



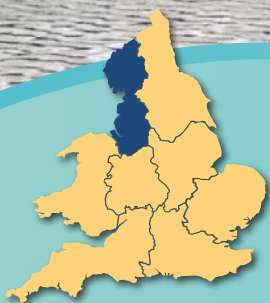
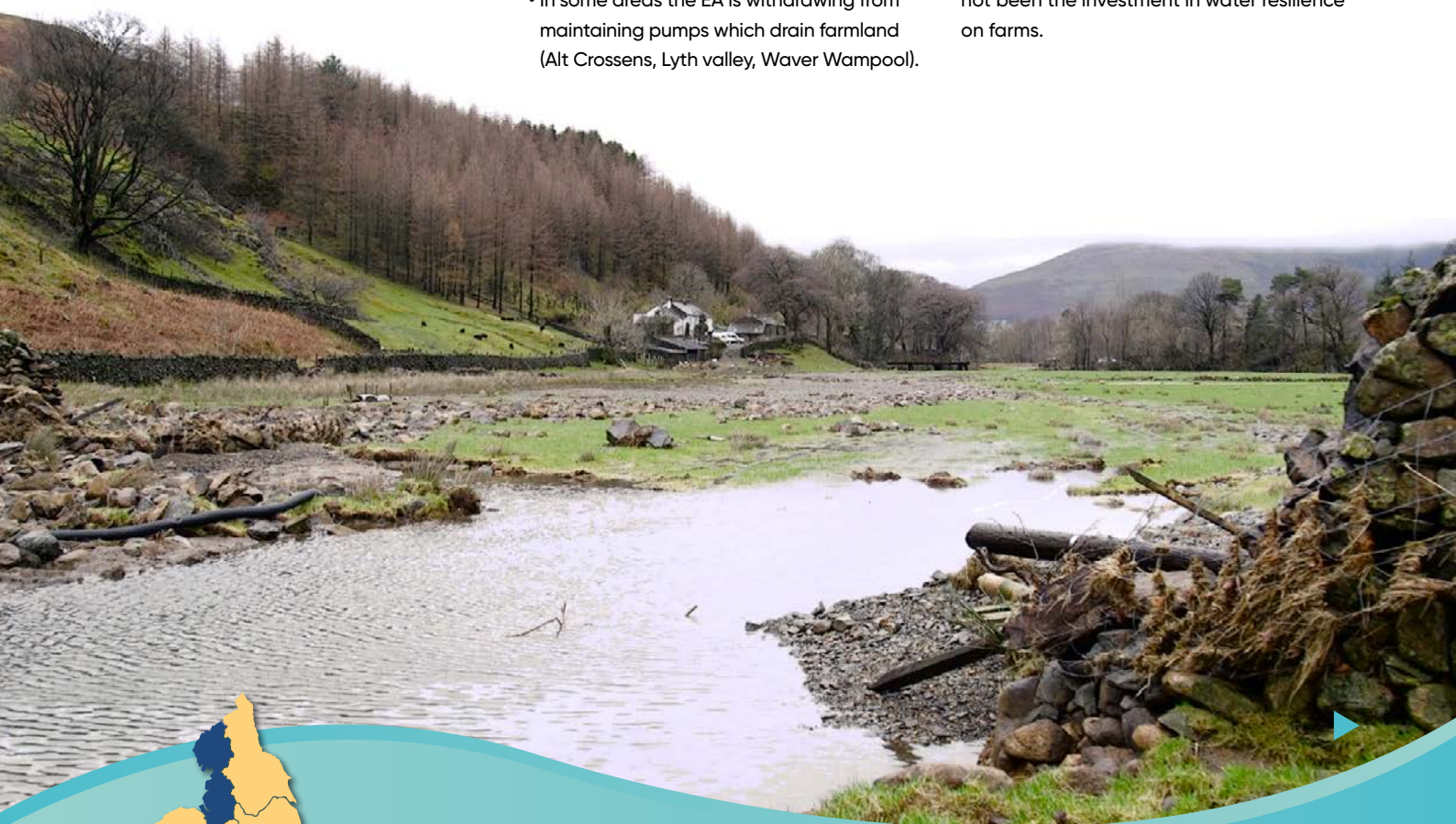
NORTH WEST

Flooding is a major issue in the North West. Traditionally, the region receives a vast amount of rainfall and, over recent years, the infrastructure has not been able to cope with the extreme heavy downpours associated with climate change. This was demonstrated in 2015 when Storm Desmond hit.

There have been a number of huge investments by the Environment Agency (EA) in the region (such as the Kendal Flood Scheme) but these have been focused on protecting people and property and not on protecting farmland, although they plan to use farmland and Natural Flood Management as part of the solution. The challenges and impacts that flooding brings to the North West include:

- Most of our best land is low lying and prone to flooding. It is protected and drained by EA assets, some of which are no longer maintained. Every year we lose high value crops due to flooding.
- We have no Internal Drainage Boards in the North West, Historically, the water board used to do a lot of the maintenance. The EA no longer carry out the maintenance and, initially, this was not communicated very well. This has left farmers unsure of who will carry out the work and unsure of what they can and cannot do without a licence. Unmanaged drainage channels mean land is more prone to flooding and the complicated licencing regime around flood risk is a barrier that stops people doing what is needed.
- In some areas the EA is withdrawing from maintaining pumps which drain farmland (Alt Crossens, Lyth valley, Waver Wampool).
- In some areas the EA and local councils will stop maintaining sea defences which only protect farmland, much of which is our better quality agricultural land.
- In the uplands, flash flooding can damage infrastructure and kill livestock

The North West is an area which traditionally had plenty of water, but it appears to become 'water stressed' very quickly in periods of dry weather as most of the water is drawn from surface water sources. In 2018, the North West was the only region in the UK that had a 'hosepipe ban' and United Utilities had to transport water to farmers whose boreholes had dried up. This can be a particular issue in areas of horticultural and potato crops. As much of the focus has been on flooding there has not been the investment in water resilience on farms.





Regional priorities:

Flood management:

- Farmers need to have the ability to protect their land from flooding and need to have the means to drain floodwater away efficiently after an event. This will help to improve the resilience of the farming business and safeguard the productivity of the soil.
- The ability to form Internal Drainage Boards to take on assets that the EA are withdrawing from. Ideally this would also include a mechanism to make sure that everyone who is benefitting from a drainage system is obligated to pay for its maintenance.
- Better balance between protecting the environment and allowing flood risk management activity to take place e.g. the difficulty getting a licence for more than one operation where a Site of Special Scientific Interest is involved. This can be expensive and bureaucratic. Farmers need long term multi operation licences in sensitive areas.
- A mechanism needs to be found whereby development does not increase the risk of flooding to agricultural land or that new developments need to contribute to channel maintenance.
- More guidance from the EA on the licencing process.
- At a strategic level, recognition of the value of farmland and food production.
- Capital grants on a case-by-case basis to help with flood protection or recovery.

Water resources:

- Proper maintenance of the current drainage system so it can hold more water.
- Help with grants and overturning the bureaucracy associated with building on-farm water storage.
- Grants and advice on water efficiency techniques (water recycling on farm, low input irrigation techniques).
- Making more of our on-farm groundwater resources. Despite surface water levels falling to very low levels in the late spring/early summer, the groundwater levels were still exceptionally high.

