

### Best Wishes from the Flow Country

We would like to take some time to thank you all for your contributions to the Flow Country Newsletter in 2015! In 2016, may your field work go smoothly, your grants get funded, your papers get published, your drains get blocked and may you continue to bring people and ideas in the Flow Country! We wish you all a great time over the festive season and look forward to seeing you and hearing from you again in the New Year.



*A dusting of snow on Ben Griam Beg on a crisp winter day. Credit: Roxane Andersen*

### Caithness and Sutherland “Peatland week”

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the Caithness and Sutherland “Peatland Week” which included the Peatlands Forum (Ferrycroft, Lairg, 27<sup>th</sup> October), the 3<sup>rd</sup> Flow Country conference dedicated to research (Caithness Horizon and North Highland College, Thurso, October 27-29<sup>th</sup>) and the field trip and demonstration event (Welbeck Estate, Berriedale, October 30<sup>th</sup>). It is worth noting that the events and the work of the researchers involved in the Flow Country received cross-party support when a motion was raised in the Scottish Parliament by MSP Rob Gibson.

The Peatlands Forum provided a platform for open discussion and debate on topics including the Scottish Government’s Peatland Strategy and the Heritage Lottery funded ‘Flows to the Future’ project. Participants were also updated on efforts to secure UNESCO World Heritage Site status for the ‘Flow Country’.

Like in previous occasions, the research conference brought researchers and students from all over the UK together with representatives from government and stakeholder agencies as well as the renewable energy sector. There were some Flow Country veterans – coming back for a third time in a row – and newcomers, getting a first taste for the “Far North”. As well as presentation and poster, the delegates got the chance to sample some of the region’s finest food and drink products, thanks to financial support from Highlands and Islands Enterprise.



*Left: Roxana Shaffie and Renée Hermans, the two winners of the best presentation and best poster by students, respectively. Credit: Gearóid Murphy. Right: The poster session included art work and school work, and beer tasting! Credit: Stuart Gibb*



Two workshops were run as part of the conference. The first workshop, which was also run during the Peatlands Forum, got delegates to draw the boundaries of the Flow Country on a map. It sounds like a simple task – but requires careful thoughts and consideration and led to some good discussions between participants (pictures on the right). The second workshop included three stations where participants had to discuss about priorities for research, knowledge gap and strategies to go forward. A summary table of identified knowledge gaps for the Flow Country is presented below. The synthesis of messages and actions required to fill those gaps can be found on the last page of this newsletter.



Credit: Stuart Gibb (left), Roxane Andersen (right)



Table 1. Knowledge gaps identified by the delegates from the Flow Country Research Conference III: Taking stock.

Knowledge gaps 2015 – Key research questions to tackle in the future
Performance of new restoration techniques (e.g. enhanced furrow blocking, stump flipping) compared to older techniques for various ecosystem functions including carbon sequestration, water regulation, climate effect and biodiversity
Evaluation of restoration outcomes and “trajectories” of peatlands in the Flows in the face of recent environmental change using remote sensing and earth observation data (i.e. development of “proxies”)
Cost-benefit of management and restoration in meaningful (tangible) terms and in economic terms
Variability of “reference”, disturbed and restored systems across (long) time and (large) space



Credit: Sjoerd Tel



Credit: Roxane Andersen



Credit: Sjoerd Tel



Credit: Roxane



Credit: Jerushah

The ‘peatland week’ was rounded off by a field trip to Welbeck Estate led by the estate Factor Anson MacAuslan and ‘Flows to the Future’ Advisory Officer Gearóid Murphy. Here, in the shadow of Scaraben, the group saw restoration in blanket bog in practice, with “live” re-profiling and drain blocking by Johnny MacKay and his team.

Anson then delivered an expected treat to the visitors showing them salmon spawning at a redd in the Langwell Water. He explained the ecology of these fish to the captivated audience, most of which had never seen salmon up close. The field trip concluded with a visit to the Grey Cairns of Camster, allowing the group to see an ancient cultural

aspect of Caithness. We look forward to welcoming everyone back in Caithness and Sutherland for the 4<sup>th</sup> Flow Country Research Conference in Spring 2017 – details will be circulated at a later time. Prepared by Roxane Andersen (ERI) with contribution from Gearóid Murphy (FttF), Stuart Gibb (ERI), Ian Mitchell (SNH) and Caroline Eccles (FttF)

## New projects in the Flows

### Peatland Action success

North Highland Forest District has been awarded another £985k from Peatland Action Fund. The bulk of the grant will be used to target Dalchork plantations, near Lairg (Sutherland). Following on from last year's PAF funded programme of forest to bog restoration at Dalchork Forest near Lairg, more funding is being targeted at the site. North Highland Forest District have successfully bid for almost £1m to restore 800 Ha of mire and the majority of this will be in Dalchork Forest. The restoration works comprise a mixture of woodland removal, felled area restoration and degraded but unplanted mire restoration. *Neil McInnes, North Highland Forest District (Forestry Commission)*

## Other news and announcements

### Launch of the Peatland Code



November 2015 was a big month for peatlands here in Scotland, as the World Forum on Natural Capital was hosted in Edinburgh. Scottish peatlands were given a prominent platform at this global conference, providing, as they do, a clear and important example of natural capital at its best by offering a number of services to society – namely carbon storage, clean drinking water and a home for wildlife.

The World Forum on Natural Capital was particularly poignant for Scottish peatlands for two reasons. The first being the recognition of peatlands by First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon during the conference. Sturgeon billed peatlands as “a good example of the fact that loss of ecosystems is a major contributor to climate change” and that as a result “instead of reducing our peatland, we’re restoring it.” Sturgeon concluded that this work was “one of the best investments we can make as a society.” To have political backing for peatland restoration in this country is extremely positive and should better enable us to reach the IUCN UK Peatland Programme (IUCN UK PP) target of one million hectares of peatlands restored in the UK by 2020.



Launching the Peatland Code at the World Forum on Natural Capital, Edinburgh

The second reason was the launch of the Peatland Code by the IUCN UK PP. This important mechanism will enable the business community to confidently fund peatland restoration and therefore make a contribution to slowing climate change. The Peatland Code provides a best practice framework for peatland restoration projects and crucially allows for the quantification of emissions reductions, which can be used by businesses for Corporate Social Responsibility purposes. For land managers it brings additional income supporting a wider programme of restoration work than could be achieved through public funds alone. Businesses can choose to fund one project or a suite, and can be matched up with others to part-fund restoration projects dependent on resources available.

A number of projects have already been identified as suitable under the Peatland Code and are ready to go, but there are also opportunities for more sites to be added. Materials will be made available to aid business introductions to the Code. For more information about the Peatland Code visit [www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org](http://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org). If you've any questions or would like to request materials on the Peatland Code (to be made available early 2016) please email [jillian.hoy@iucn.org.uk](mailto:jillian.hoy@iucn.org.uk).

*The next edition of the newsletter will come out in March, please email your contributions to Roxane Andersen ([roxane.andersen@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:roxane.andersen@uhi.ac.uk)) before the Friday 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2016.*

Key message

**Peatlands are not just about carbon**  
Multiple tangible benefits can be derived from appropriate management (including restoration) of peatlands now and in the future

Pathways of communication & Actions required to fill identified knowledge gaps

Research in the Flow Country conference and field trips, Flow Country Newsletter, Flow Country website

**Integrate knowledge across disciplines**

- Peer-reviewed publications
- Online database
- Inter-disciplinary conferences
- Output focussed events/workshops

**Simplify messages**

- Briefs that link research outcome to relevant policies (multiple directions)
- Communicate through existing science-policy interfaces
- Include people (cultural and social dimensions)

**Spend time the ground**

- Site visits
- Demonstration events
- One-on-one exchange
- Advisory service

**Multi-disciplinary approach to monitor change and put in the long-term context**

- Inter-annual variability
- Extreme event
- Resilience
- Socio-economic impacts

**Provide support and develop common framework for long-term monitoring**

- Assess restoration outcomes
- Implement national peatland strategy

**Describe/identify concerns where research could inform management on the ground (bottom up approach)**

**Document best practice based on experience from land managers and stakeholders and monitoring outputs**

**Empirical data integrating Morphology – Ecology – Biogeochemistry – Hydrology**

- Upscaling (areas relevant to the Flow Country context)
- Modelling (timescales relevant to peatlands)
- Separating out drivers (inform management)

**Recognise good practice to promote uptake of peatland restoration schemes (e.g. Peatland Action, SRDP)**

**Further engage with business sector**

**Clarify what evidence is needed to further support/change existing policy (bottom up approaches)**

**“Big ideas” (top down approach)**

Target group

