Data Access Policy

Reviewed March 2026

Policy Statement:

The fundamental principle that Somerset Environmental Records Centre will work to as part of its core function, is towards making all datasets as accessible as possible, to aid in the conservation, protection, and enhancement of the counties biodiversity.

However, access to SERC datasets will be restricted to use by appropriate users only, provided at an appropriate resolution or within agreed formats. This is necessary to ensure the responsible use of the data, especially where open publication could pose a real threat to species or habitats, would compromise SERC services/business model, the further supply of data, or where third party licences restrict sharing.

There are three principle user groups that access SERC data on a regular basis, these are;

1. **Service Level Agreement holders (SLA), such as Local Authorities, Statutory Agencies, and large landowners ie Wessex Water.**

The nature of their duties and the scope and scale of their responsibilities to safeguarding biodiversity, requires access to the most up to date and high resolution data available. These organisations will have developed their own data security policies and robust data management frameworks, which typically includes holding up to date licences with Ordnance Survey. SERC therefore provides its data, updated on a regular basis, as GIS shp files, so that the information can be absorbed into their own data management systems. The SLA sets out the terms of the data supply, including who has access within the organisation, and any case by case variations that have been agreed. The lead contact within that organisation is responsible for ensuring that the terms of the data use are known by users, and access is restricted to the agreed level. Typically through these agreements, data is used to inform strategic planning, building control, land management, and project specific initiatives, at scale.

2. **Ecological Consultancies/Commercial & Non Commercial users ie Conservation NGOs**

SERC provides its data within products developed specifically for this user group, so that the data is useable for the defined purpose, whilst remaining secure. The SERC Data Search ensures data is visible at an appropriate level, and fit for the intended purpose, without

the need for individual data licences to be drawn up each time an enquiry is made. This ensures access to the data is as timely as possible, and as cost effective as possible for both parties. To enable this, the format is 'fixed', which means that the data is visualised, but raw data isn't passed on for future use. This also allows SERC to provide data where the user does not have an OS licence, ensuring it informs their work, without breach of SERC's OS licence. Data searches are typically provided to underpin Environmental Impact Assessments within the built environment, and act as a guide for planning of on the ground survey. Data is provided at reduced resolution for sensitive species, but still made as relevant as possible within this format, as the users are professionals, with many being members of CIEEM or similar bodies. However, not all professional users will operate within the same set of principles or standards, so SERC reserves the right to further reduce resolution of data, or restrict the geographic coverage provided to these users, where it feels that is appropriate to safeguard its business model/data security, or to safeguard species or habitats. Or if required, SERC may decline the request for data entirely.

Where large scale projects require data for either a longer period, or over a larger geographic area, in certain circumstances SERC can make data available on GIS, under a data licence agreement. The recipient must have its own licences in place ie OS, and provide copies of its data security/data management policies upon request, and each enquiry will be considered on a case by case basis.

3. The General Public

Where SERC receives an enquiry from a non-professional user/member of the general public, we will seek to understand the intended purpose/use of the data, and provide data in an appropriate format. In the same way as in sections 1&2 above, consideration will be given to ensuring the output is fit for purpose/aids the enquirer, but also ensures the data is not misused or misinterpreted. Resolution of data may be reduced further than that provided to professional users, and/or restricted in geographic coverage. Data will not be provided as GIS shp files, but will be within a summary output or fixed product, and the request may be declined if the use is deemed to be inappropriate, and may put species or habitats at harm.

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SERC will regularly review the needs of all user groups, and ensure appropriate ways to disseminate its data are in place, whilst adhering to the needs of SERC, its partnership, and the many data providers that make up the SERC database. Any queries relating to this policy should be directed to the SERC Manager – iegerton@devonwildlifetrust.org