



INVITATION TO TENDER

Plantlife

1. Introduction

This is an exciting opportunity to develop a definition for ‘Ancient Grasslands’, and a methodology by which to identify them.

The project is managed by Plantlife, with the funding being provided through a grant from the People’s Trust for Endangered Species (PTES). A **budget of £10,000 (including VAT, if applicable)** is available to deliver this specification.

The deadline for submissions is **22 February (9.00am)**.

2. Project context

The aim of the project is to **develop a definition for old, undisturbed grasslands that could be considered to be ‘Ancient Grasslands’¹** in England, Scotland, and Wales, as well as **a methodology by which to identify them**. The definition and methodology might vary by nation. Plantlife’s intention is to use these definitions to secure stronger protections for those grasslands within planning policies, similar to the protections that Ancient Woodlands might receive.

This project would enable the widespread identification of ‘Ancient Grassland’ sites and greater understanding of their importance amongst land managers, policymakers and the general public. It would also allow Plantlife and its partners to advocate for stronger legal protections, based on a common and agreed definition, as well as better support for farmers and land managers of ‘Ancient Grassland’ sites. This could help stem habitat losses and facilitate restoration opportunities, contributing to the conservation of the endangered Mealy Meadowcap and other grassland CHEGD species. Plantlife’s wider goal is for statutory agencies in England, Scotland, and Wales to adopt a definition of ‘Ancient Grasslands’ (potentially tailored according to the nation), and to secure stronger protections in the planning system, for example ones that are associated with Ancient Woodlands.

¹ The recommended wording for the definition does not necessarily have to be ‘Ancient Grasslands’, if it is determined that a different term would be more appropriate – for example ‘Old Growth Grasslands’.

Broadly, this definition should cover grasslands that are made up of complex communities of plants, fungi, and micro-organisms that have developed over time. They might not have been ploughed, fertilised, or disturbed for a long timeframe, which has led to specific soil structures and soil organic carbon content that can only develop over long periods, resulting in a habitat that could be termed 'irreplaceable' given it cannot be recreated within a meaningful timeframe (i.e. within many decades).

Whilst the identification methodology should draw on different approaches, a key component of this project is considering how grassland fungal species could be indicator species for ancient grassland. In particular, the project should consider the role of CHEGD species, such as Mealy Meadowcap (*Pseudotrachelium metapodium*). Many fungal species associated with old, unimproved grasslands are threatened; nearly 90 per cent of all waxcap species are on one or more European national Red Lists for threatened fungi, and currently 32 UK grassland fungal species are on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) International Red List, with more on the waiting list.

The IUCN cites threats to the Mealy Meadowcap across its range in Europe, where it is confined to old, semi-natural grasslands. Habitat loss is the main threat; more than 97% of the UK's species-rich and long-established grasslands are likely to have been destroyed since the 1930s. Agricultural improvements, such as ploughing and the application of fertiliser, have been a key driver of species-rich grassland habitat losses. Nitrogen deposition, often from agricultural air pollution, is also a threat to these species.

3. About us

Plantlife is the global charity working to enhance, protect, restore and celebrate the wild plants and fungi that are essential to all life on earth. With two in five plant species at risk of extinction, biodiversity loss is now the fastest it's ever been – which means our work has never been more vital. We champion and accelerate conservation action, working at the heart of a global network of individuals and organisations, to influence and inspire landowners and land managers, public and private bodies, governments and local communities. One of our strategic ambitions to 2030 is that species-rich wildflower and waxcap grasslands are protected and restored at scale.

4. Specification

We are seeking a contractor who can write **a discussion paper**. It will be an internal discussion paper but may be shared externally with relevant organisations in the conservation sector and policymakers.

The discussion paper should provide:

- **Recommended definitions for ‘Ancient Grasslands’ for England, Scotland, and Wales** - if necessary, with multiple definitions that are appropriate for use within these contexts;
 - National Policy and Planning Frameworks, particularly as an Irreplaceable Habitat²;
 - Summary Policy Statements and standing advice;
- Discussion on potential trade-offs and limitations of different approaches to definitions;
- Discussion on the potential legal protections that could be afforded ‘Ancient Grasslands’, and the risks that these might create to semi-natural grasslands excluded from this definition;

- A proposed **methodology to identify ‘Ancient Grasslands’** - if necessary, with different approaches for England, Scotland, and Wales. It might include a combination of (non-exhaustive list):
 - a **time-related** definition where we use a key date to define which grasslands could be considered ancient;
 - a **species-related** definition and a **soil-related** definition that could both be used to date grasslands through scientific methods (and to determine which grasslands have been continuously managed);
 - In acknowledgement of the grant funding Plantlife received from PTES, particular consideration must be given to ways in which grassland CHEGD fungi could be indicator species;
 - a **historical** approach that, in combination with other methods, could be used to reinforce an ancient grassland’s status.
- **Stakeholder engagement on the proposed definition and methodology** - produce a list of possible stakeholders from whom feedback could be invited. Plantlife to then identify a prioritised list for the contractor to contact. Plantlife to provide contact details. This list could include:
 - Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management;
 - Natural England;
 - NatureScot;
 - Natural Resources Wales;
 - Joint Nature Conservation Committee;
 - Specialist ecologists.

² By way of example, Ancient Woodlands are defined in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) for England; the UK Government’s [standing advice](#) for planners and developers; NatureScot’s [Policy Summary and Statement](#); Natural Resource Wales [Guidance and Advice](#).

Drawing on this literature (non-exhaustive):

- Internal Memo – Ancient Grasslands/Long-established grasslands – Plantlife (to be provided on request)
- [National Vegetation Classification: MG5 grassland \(TIN147\)](#) – Natural England
- Ancient Grasslands in England Summary – [Insider Ecology article](#) - Martin Allen
- Ancient grasslands guide ambitious goals in restoration - [paper](#) - Elise Buisson, Sally Archibald, Alessandra Fidelis, Katharine N. Suding
- Linking climate warming and land conversion to species’ range changes across Great Britain - [Nature article](#) - Suggitt, A.J., Wheatley, C.J., Aucott, P. *et al.*
- Using the old growth concept to identify old, species-rich semi-natural grassland – [article](#) - André Pornon, Christophe Andalo
- Toward an old-growth concept for grasslands, savannas, and woodlands – [article](#) - Veldman, J.W., Buisson, E., Durigan, G., Fernandes, G.W., Le Stradic, S., Mahy, G., Negreiros, D., Overbeck, G.E., Veldman, R.G., Zaloumis, N.P., Putz, F.E. and Bond, W.J.

Whilst it is the responsibility of the contractor to source literature and evidence for review, Plantlife staff can provide this literature, as well as further advice.

The exact scope of the discussion paper can be subject to further discussion during the ITT process.

4.1 Content

Any external data or images should be credited appropriately in the discussion paper. There is no specific structure for a discussion paper. Plantlife will provide appropriate logos.

4.2 Outputs

The required outputs from the contractor are as follows:

- i. Written discussion paper on definition for ‘Ancient Grasslands’ and identification methodology
 - Estimated length: 5000 words
- ii. A detailed record of feedback and discussion with stakeholders

5. Contract management, timeline and budget

5.1 Contract management

This project is led and managed by Rachel Warmington, Head of Science at Plantlife. She will be supported by Lizzie Wilberforce, Head of Plantlife Cymru, and Jo Riggall, Grassland Advocacy Officer. Plantlife will maintain frequent contact with the contractor to facilitate and monitor the contract delivery. Ad hoc calls with Plantlife staff throughout the project may be required.

5.2 Timeline

We are inviting submissions to undertake the specification below with the following timeline (2024):

| | |
|----------------|---|
| 23 Jan | Invitation to tender (ITT) issued |
| 22 Feb | Deadline for submissions (by 09:00) |
| 26 Feb – 1 Mar | Evaluation of submissions and meeting with shortlist candidates |
| 4 Mar | Contract awarded |
| 30 Apr | Provisional target date for completion of contract (<i>Subject to discussion</i>) |

5.3 Budget

£10,000 (including VAT, if applicable) is available to deliver this project, including any costs beyond the contractor's day rate. There are no travel requirements and therefore no anticipated travel costs.

5.4 Submission and supporting documentation

The deadline for submissions is **22 February (9.00am)**. Your submission should be returned to the following email address: **Rachel.warmington@plantlife.org.uk**

If you are intending to submit a tender and would like to discuss the project or receive any responses to questions and clarifications, please email rachel.warmington@plantlife.org.uk. We will confirm receipt of submissions within 2 working days.

Your submission should be in letter format with a maximum of 4 pages, providing detail on the following elements:

- i) The contractor's familiarity with the subject and experience of developing reports and reviewing evidence / data associated with grassland habitats and grassland fungi, with relevant examples.
- ii) Proposed methodology for delivering the specification, including discussion paper report outlines.

- iii) The day rate (excluding VAT) charged; this rate should include all IT and office/home working costs.
- iv) A clear statement of the number of days needed to undertake each element of the work.
- v) The contractor should indicate whether they are VAT registered and provide a VAT number if appropriate.

In addition, applicants should supply the following documentation:

- vi) CV(s) of personnel who will undertake the work.
- vii) Evidence of public liability insurance and professional indemnity insurance.
- viii) Details of two current or previous clients who can provide references on request (these will not be contacted without your explicit agreement).

6. Evaluation Criteria

The successful candidate will be selected based on the quality of their submission, addressing all elements of the specification, as well as the value of the quote submitted and estimated timescales. A shortlist of candidates will be invited to meet representatives from Plantlife.