

## What is the Peatlands Partnership?

The Peatlands Partnership is a group of organisations who are working together with land managers and communities to maintain and enhance the peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland. It is chaired by Professor Stuart Gibb of the Environmental Research Institute in Thurso. The Partnership includes Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, The Highland Council, RSPB Scotland, Plantlife International, the Environmental Research Institute (North Highland College), the Highland Third Sector Interface, the Northern Deer Management Group, the Flow Country Rivers Trust and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

### Get involved!

If you would like to get involved, why not volunteer? You could work on the RSPB Reserve getting your hands dirty, help out in the Forsinard Visitor Centre, or at events or school visits across the area. If you prefer to stay warm and dry then why not help out with administration or public relations?

Whatever your interest, if you're passionate about The Flow Country, sustainable development and/or climate change then we can match you to a volunteering post. Full training and support will be given. Your time will be invaluable to us and expenses will be paid.



### Join us at an event

Keep an eye on the website [www.theflowcountry.org.uk](http://www.theflowcountry.org.uk), twitter and facebook for details of forthcoming events, including an opening for our new Field Centre and a Dark Skies Evening.



### Do you manage land in the peatlands?

Gearoid, our Advisory Officer, works with land managers to advise them on blanket bog restoration and management, draw up management plans and help access funding. If you manage land in the peatlands, then please get in touch.

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[www.theflowcountry.org.uk](http://www.theflowcountry.org.uk)



THE PEATLANDS PARTNERSHIP

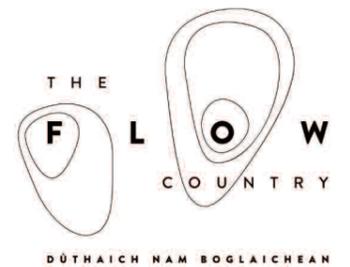


THE MORE YOU LOOK THE MORE YOU SEE

# THE FLOW

# COUNTRY

The Peatlands Partnership's 2016 Flows to the Future Newsletter



## Hello!

The Flow Country is the extensive area of peatland which stretches through Caithness and Sutherland and is **the best blanket bog of its type in the world.**

The Heritage Lottery Fund and many other bodies are supporting the Flows to the Future project, which is a Peatlands Partnership initiative.

This newsletter gives an introduction to what's happening. You can also find out more on our website [www.theflowcountry.org.uk](http://www.theflowcountry.org.uk). We'd love you to become involved in our work, whether through volunteering, attending events or using the website.

## Happy reading!

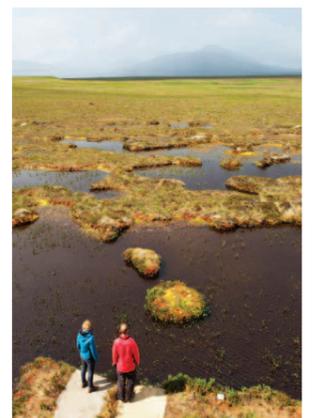
Caroline Eccles  
Project Manager

## Flows to the Future

### The project will:

1. Restore 7 square miles of blanket bog habitat - removing forestry and blocking drains on RSPB Forsinard Flows National Nature Reserve.
2. Provide peatland management advice to land managers.
3. Create a 'Flows Lookout' (already built), develop 5 roadside interpretation sites across the Flow Country to give panoramic views, provide a trail for visitors, signpost peatland walks.
4. Establish a peatland science centre of excellence at Forsinard, through a new field centre, which will also provide volunteer accommodation.
5. Update and improve the visitor centre at Forsinard, provide a new car park and upgrade the Dubh Lochan Trail.
6. Provide learning/awareness raising opportunities - a new Flow Country website and film, online 3D model of the Flow Country and carbon capture game, creative community arts commissions to explore how the Flows can inspire communities and artists, a travelling exhibition.
7. Provide a schools programme and activities for communities.

[www.theflowcountry.org.uk](http://www.theflowcountry.org.uk)



# Take a new look at the Flows...

## What

The Flows Lookout is a new two storey tower reached by a boardwalk.

## Where

It's on the RSPB nature reserve at Forsinard in the heart of The Flow Country, on the A897 between Melvich and Helmsdale. Forsinard railway station is on the doorstep, with trains from Inverness and Wick four times a day.

## When

It's open 24/7, 52 weeks a year.

## Why

The Flows Lookout gives a fantastic view of a peatland pool system, a special landscape feature that exists across the Flow Country. It was a big decision to build a tower here, but it's important for the future of the peatlands that more people are able to see and appreciate them.

## Who

It was designed by ICOSIS architects from Edinburgh, and built by O'Brien Construction, Thurso. At the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland Awards in 2016, the Lookout was named one of the eleven best buildings of the year.

## How

Building on peat is challenging and we wanted to minimise the impact. During construction all materials were taken along a temporary boardwalk or by helicopter. The building sits on piles above the peat and takes up a very small area.



## Restoration and Rejuvenation!

As part of the project, large areas which are currently forested are being restored to open peatland.

Peatlands are an internationally rare habitat. Forest planting on deep peat dries it out, making it unsuitable for peatland wildlife and stopping peat from forming. Habitat restoration allows the wildlife to return and restarts peat formation.

Peat is made from partially decomposed plant remains, so it stores huge amounts of carbon. Keeping the Flow Country in good condition is therefore really important in the fight against climate change - it stores twice as much carbon as all the UK's forests.

In the past, trees were planted on deep peat and many have not grown particularly well. Whilst trees can be great for wildlife in the right place, these were not native species and do not support the same rich biodiversity that was found on the peatlands that they replaced. To date forestry has been removed from 280 hectares of deep peat as part of this project, with more planned.



## New centre for Forsinard

The Flow Country is the focus for internationally significant scientific research by universities from across the UK, particularly on climate change issues. Current facilities are very poor, and so a field centre is being built in Forsinard on a former house site. Existing buildings were looked at, but a conversion would have been more expensive, as well as less fit for our specialist uses, and with higher running costs. The field centre will provide much-needed accommodation and facilities for volunteers, visiting scientists and education groups, as well as office space. The existing visitor centre will continue to provide information for day visitors and will be refreshed during winter 2016.

The Field Centre is being built by O'Brien Construction, Thurso.



## The Flows as an outdoor classroom

During the 2016 Summer Term, more than 300 pupils took part in school visits in The Flow Country, finding out not only about the amazing wildlife, but also how the Flows help to combat climate change. Sjoerd Tel, our Learning Development Officer, has worked alongside RSPB Reserve staff and volunteers, as well as running events jointly with the Highland Council Ranger Service, the West Sutherland Fisheries Trust, and Scottish Water.

Sjoerd is preparing new activities all the time and the new Field Centre will provide a well-equipped education room, as well as other group facilities.

Schools and youth groups can get in touch to book sessions either at Forsinard or a site near them, or to arrange work experience. Activities are free of charge.



## Putting the Flows on the international map

The Flow Country has been identified for some years as a possible UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Peatlands Partnership is currently looking at the technical case for this, and will shortly be consulting with local interests on the pros and cons. A recent independent assessment concluded that, compared to other sites, The Flow Country is both more extensive and of better quality. In other words, we really have a world-class resource.

## Bettyhill hosts film premiere

In June, Farr High School's S1 class, along with Tongue Primary School, were invited to the first screening of 'The Flow Country' in the Screen Machine in Bettyhill.

*"I personally enjoyed this film because I, along with my peers at Tongue Primary School, was part of the film. In 2015, we as a school went up to the peatlands to do some activities with the 'Flows to the Future' production team and as we were doing so, we got filmed. Being involved in this project has made me more aware of the beautiful Flow Country surrounding us and has made me appreciate where I live."*

Anna Magee, S1 Farr High School



If you would like to see our new film, visit our website.