

**Tenth Meeting of the Upland Ecosystem group
Newtown
12 January 2012**

Present: Charles Morgan (PONT), Jan Sherry (CCW), John Farrar (Bangor University), Mariecia Fraser (IBERS Aberystwyth), Steve Chambers (WG), Dafydd Roberts (SNPA), Clive Faulkner (Monts WT), Gareth Ellis (BBNP), Peter Dennis (IBERS Aberystwyth), Peter Jones (CCW), Helen Buckingham (NT), Julia Korn (CCW)

Apologies: Sian Whitehead (CCW), Peter Jennings (standing down), Bev Lewis (Mont WT), Joe Daggart (NT), Reg Thorpe (RSPB), John Healy (Bangor University).

1. Future Work Programme

A small sub- group will be established to produce a first draft of a work programme by the next meeting.

Included in the work programme:

- Review of the Upland Framework and how the maps link to the priority area maps. This would start with a pilot focused on the Futurescape project covering the North East Wales moors and the area covered by the Powys Peatland project. All to carry on using the Upland Framework maps as a visual tool for now.
- Montane Heath action – although successful negotiations with some commoners, some still not come on board. Various engagement techniques have been tried and unless all graziers sign up to an agreement it will not be possible to fence off any areas of Montane Heath on the Carneddau.
- Priority mapping: first phase ready to circulate. Future action required to be set out in work programme
- Work programme should include generic actions required by all Ecosystem groups arising from Chairs meetings, WBP Steering Group etc.

Actions

JK/JS to establish small sub group including CM and JK to produce draft work programme for 2012/13

JS to establish sub group to develop pilots to trial review of the Upland framework.

JS to contact Dave Lamercraft and Sarah Mellor about the priority maps for Twite in the Ogwen valley.

JS to discuss action on priority mapping with Sian Whitehead including the possibility of building commitment via the RSPB Strategic partnership plan for 2012/13.

CM to contact John Ratcliffe to get an update on the situation regarding protecting the Montane heath

CM to lead on setting up a sub group to plan for the Montane heath

Sub group to consider small enclosures on Elidir Fach and Pen Helyg Du as alternative experimental plots.

SC to discuss issues around Montane heath with SEED colleagues and ask WG to direct action on this to meet habitat directive requirements.

2. Funding Update

- WG ERDC Fund: All three Upland recommendations received funding through the WG Ecosystem Resilience, Diversity and Compliance Fund. All projects progressing well and the Migneint has received additional money from underspend. It was suggested that the Minister John Griffiths AM should visit some of the WGERDC Funded projects. A visit to the Migneint could be built into the programme for the IUCN conference on Wetlands in Bangor in June.
- Powys Peatland Project: LIFE Biodiversity Funding bid is being developed which will deal with Molinia and address erosion problems. It is important to have early engagement with DEFRA who can help sell the bid in Europe

The Upland group needs to support applications that address its urgent priorities. It should aim to broaden the institutional base to achieve its objectives as this brings in new ideas, expertise and opportunities. It is important to ensure quality projects are developed that demonstrate real value for money.

Actions

JK to lead on an exercise to map out priorities versus opportunities for funding as part of the work programme. A group engaging with broad representation is required to do this.

JK to discuss with Sian Whitehead the arrangements for the IUCN conference and whether the Minister could be invited to launch the **???? and visit the Migneint.**

HB to contact David Mitchell (CCW) to discuss NT involvement in the Powys Peatland project.

Upland group members to offer support to applications that submit quality projects addressing Upland priorities.

3. Communication

- Brecon Beacons Upland workshop: The workshop in the BBNP was successful run in November 2011 and those who supported the event were thanked. Participants produced a list of outcomes that the Upland Group should aim to achieve.
- North Wales Upland Workshop: Suggested that this be held tagged onto the RSPB Futurescapes workshop.
- Autumn Upland workshop: To be run at the Western end of the South Wales valleys. Possibility of exploring opportunities presented through road building compensation. Focus of the workshop could be on development – threats and opportunities.

Actions

CM to circulate the list of outcomes for the Upland group agreed at the workshop in the BBNP.

JS to talk to John Clark (RSPB) about joining up with Futurescapes to run the North Wales Upland workshop

GE to ask Paul Sinnardurai whether the new road along the valleys is providing compensation for biodiversity and whether there are opportunities for the Uplands?

4. Review of the Wales Biodiversity Framework

An update was provided. The Structure of WBP and the roles and responsibilities of the groups involved are set out in the Wales Biodiversity Framework (on the WBP website). The groups (Steering group, Wales level expert groups and Local partnerships, the work they do and the way they work is under review. The main driver for this is the Natural Environment Framework and also new European and International targets on biodiversity and ecosystems. Workstreams have been set up to look at the different groups including one Julia is leading on looking at the Ecosystem groups and the Outcome 21 group. The latter focuses on achieving the targets set out in the Environment Strategy for Achieving favourable condition on sites. Progress on this review will report in May to the new programme groups set up to oversee the move to a new Single Environment Body in Wales and the work required to deliver under the Natural Environment Framework.

The consultation on the Natural Environment Framework Green Paper will be launched on 30 January and will close on May 3rd.

Actions

**JK to report back on the work reviewing WBP at the next Upland meeting
JK to discuss with Tracey Lovering the suggestion that Diana Reynolds attends the WBP Group Chairs meeting in March to hold an hour long session on the NEF green Paper. Done
CW, CM and HB to ask WG why they have not secured a high quality environmental speaker for the launch.**

5. Habitat Reporting 2011

Biodiversity action plan reporting to the CBD has been held every 3 years since 1999, largely informed by expert opinion due to a lack of data. Just before Christmas Defra requested that the countries each report against the 2010 targets for habitats.

Information is available in the form of

- Countryside survey
- Agri-environment data
- SAC data
- Some SSSI data
- Data from individual project monitoring

However a lack of a monitoring strategy means that there is no strategic approach. WG needs to take a lead bringing together existing datasets.

There is no clarity on why Wales is being asked to report on the habitat targets. There is however a need to improve the collation of monitoring data and identify gaps. The Government of Wales programme includes and outcome to support health ecosystems. Indicators include the % of habitat and species stable or improving and number of lakes, rivers and coastlines of good ecological status.

Actions

JS to lead on producing key points that should be communicated to WG via Chris Lea regarding the requirement for data and the lack of a strategy giving strategic steer on this issue.

JK to circulate outcome of the Environmental Research Hub monitoring seminar held 3 years ago

SS to clearly state to WG government that currently Wales can only report based on expert opinion.

PD to circulate the UK Biodiversity Monitoring Strategy produced following the CEH Seminar

SC to feedback to the Upland group information on the monitoring strategy for Glastir.

6. Research gaps

Peter Dennis and Mariecia Fraser provided research updates from IBERS

- PHD project looking at decline of Golden Plover and other waders – lack of hard data on drivers. Asked if research could be tacked onto the Pumlumon restoration project? Also relevance to Abergwesyn.
- Steph McGowan/Chris Evans (CEH) are revisiting biological programme sites from the 1930s and repeating soil and vegetation surveys using the same techniques. Exploring change and linking to drivers e.g. pollution management. Includes inside and outside enclosures to look at the impacts of grazing (in Cwm Idwal and on Snowdon).
- Livestock Systems – guidelines for implementing change and maintenance beyond change. Management questions raised: Agri-environment concerns around stocking rates set i.e. don't take account of size/type of animal). Is headage rate correct metric or should it be live weight based?
- Cutting final year in progress of LIFE bid. Under grazing major problem. If cut is there a bio-energy product based on Natura sites. How do you encourage animals to graze cut areas? Different breeds suitable for different habitats.
- The Abergwesyn project is currently using GPS collars on the cattle. PD may be able to find a MSC student to interpret the data and explore how the cattle are using the project area, this could include observational work. CCW funds the project and so would need to be included in MSC development.
- PD referred to the EU Bio Bio Project developing biodiversity indicators for low input organic farming. These are being developed based on scientific credibility and feedback from stakeholders across 14 European countries. The data is being analysed and currently earthworms, spiders, bumble bees, spiders, birds and higher plants are being considered. The approach has adopted the countryside survey habitat to sampling

The discussion focused on the need to evidence the ecosystem approach and in particular evidence of ecosystem services provided by the Uplands based around ecosystem flows. Currently management decisions are made based on a lack of knowledge on processes that give us services. Research that supports appropriate habitat management enables better understanding of the processes.

Actions

HB to put PD and MF in touch with Joe Daggart about the Abergwesyn project potential to develop MSC project interpreting data from GPS collars and observational data to inform future management options.

MF/PD to discuss with JD and CCW staff possible future use of collars for research projects.

PD to send CM/JK summary from the Bio Bio work to circulate to group.

JK to send the information on the Bio Bio work to the Alys Edwards (WBP Monitoring progress group) and David Allen at CCW.

CM to organise a video conference to agree key gaps in Upland evidence and ensure that this is built into the work programme for 2012/13 or following years.

PD to circulate the DEFRA scientific priorities for biodiversity

JK to follow up with Shaun Russell the Hub's role in collating information on past/current research across the UK addressing gaps (CM include SR ion above video meeting?)

All to send in ideas on evidence gaps in the Uplands to CM

CM to lead on a small group to agree the main gaps for 2012/13 (include HB, JF, MF, PD, SC and a CCW representative).

7. Next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would include a field visit to the project in Torfaen. The Autumn meeting will be held at the IBERS building in Aberystwyth

Actions

- **CM to organise the next meeting on July 5th in Torfaen and the field visit.**
- **PD to organise the Autumn meeting**
- **JK to help with both meetings.**
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8. AOB

Phytophthora Research shows that progress on heathland has been slow and it is likely this has been due to dry springs. Woodland spread remains problematic. People have been asked to be vigilant and report sightings to FERA ASAP.

WG Planning meeting.

Action: CM to attend and represent the Upland Group.

Key Messages

- **Partners are asked to consider whether they have any potential Upland projects especially those in priority biodiversity areas, and to discuss these with representatives of the Upland Group. It would be useful to have projects on the shelf that can be quickly developed in response to new funding mechanisms.**
- **The Upland group is currently collating urgent research gaps. If anyone would like to contribute ideas to this please send directly to Charles Morgan by the end of February.**
- **Attached is information on Phytophthora. Please remain vigilant and report any suspected cases to FERA ASAP.**