

Trees absorb just seven per cent of Cornwall's carbon emissions in a year

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Trees absorb just seven per cent of the carbon dioxide emitted in Cornwall every year, figures reveal.

Environmental campaigners warn that years of deforestation has left areas of the UK lacking in "one of its biggest natural allies" in the fight against climate change.

Trees absorb carbon dioxide (CO₂) – the main greenhouse gas – from the air and convert it into wood and oxygen in a process known as carbon sequestration.

Data from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy reveals that woodland in Cornwall sequestered 0.6 tonnes of CO₂ per hectare in 2017 – the latest available figures.

It means trees in the area captured an estimated 203,600 tonnes of carbon, according to that year's land size figures from the Office for National Statistics.

Different data from the BEIS department shows Cornwall emitted 2.8 million tonnes of CO₂ in the same year, meaning trees would have absorbed seven per cent of the carbon released into the air in 2017.

The ONS measures the amount of money saved by carbon sequestration based on how much would have to be spent to meet emissions targets if the CO₂ had to be removed from the atmosphere by other means.

In Cornwall, this socio-economic benefit was estimated to be £38 per hectare.

South Ayrshire, in Scotland, benefited the most from carbon capture in the UK in 2017, with a value of £171 per hectare. In stark contrast, Boston, in Lincolnshire, east Midlands, received the lowest socio-economic benefit at just 20p per hectare.

As part of its 25-year plan to improve the UK's air and water quality, the Government's Woodland Carbon Guarantee incentivises tree planting by allowing land managers to sell the carbon dioxide they capture in the form of 'carbon credits'.

It was first announced in the 2018 autumn budget with the aim of accelerating woodland planting rates.

Councils, community and volunteer groups in England can also apply for a share of the Government's £10 million Urban Tree Challenge Fund, to increase tree numbers across the country's towns and cities.

Back in October Cornwall Council announced its Forest for Cornwall programme, which has ambitions to cover 8,000 hectares of land across Cornwall with carbon-absorbing woodlands and forests.

However, environmental campaign group Friends of the Earth says the Government needs to "step up" and further boost its spending on trees in England.

Emi Murphy, trees campaigner at Friends of the Earth, said: "Decades of woodland destruction has left us severely lacking in one of the biggest natural allies in the fight against climate breakdown.

"Growing and maintaining more woodland is a key part of tackling the climate and nature emergency. At the moment the Government stands to miss even its own meagre manifesto commitment on trees. The upcoming English Tree Strategy is a big opportunity to turn this around.

"There's only so much carbon that trees can remove from the atmosphere so it's really important that emissions in areas such as transport and home heating are rapidly cut too."

A Defra spokesman said: "Forests and woodlands are vital for capturing carbon and improving the environment for the next generation, which is why our ambitious environmental programme puts tree planting at its heart.

"We have also announced the £640m Nature for Climate Fund to increase tree planting across the UK to 30,000 hectares per year by 2025. This will create new programmes, above and beyond the existing funding."

Source: <https://www.falmouthpacket.co.uk/news/18369689.trees-absorb-just-seven-per-cent-cornwalls-carbon-emissions-year/>