

## THANK YOU!

*We would like to thank all the delegates of the 2014 Flow Country Research Conference: you all contributed to make this event a real success. We have now been able to reflect on the conference and compiled the notes from the workshops. This edition of the Newsletter provides a summary of the outputs as well as a few images. It is with great pleasure that we confirm our intention to organise and host a third event during the autumn 2015, with the aim to showcase the results of all the new research that has been initiated since 2012. In the meantime... we all have a lot of work to do!*



*Top: The poster session provided a good opportunity to discuss and catch up in a relaxed atmosphere in the break-out area of ERI's Centre for the Energy and the Environment (credit: B. Bremner). Middle: Delegates of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Flow Country research Conference (credit N. Cameron). Bottom: Two of the groups hard at work during the workshops (credit: N. Cameron).*

## Workshop 1. Peatland restoration in the Flow Country

The first keynote presentation made by Dr. Lauren Parry (U. Leeds) gave a summary of the blanket bog restoration that is currently being done in England. Although a lot of research effort has been put in the restoration of highly eroded and bare peat areas south of the border, not all of it is relevant for the context, disturbance regime and conditions found in Scotland, especially in the Flow Country. The second keynote, Clifton Bain, from the IUCN UK Peatland Programme, introduced the [Peatland Code](#) and the work of the IUCN towards its development. It is fair to say that peatland restoration is not only a major topic of discussion at the UK, it is also a high priority within the EU and internationally. With the Scottish Government recently announced a [£15 M investment](#) in peatland restoration over the next two financial years, it seemed like the conference was a good opportunity to ask ourselves, in relation to Scottish peatland restoration: What are the knowledge gaps? What should the role of the Flow Country Research Hub be and how should it evolve over the next 5 years? How can the Flow Country scientific community become more integrated with practitioners and policy makers? We split into three groups and worked separately, yet there was an overall sense of agreement, with the table below capturing elements which have been highlighted by all the groups.

Knowledge gaps	Role of the Research Hub	Science-Policy-Practice integration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Best restoration techniques for different disturbances</li> <li>- Priority areas for restoration</li> <li>- Development of proxies (e.g. remote sensing) for evaluation of carbon and biodiversity benefits of restoration</li> <li>- Reference systems (how to define success, what is a functional blanket bog, are there indicator species, etc.)</li> <li>- Future forecasting; linking past-present-future conditions</li> <li>- Cost-benefit of restoration in economic terms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communicate and share knowledge about research within the scientific community</li> <li>- Provide/manage access to metadata, including data in the grey literature</li> <li>- Ensure high quality of science and continuous contribution to research effort in the Flow Country</li> <li>- Engage with other stakeholders/wider public to communicate the science (make the science accessible)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create a website for the Hub</li> <li>- Organise workshops and knowledge transfer events including land owners, farmers, crofters, restoration practitioners, etc. using existing models (e.g. Canada)</li> <li>- Organise community events and maintain a good coverage of the research activities locally</li> <li>- Develop projects using e.g. citizen science, apprenticeships, summer schools, etc.</li> <li>- Develop a basic monitoring programme/network to assist land managers with evaluation of restoration</li> <li>- Integrate the Hub concept in grant applications</li> </ul>



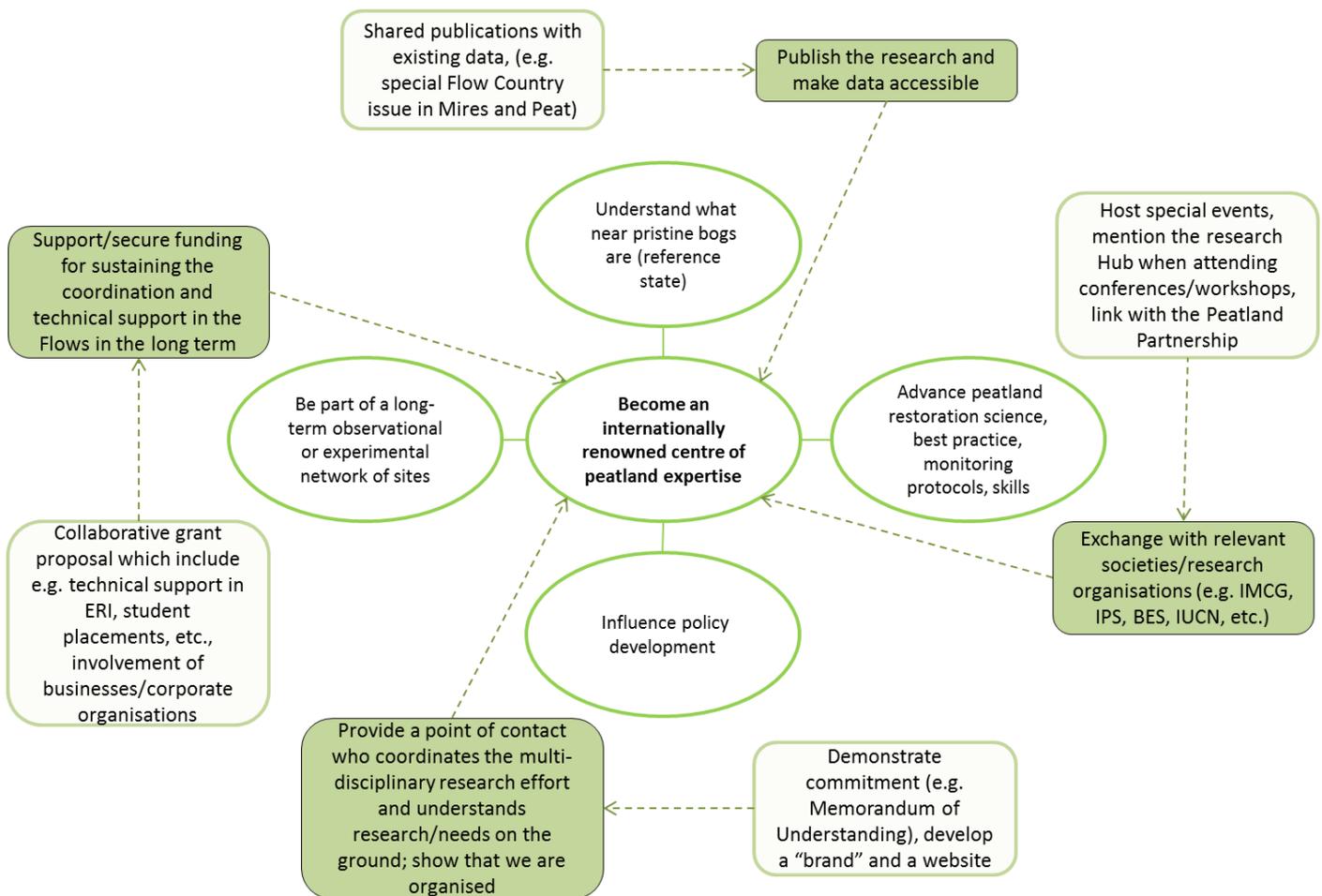
*A few steps towards integration during the conference... Left: the food for the evening receptions was prepared and served by the hospitality students from North Highland College using locally sourced products (credit B. Bremner). Middle: Local artists were invited to display artwork inspired by the Flow Country and to attend the poster session where they mingled and exchanged with the researchers (credit: B. Bremner). Right: Participants in the field trip met and discussed with Johnny Mackay, one of the local contractors, while he was doing brash crushing and furrow blocking in the Dyke plantation (credit: R. Andersen).*

**As an immediate action taken by the Hub following the conference, a “Flows Research Hub” Twitter account was set up @Flowsresearch, managed by Ed Turner (U. Leeds) and Graham Hambley (U. St Andrews).**

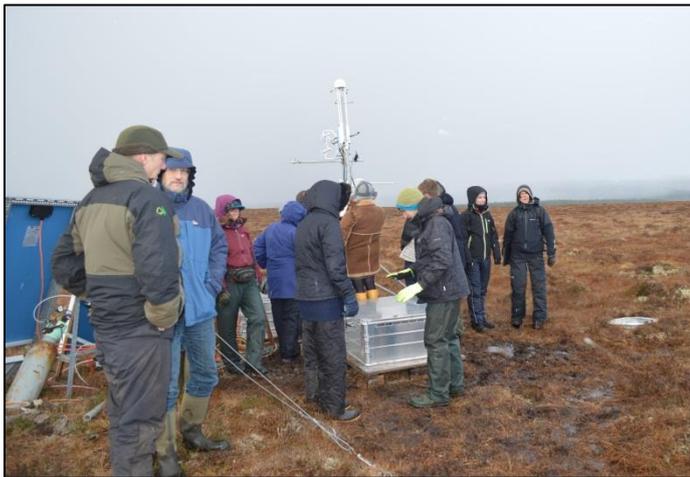
## Workshop 2. Looking forward

The “Flow Country Research Hub” was launched in October 2012 during the first Flow Country Research Conference, as a network that aimed to deliver high quality science covering the broad range of disciplines required to protect, to manage and to understand the peatlands of the Flow Country in a coordinated way. Following that, the Hub has provided quarterly updates on research and organised the second conference, where over 20 talks and 12 posters showcased current research and promising projects. We felt that it was time to ask: “now what?” In other words we want to understand the aspirations, organisation challenges and opportunities that lay ahead. We asked each of the three groups: what do we want to achieve in the medium-long term? How do we do this? What opportunities are there to enable this?

Once again, there was a strong agreement between the three groups: all aspired to become an internationally renowned centre of peatland expertise. When all the information is summarised together, the aspiration (circular boxes), organisation challenges (dark green boxes) and opportunities (light green boxes) of the Flow Country research Hub in the mid- to long-term could look like this:



We hope that over the next 18 months, we can work together to build the strong foundations necessary to make the Flow Country Research Hub sustainable and ready to fulfil those aspirations!



Top: The winners of the SNH student award presented by Andrew Coupar (SNH): Paul Gaffney (best presentation), Joss Ratcliffe (best presentation) and Amy Pickard (best poster) (credit: J. Noble). Bottom: The field trip, sponsored by the IPS and organised by Paul Gaffney, Renée Hermans and Graham Hambley with help from RSPB staff, took the participants to the Cross Loch Tower (morning) and to the Raphan block where they braved hail showers and fierce winds to look at different restoration trials (afternoon) (Credit: N. Cameron and G. Hambley).

### Other news...

#### Evaluating peatland management and restoration for multiple outcomes

A new PhD project that will seek to establish which peatland management and restoration methods are optimal for the multiple benefits of biodiversity conservation and carbon storage and sequestration will start in the autumn 2014. Ainoa Pravia will be supervised by Nick Littlewood and Rebekka Artz from the James Hutton Institute and by Roxane Andersen and Kenny Boyd from the ERI/UHI. Specifically, she will aim to: 1) Evaluate the short- and long-term carbon benefit of restoration using a life-cycle approach by integrating a) measures of GHG emissions and b) carbon budget based on timber harvest during the transition from afforested to open ground, 2) Characterise biodiversity assemblages, especially arthropods, found in 'pristine' blanket bog, afforested blanket bogs, and blanket bogs restored at different times and with different management approaches 3) Identify species from the arthropod assemblages that are indicative of the status of restored peatlands, and 4) Compare how effectively different management approaches deliver biodiversity and carbon benefits. *Roxane Andersen (ERI)*

The next edition of the newsletter will come out in June, please email your contributions to Roxane Andersen ([roxane.andersen@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:roxane.andersen@uhi.ac.uk)) before the 31<sup>st</sup> of May 2014.