# Beavers to be reintroduced into the wild in England for the first time in centuries



Beavers are set to be reintroduced into the wild in England for the first time in centuries, with the environment secretary, Steve Reed, announcing that nature groups will be granted licences for their release into local waterways. This significant policy change allows for the first releases to take place as early as this autumn.

Historically, beavers were eliminated from Britain approximately 400 years ago due to extensive hunting for their fur, meat, and scent oil. However, their numbers have increased in recent years following licensed reintroductions into enclosures and, in some instances, illegal releases. Current estimates suggest that around 500 beavers now inhabit the wild in England.

The reintroduction of beavers is viewed as beneficial for the environment, as these rodents play a crucial role in creating habitats for various wildlife and in mitigating flooding. They do so by altering waterways, which helps to slow water flow and create still pools. The government's new approach will involve comprehensive release projects that must present a 10-year plan, detailing their expected impacts on the landscape.

There have been challenges to this policy within the government, particularly at No 10, where there were concerns that the plan might upset farmers, who could perceive beavers as a threat to agricultural land. Following considerable backlash from wildlife groups regarding the policy's delay, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) received the go-ahead for the announcement.

The potential economic benefits of beaver reintroduction have also been highlighted. Defra has argued that these animals could align with Labour's growth mission, as they contribute to infrastructure development and nature restoration at no cost. An example cited was a project in the Czech Republic, where beavers reportedly saved the government £1 million by constructing a dam.

Richard Benwell, chief executive of Wildlife and Countryside Link, expressed his approval of the initiative, stating, “Restoring nature means restoring whole ecosystems, and few can beat the beaver in helping bring landscapes to life.” He noted that beavers can help rejuvenate rivers and wetlands while mitigating both flooding and drought. Benwell underscored the importance of wild releases, noting that it was “excellent that the government is making progress.”

Several projects are already poised for implementation, such as the National Trust’s Purbeck Heaths release project in Dorset, alongside initiatives from the Wildlife Trusts aiming for beaver releases in Devon and Cornwall.

However, concerns have been raised by the farming community regarding the potential impact of beaver populations on agricultural land. Tom Bradshaw, president of the National Farmers’ Union, stated that mechanisms for control would need to be established, particularly if beavers inadvertently cause flooding in fields. He suggested that lethal control methods should be part of a broader strategy for managing beaver populations.

Current plans indicate that lethal control measures would only be permissible as a last resort. The government is expected to announce additional support for farmers who may face challenges due to flooding caused by beaver activity.

This move towards beaver reintroduction has been nearly a decade in the making, first initiated under the former Conservative environment secretary Michael Gove in 2017. Following a successful trial of wild-living beavers on the River Otter in Devon, which showed positive impacts on flooding and local biodiversity, there has been ongoing pressure from farming groups against the releases due to fears of potential conflict with agriculture.

Zac Goldsmith, the Conservative peer and former environment minister, commented on the newly announced plans, remarking, “It’s great this is finally being resolved. It should never have taken so long... The case for beavers couldn’t be clearer,” emphasising their positive environmental impact.

As plans for beaver reintroductions unfold, the government will aim to balance ecological benefits with agricultural interests to ensure a sustainable approach to this historic wildlife re-emergence.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://beavertrust.org/restoring-englands-rivers-coalition-of-49-organisations-push-for-wild-beaver-reintroduction-policy/> - This article supports the claim that beavers are beneficial for the environment, creating habitats and mitigating flooding, and that there is a push for their reintroduction in England. It highlights the importance of a national strategy for beaver reintroduction.
* <https://beavertrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/England-wild-beaver-reintroduction-letter_Jan-2025.docx.pdf> - This document explains the need for a licensing framework and national strategy for beaver reintroduction in England, emphasizing their role in ecosystem restoration and biodiversity support.
* <https://www.wcl.org.uk/duplicate-of-turning-the-tide-for-nature-earthwatch%E2%80%99s-2025-plans.asp> - This article discusses the benefits of beaver reintroduction, including their role as 'ecosystem engineers' and their potential to mitigate flooding and boost biodiversity in England.
* <https://news.exeter.ac.uk/centre-for-resilience-in-environment-water-and-waste/research-backs-beavers-in-fight-against-flooding-and-droughts/> - This article references the University of Exeter's study on beavers, highlighting their positive impacts on flooding and drought alleviation, supporting the environmental benefits of their reintroduction.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/five-years-of-beaver-activity-reduces-impact-of-flooding> - This news article discusses a study showing that beaver activity can reduce the impact of flooding, supporting the claim that beavers help in mitigating flooding through their dam-building activities.
* <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969716323099> - This article provides scientific evidence supporting the benefits of beaver reintroduction, including habitat restoration and biodiversity enhancement, which aligns with the environmental benefits mentioned in the article.