WITH STATUTORY BODIES

WWT built positive relationships at the earliest opportunity with the planning authorities and statutory bodies where we were examining the feasibility of saltmarsh restoration.

Speaking to staff at the Forest of Dean District Council, it was clear that they were very aware of the threat to the bank around the Awre peninsula and the Shoreline Management Plan for the area.

We have also held meetings at Awre with a wide range of statutory stakeholders to offer opportunities to input into early design thinking and the scope of survey and assessment works that we'll be working on through 2025.

The highlights of this engagement have been a visit from the heads of Natural England and the Environment Agency. Natural England chair Tony Juniper visited in early May, verbally expressing support for the project and offering advice on how best to engage with his organisation. Shortly after the Environment Agency chair, Alan Lovell, visited Awre for a tour and expressed an interest in being kept informed going forward.

NEXT STEPS

This year has laid the foundations for a saltmarsh reserve that will capture huge amounts of carbon and offer a spectacular home for all kinds of wetland wildlife. The reserve will also act as a base for our world-leading saltmarsh research, which will keep WWT at the forefront of efforts to revive this rare wetland.

Throughout 2025 we will continue survey and monitoring work, examining what wildlife is already here, while finessing our vision into a final design. We will continue to involve the community, seeking their input as we begin the formal planning process.

We will look to submit our planning application in Spring 2026, before navigating the process itself through the end of the year. If all goes to plan, we aim to breach the existing flood defences in Autumn 2027, to let estuary water in and begin the process of colonisation by saltmarsh plants.

We would like to thank Aviva once again for their incredibly generous donation to this programme of work. We're excited to report back with more progress next year.

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WWT is the wetland charity. We're on a mission to restore wetlands because they're a wondrous solution to the problems our world faces.

Our vision:

A world where healthy wetland nature thrives and enriches lives.

Our mission:

Restore wetlands and unlock their power.

Our ambitions:

We have big ambitions for the future. To stay on track to reach our ambitions, our new strategy sets clear targets for 2030.

To find out more please contact
saltmarshsolutions@wwt.org.uk

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

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