

Wales Biodiversity Upland Ecosystem Group

Minutes of inaugural meeting

12th February 2009

CCW Ladywell House, Newtown

Present

Barbara Jones (Chair, CCW)

Helen Buckingham (NT)

Trevor Dines (Plantlife)

Gareth Ellis (Brecon Beacons National Park)

Clive Faulkner (Monts Wildlife Trust)

Peter Jones (CCW)

Beverley Lewis (Wildlife Trusts Wales)

Patrick Lindley (RSPB)

Charles Morgan (PONT)

Dafydd Roberts (Snowdonia National Park)

Chris Tucker (FC)

Apologies

Steve Chambers (WAG), Peter Jennings (Dwr Cymru), Jan Sherry (CCW), Sheila Spence (Gwent Fungus Group), Sian Whitehead (CCW)

Membership

- The membership of the group was discussed with a view to filling any skills or sectoral gaps. Farming interests to be approached.

Action Barbara by next meeting

- An appropriate candidate from the Environment Agency to be contacted.

Action Pete by next meeting

Remit

- Some modifications were made to the Remit of the Ecosystem Group. Comments on this modified text to be sent to Barbara by the end of March.

Action all by end March

- The group agreed that our main function would be to set Welsh targets, prioritise what is needed where, when and what, to identify opportunities for actions/resources and to advise on policy, research and management action.

Habitats

- There are three new additions to the habitat list. Action Plans for these are being drafted now at the UK level. These will be circulated for comment when available.

Action Barbara

- When the plans are agreed, Welsh targets will need to be set by the group

- For the existing habitats plans, the actions and targets need to be revised and updated to reflect the new national targets and the need for Welsh targets. These to be actioned by the end of April and sent to Barbara by:-

Limestone Pavement – Gareth

Blanket Bog - Pete
Upland Heath – Jan
Upland Calcareous Grassland - Barbara
These drafts will then be circulated for comment.

Action Gareth, Pete, Jan & Barbara by end April

Species

- We need to wait for the revised species list from Jan. Trevor is working on the signposting, allocation to lead partners and ultimately to local authorities/LBAPS for action. When this is complete, the group can begin to consider opportunities to group species for action etc.
- It was felt that an 'idiots' guide to the Task and Finish Groups process would be most helpful

Action Jan & Trevor

Policy Action

- Each Ecosystem group has been asked by the policy group to look at the existing Policy Actions and identify those that are redundant and those that are now a high priority. This will be undertaken as part of the revision of existing habitat plans.

Action Gareth, Pete, Jan & Barbara by end April

- All should email what you consider to be the top five policy actions to progress upland biodiversity action to Barbara before the end of February.

Action All by end Feb

- It was agreed that Axis 2 will be crucial in determining whether agri-environment measures in the uplands will deliver biodiversity benefit and help reach WAGs BAP targets. The group would aim to have some involvement in the development of Axis 2 as it affects the uplands. A presentation by Chris Westlake to the group members may be possible.

Action Charles to investigate

LBAP engagement

- The group agreed that we should lobby the policy group and WBP to ask for more support for LBAP officers to deliver the often complex and resource intensive actions in the uplands. Meanwhile, many LBAP plans for upland habitats will need to be revised and updated. A list of LBAP actions in the uplands would be useful to see what has been possible so far and where the gaps occur.

Delivering actions

- Barbara to send out summary of upland framework to Chris and to send out the Upland Framework web link to all.

Action Barbara

- Chris to investigate FC approach to integrating long-term forest plans to CCWs Upland Framework

Action Chris

- The group agreed that we should encourage WBP to employ spatial mapping as a basis for planning land use and setting land use targets. The Upland Framework and Important Bird Areas project could be used as a basis for action on upland statutory sites with planning for other species groups incorporated into this. The approach needs to be extended to the wider upland resource.

Climate change

- The extent and rate of climate changes are currently difficult to determine due to limitations in climate models and uncertainties regarding the impacts of projected change on species, soils and wider ecosystems. Therefore, whilst recognising the significance of the potential effects of climate change on the uplands, the group agreed that the best way to address these at the moment was to focus on maintenance of robust habitats and species populations in good condition, to improve their resilience to environmental change. Monitoring will be important to ensure that trends and changes are picked up at an early stage. Currently, land management is having far more of an impact on the condition of upland ecosystems and should be seen as the priority for action to address the state of these systems.

Landscape scale Projects

- A number of Landscape scale projects are underway in the uplands including:-
LIFE Berwyn & Migneint
Pumlumon project
Cambrian Mountains project
NT Upper Conwy catchment project
NT Abergwesyn project
Valleys Regional park project (being developed)
Forgotten landscapes project
Raglen Tir Eryri (coming to a close)
Heather & Hillforts project in Clwyd
Snowdonia convergence funding project (being developed)

The group agreed that it had a clear role in supporting the development of Landscape scale projects to ensure they deliver biodiversity targets. However, a number of these current projects only have a small proportion of their resources allocated to biodiversity, so future projects may need to focus specifically on biodiversity to achieve the targets.

- Any additions to this list to be sent to Barbara by the end of February.

Action All by end Feb

Habitat restoration on former conifer sites

- The group felt that it was important that it had a supportive input into FC development of strategic policy, particularly in relation to blanket bog restoration on afforested sites. Pete to discuss opportunities with Chris by the next meeting.

Action Pete & Chris

Research

- All to identify research needs, gaps and issues and send these to Barbara by the next meeting.

Action All by end June

AOB

- It was agreed that the group should consider the issue of invasive species in upland ecosystems.
- The Heads of the Valleys project officer to attend the next meeting and give a presentation on the objectives of the project for discussion

Action Charles to arrange

- The WAG Upland Forum should be approached to discuss exchange of information and the possibility of members from each group attending each others meetings

Action Barbara

Date & place of Next Meeting

- The next meeting will be held on 30th June at CCW offices in Aberystwyth