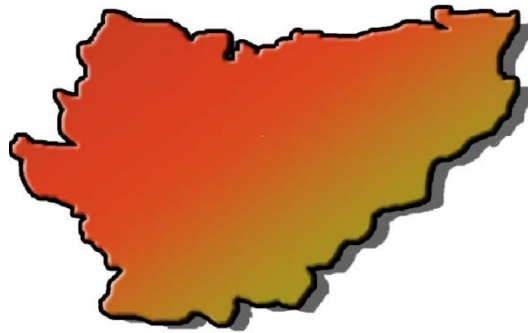


Arts and Science join forces to spread the word in Flows Project.



The Peatlands Partnership

*In this article **Ian Mitchell** of **Scottish Natural Heritage** explains how the Peatlands Partnership's Flow to the Future Project plans to spread the word about the Flow Country and why it is important to each and every one of us.*

When The Peatlands Partnership first came up with the idea of developing the Flow to the Future project we realised there were two quite different audiences that we would need to think about. Firstly, there are those who live close enough to visit the area, and secondly there are those who will probably never travel to the Flow Country but may be interested in its nature, landscapes and role in climate regulation.

This means we have to develop different approaches to telling them about the Flow Country and why it is such a unique and important place.

We should not forget that while this landscape impresses by its huge scale, the detail is equally fascinating, such as the specialised plants and animals that are specially adapted to survive in such a water-logged environment.

We will also explain that The Flow Country is the largest continuous area of blanket bog in the world. Blanket bog here has been storing carbon ever since the glaciers melted away, and the Flow Country now holds more carbon than all the forests in Britain. Keeping this carbon locked away helps to regulate the planet's climate.

To ensure the carbon does remain locked up in the peatlands, seven square miles of the Flow Country are being restored through this project. This will make a major contribution to Britain's efforts to mitigate climate change. And the restored peatland will in time support the special plants and animals of the Flow Country.

So how will we spread these messages? Well, with the help of a focus group of local people the Peatlands Partnership has come up with a range of proposals.

For those of us nearby, the Flow to the Future project will improve the access, interpretation and opportunities to learn about the peatlands. We will develop programmes for schools, land managers and local people.

A new Flows Observatory will be built on the existing Dubh Lochan Trail near the RSPB's Forsinard Flows Reserve Visitor Centre which will itself be upgraded.

Roadside interpretation and viewpoints will be developed near Tongue and The Crask in Sutherland and beside the Causeymire (A9) in Caithness. We will also be working closely with Strathnaver Museum and Caithness Horizons to provide them with new materials for their exhibitions.

Among those who have been helping us come up with these ideas is Frances Gunn of CVS North. Frances, who is also a director of the Strathnaver Museum, says, "It really is good news that the Peatlands Partnership were successful in their Heritage Lottery bid, it's good news for the Flow Country and good news for my home area as well. We put forward a range of exciting ideas as the project was developed and I am really pleased to see that some of these are now one step closer to becoming a reality."

For those living further afield, the project will provide remote learning opportunities including an interactive website with an on-line carbon capture game and a 3D virtual landscape model of the Flow Country. This will enable you to 'fly' over the area and zoom in at points to see the fascinating details of the pools and blanket bog vegetation. A new multimedia presentation will be developed for the Forsinard Visitor Centre which will also form part of a travelling exhibition to visit public venues, exhibition centres, natural history museums and science centres across the UK.

An exciting programme of community arts projects will also provide material for the travelling exhibition along with a series of artistic commissions which will be developed in collaboration with Glasgow School of Art, Edinburgh College of Art, individual artists and local communities.

Beki Pope, the Director of Caithness Horizons (the Thurso museum) explained, "Caithness Horizons has a growing reputation for the interpretation of the heritage of the north. I am therefore delighted that the Flow to the Future project will help us develop new displays on the peatlands and I am particularly excited about the community arts commissions that will be delivered by the project.

"Many people who have a strong interest in the arts might not initially be interested in peat bogs but by showing them the beauty of the Flows and the art it can inspire, we can demonstrate just how precious these places are to a whole new audience."

Ends.

Photo 1

View of of the peatlands from Mhoine House near Tongue. This is one of the Flow to the Future project's possible roadside viewing points and offers the possibility of also developing an all abilities trail along sections of an old road across the Mhoine peatlands.

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Photo 2

View from a layby on the Causeymire (A9) between Latheron and Achavanich. Another possible roadside viewpoint site for the Flow to the Future project. © Andy Hay/RSPB Images

Ends.

NOTES TO EDITORS

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The Peatlands Partnership includes Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission (Scotland), Highland Council, RSPB Scotland, Plantlife International and The Environmental Research Institute. It liaises with local community groups, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Government's Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate and the North Sutherland Community Forest Trust. It is independently chaired by John Henderson of Scrabster Farm, Caithness.

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