



American Mink Eradication

A Strategy for Wales (2027 – 2035)



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Executive Summary

The presence of American Mink in the UK has caused the demise of many wetland, freshwater and coastal ecosystems, as well as numerous species that depend on them. The once common Water Vole is now on the brink of extinction in Wales due primarily to American Mink predation. Other mammals, fish, waders, wildfowl and seabird populations are all threatened by the presence of the invasive non-native predator. It is entirely possible to eradicate American Mink from Wales. If this was to be the case, Wales would be the first nation in the world to do so and thereby facilitate the dramatic recovery of countless species, habitats and ecosystems.

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Vision

A Wales free of American Mink (*Neogale vison*) by 2035, enabling the recovery of native wildlife and the resilience of freshwater, wetland, riparian and coastal ecosystems.

The eradication of American Mink will provide significant conservation benefits, particularly for the recovery of the Water Vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) and other species vulnerable to Mink predation.

The programme will also demonstrate how Welsh Government, statutory agencies, conservation organisations, landowners, communities, scientists and volunteers can work collaboratively to deliver landscape-scale biodiversity recovery.

The Case for Action

American Mink are an established invasive non-native predator throughout Wales. Their highly adaptable nature and ability to hunt both on land and in water means they can exert significant pressure on native wildlife.

Water Voles are particularly vulnerable because Mink can enter their burrow systems and exploit habitats in which they have few effective refuges. The Water Vole has undergone an estimated 96% decline across the UK and is now one of Britain's most threatened mammals. Mink impacts extend beyond Water Voles to:

- ground-nesting birds such as waders, seabirds, wildfowl and game.
- riverine birds such as ducks, geese, rails, Dipper and Kingfisher.
- fish and other aquatic species such as White-clawed Crayfish.
- amphibians and reptiles.
- small mammals.

Consequently, Mink eradication has the potential to deliver benefits across freshwater, wetland, riparian and coastal ecosystems, supporting wider biodiversity recovery and ecosystem resilience.

Localised Mink control has been undertaken successfully in Wales for many years. However, isolated projects are vulnerable to recolonisation when control ends or where neighbouring areas remain occupied. **A coordinated, landscape-scale approach is therefore required to achieve lasting eradication.**

Strategic Objective

The primary objective is: **To eradicate American Mink from Wales through a coordinated, evidence-led, landscape-scale programme, with eradication targeted for 2035.**

The programme will:

- reduce and ultimately eliminate established Mink populations.
- prevent recolonisation from neighbouring areas.
- protect and facilitate the recovery of Water Voles and other vulnerable native species.
- establish effective long-term surveillance to confirm eradication.
- develop a coordinated national approach to Mink management.
- maximise the use of volunteers and community participation.
- provide measurable ecological, social and economic benefits from investment.

Strategic Principles

The programme should be based on the following principles:

Landscape-scale Delivery

Mink control must operate across whole river catchments and connected landscapes rather than isolated sites. This will minimise recolonisation and maximise ecological benefits.

Evidence-led Management

Decisions should be informed by the best available ecological, trapping, genetic and spatial data.

Adaptive Management

Methods, equipment, trap deployment and operational approaches should be reviewed continually and adapted in response to evidence, technological development and experience.

Animal Welfare

All control operations must comply with relevant legislation and animal welfare requirements. Trapping and dispatch must be undertaken using appropriate equipment, methods and trained personnel.

Partnership Working

No single organisation can deliver eradication across Wales. The programme should bring together Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, conservation organisations, landowners, communities, volunteers, scientists and contractors.

Long-term Commitment

Eradication requires sustained effort. The programme must continue beyond the last confirmed Mink record through structured surveillance and rapid response to any subsequent detection.

Delivery Model

A **single lead organisation** should coordinate the national programme, providing clear accountability while enabling delivery through regional partners and existing conservation initiatives.

The governance structure should include:

- a **National Stakeholder Group** providing strategic oversight.
- an experienced **National Project Manager**.
- **Regional Project Officers** responsible for operational delivery.
- administrative, financial and technical support.
- scientific and genetic monitoring expertise.
- a coordinated network of trained volunteers and contractors.

Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales should provide strategic support, facilitate access to relevant public land and ensure alignment with national biodiversity, biosecurity and invasive non-native species priorities.

Existing Welsh initiatives, including regional Mink partnerships and forums, should form an important foundation for national delivery rather than being replaced by a wholly new structure.

Operational Approach

The programme should combine professional delivery with substantial volunteer participation.

Key components will include:

- electronically monitored live-capture traps.
- floating Mink rafts and bank-based traps.
- appropriate trap densities determined by local conditions.
- effective lures.
- remote monitoring technology.
- a national Mink records and trapping database.
- genetic monitoring.
- targeted surveillance.
- trained volunteers and contractors.
- post-eradication monitoring.

Approximately **1,500 electronically monitored live traps** are proposed for deployment across Wales, with trap density adapted to geography, habitat, watercourses, access and local Mink distribution.

The proposed workforce is approximately:

- **15 Project Officers**
- **15 Project Assistants**
- **3 Regional Officers**

Supported by volunteers and specialist contractors.

Technology should remain adaptable. Improvements in remote monitoring, trap design and satellite-linked systems should be evaluated and adopted where they improve effectiveness, welfare, reliability or efficiency.

Technology and Innovation

Remote Monitoring Devices (RMDs) and electronically monitored traps will be central to the programme. They can reduce routine inspection requirements, improve response times and increase operational efficiency and animal welfare.

The strategy should remain **technology-neutral**, allowing new technologies to be incorporated as they become available. This is particularly important in Wales, where mobile phone coverage is limited in some remote areas. Emerging satellite-linked monitoring systems may provide an important solution.

Trap and raft designs should similarly be subject to continuous improvement and field evaluation rather than being restricted to a single prescribed design.

Monitoring and Confirmation of Eradication

A robust monitoring framework will be essential to demonstrate progress and provide confidence that eradication has been achieved.

Monitoring should combine:

- trapping data;
- remote monitoring records;
- Mink sightings and other field evidence;
- spatial analysis;
- environmental surveillance; and
- genetic monitoring.

Genetic analysis of recovered Mink can help distinguish between residual populations and reinvasion, identify dispersal routes and inform targeted control.

The absence of Mink detections alone should not be considered sufficient evidence of eradication. Confirmation should be based on multiple lines of evidence followed by an appropriate period of post-eradication surveillance.

Welsh Delivery Challenges

The programme must be designed specifically for Welsh conditions.

Key challenges include:

- difficult upland terrain.
- limited road access.
- variable mobile phone coverage.

- inaccessible cliffs and islands.
- flooding and extreme weather.
- urban development alongside rivers.
- landowner access and permissions.
- potentially variable volunteer capacity.

Recolonisation from England represents a particularly important risk. The programme should therefore include coordinated activity along the **Wales–England border and across relevant cross-border catchments**, working with English agencies and conservation organisations.

The Welsh Government Woodland Estate and other public land provide important opportunities to improve access and protect strategic areas for eradication and Water Vole recovery.

Funding and Investment

A national eradication programme will require sustained investment over several years. The current indicative **five-year programme cost is £10.17 million**, comprising:

Cost Element	Five-year Cost
Staffing	£6,004,265
Equipment	£1,304,304
Travel and subsistence	£716,893
Professional services	£388,722
Sundries	£40,862
Overheads	£1,713,307
Total	£10,168,353

The budget should be regarded as an indicative programme-level estimate and reviewed regularly in response to operational experience, inflation, technological development and progress towards eradication. The costs should be not simply be viewed as a Mink control expenditure but as a **strategic investment in biodiversity recovery and ecosystem resilience in Wales**.

Communications and Public Engagement

Public confidence will be essential to the success of the programme.

Communications should be:

- proactive and reactive
- transparent
- evidence-led
- accessible
- consistent

- available in both Welsh and English.

The programme should clearly explain why Mink eradication is necessary, the evidence supporting the approach, the welfare safeguards in place and the ecological outcomes being sought.

Communications should focus on **restoring native wildlife and ecosystems**. Emphasis should be placed on:

- landowner engagement.
- community participation.
- volunteer recruitment.
- reporting of Mink sightings.
- ecological outcomes.
- transparency around animal welfare.
- demonstrating progress and value for money.

Potential controversy should be anticipated and addressed through factual, empathetic and consistent communication.

Policy Alignment

An all-Wales mink eradication programme is strongly aligned with existing Welsh and UK policy and legislation relating to invasive non-native species, biodiversity, ecosystem resilience and environmental protection. Relevant legislative frameworks include:

- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981;
- Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order 2019;
- Environment (Wales) Act 2016;
- Mink Keeping (Prohibition) (Wales) Order 2012;
- Sustainable Farming Scheme;
- Great Britain Invasive Non-Native Species Strategy 2023–2030;
- INNS Priority Species for Action in Wales;
- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015;
- Wales Biosecurity Strategy 2023–2030; and
- Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Act 2026.

The strategy therefore provides a mechanism for **delivering existing biodiversity, biosecurity and invasive species commitments through a coordinated national programme**, rather than creating a separate policy direction.

Programme Outcomes

Successful implementation will deliver an **American Mink eradicated from Wales**.

Ecological Outcomes

- recovery and increased resilience of Water Vole populations.
- improved breeding success and population recovery for vulnerable ground-nesting and wetland birds.
- reduced predation pressure on native fish and aquatic species.
- improved resilience of freshwater and wetland ecosystems.
- wider biodiversity recovery.

Strategic Outcomes

- a national model for invasive species eradication.
- stronger collaboration between government, conservation organisations and landowners.
- increased community and volunteer participation.
- improved national biodiversity monitoring capability.
- enhanced Welsh capacity to respond to future invasive species threats.
- enhanced cross-sector ability and experience to deliver national species recovery projects.

Success Measures

Progress should be assessed against a clear national monitoring framework, including:

1. reduction in confirmed Mink distribution.
2. number and proportion of catchments cleared.
3. number of confirmed Mink detections.
4. trapping effort and capture rates.
5. evidence of reinvasion and effectiveness of border protection.
6. Water Vole and other ecological recovery indicators.
7. volunteer and landowner participation.
8. programme expenditure against budget.
9. achievement of defined eradication and post-eradication surveillance milestones.

Strategic Commitment

The evidence from Wales and elsewhere in the UK demonstrates that **landscape-scale American Mink eradication is achievable where control is sufficiently intensive, coordinated and sustained.**

Wales now has an opportunity to move from fragmented local Mink control to a coordinated national eradication programme.

Achieving a **Mink-free Wales by 2035** will require sustained political commitment, secure long-term funding, effective governance, access to land, professional and volunteer capacity, technological innovation, and collaboration across organisational and administrative boundaries.

The strategic priority should therefore be to establish and fund a coordinated all-Wales eradication programme, delivered at landscape and catchment scale, with the flexibility to adapt as evidence, technology and operational experience develop.

The ultimate measure of success will not simply be the removal of American Mink, but the recovery of native wildlife and healthier, more resilient ecosystems across Wales.



