

Vegetation Management for Flood Risk on the Broads Flood Embankments 2023

You may see our Environment Agency teams (or contractors on our behalf) out and about cutting the vegetation across our embankments across the Broadland area. Whilst a part of the natural environment, these man-made embankments are important flood defences that help reduce the risk of flooding to people, property and the environment.

Why do we cut the vegetation on the embankments?

Embankments need regular maintenance. Research has shown that the regular mowing of vegetation improves the strength of the root network which helps protect the embankment from external erosion caused by rainfall, wind, currents, wave action and pedestrian footfall.



Regular cutting also prevents broad leaved plants and woody vegetation from establishing. Growth of this type of vegetation can damage the embankment through root penetration and if left to establish, it will shade out species such as low growing grasses and wildflowers which are needed to stabilise the bank surface.

Shorter vegetation also helps our teams monitor and inspect our defences, which we do regularly to identify any signs of damage.

When do we cut the vegetation?

We carry out our cutting between March and October. We programme our work depending on the flood risk rating of each embankment and the environmental sensitivity of the area. All embankments will receive at least one cut between September and October. Some embankments will also receive extra cuts earlier in the Spring and Summer months. The cutting specifications used are sympathetic to the environmental sensitivities of each location and the time of year.

How do we cut the vegetation?

We generally use ride-on machinery with cutting attachments to cut the vegetation. Sometimes we carry out strimming by hand. All methods have been reviewed and approved by our ecology experts.



What checks do we put in place for nesting birds?

We have adapted our programme to avoid cutting long vegetation during peak bird nesting season. However, some of our maintenance needs to be carried out during bird nesting season. Nesting birds are legally protected, so we apply environmental checks before any work is carried out. An ecologist will walk over the site prior to the works to identify any nests. Our operational staff are diligent and should they see a nest or nesting bird, they will stop any works and seek further advice.

What about the local wildlife? How have we adapted our work to support biodiversity?

We work closely with our team of ecology experts to ensure our maintenance work supports biodiversity and limits the impact on the environment. We also have an assent from Natural England that sets how we work in the most sensitive SSSI areas (Special Sites of Scientific Interest). For example, we have agreed available times in the year when we can carry out this essential maintenance.

You will notice we leave a strip of uncut vegetation on the rear slope of the bank wherever possible. We sometimes refer to this a 'wildlife strip' to retain habitat for any insects, reptiles or birds that may use it.

We are continuously working to achieve a balance between environmental, conservation, health & safety and operational issues whilst still maintaining the integrity of the flood defence.



Who can I contact for more information?

We have made changes to our work as a result of comments from the public and welcome your feedback again this year.

If you would like further information on maintenance, please get in touch using the contact details below:

Email - enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

Telephone - 03708 506 506 (Monday to Friday, 8am-6pm)

Incident Hotline - 0800 80 70 60 - to report flooding, blockages, pollution, unusual changes in flow of water, collapsed or badly damaged defences (24-hour service).