

Ninth Meeting
Wales Biodiversity Partnership Upland Ecosystem Group
13th October 2011
Newtown

Present: Charles Morgan PONT (Chair), Dave Lamacroft (RSPB), Steve Chambers (WG), Jan Sherry (CCW), Marieica Fraser (Aberystwyth university), Dafydd Roberts (SNPA), Gareth Ellis (BBNP and LBAP representative), Bev Lewis WTWs, Liz Lewis Reddy (Mont WT) Dr Peter Dennis, Peter Jones CCW and Julia Korn CCW.

Apologies: Sian Whitehead (CCW), Helen Buckingham (NT), Simon Thorp (Heather Trust), John Farrar (Bangor University)

1. Work Planning

A move from action plans to annual work plans for the group was discussed. These would set out what needs to be done (including research), by who, and to achieve which priority actions. These plans could be costed and potential funding mechanisms identified.

Action: JK to explore the idea of developing a work plan with JS and feed back to the next meeting.

2. Research Gaps for the Uplands

Ecosystem groups (EGs) and the Species Expert (SEG) group have all invited representatives from the academic community to join to help identify and address research priorities for the conservation and restoration of habitats/species.

EGs are in a good position to:

- identify, agree and communicate these priorities to those in a position to develop the evidence
- use research findings to underpin future decision making that supports the delivery of the Natural Environment Framework (NEF).

The academic community is able to

- communicate on-going /completed research that may fill gaps;
- support recommendations made to WG or Defra (or others) on priorities,
- incorporate into future research projects and programmes run by universities (funded and non-funded).

Priorities discussed

- **Catchment Scale hydrological research**

EU LIFE Project at Lake Vyrnwy – monitoring blocked and currently monitoring impacts down stream. Mike Walker/Mike Morris. Chris Evans (PHD) is looking at local effects of blocking on the Migneint although no large scale monitoring going on. The need pre-modification data was flagged up.

- **Research to support implementation of the Upland Framework**
Mariencia referred to work going on sustainable intensification of the uplands.
- **Grazing in the Uplands**
Information on grazing requirements to deliver biodiversity outcomes is needed. It is important to understand the interactions between different impacts on the biodiversity and the significance of changes to different habitat and species. New techniques to manage grazing are being developed e.g. the idea of buried electric fences activated by collars worn on cattle – City of London Parks (Epping Forest).
- **Collating and communicating existing information**
NERC records are held within CEH (Brian Reynolds). Data from repeat surveys e.g. those on Snowdon, could techniques be introduced elsewhere e.g. Pumlumon. Involve the Wales Environment Research Hub.

At the Ecosystem group Chairs meeting on September 6th it was agreed that there will be a workshop for all academics joining Ecosystem Groups or Species Expert Groups to provide an overview of NEF and arrange allocation of suitable research activities to MSc students. Research activities not suitable for this approach will be passed on to WG for possible inclusion in appropriate Wales and UK research programmes.

Action: CM to contact Andrew Pullen (Bangor Uni – Evidence Based Conservation) and Shaun Russell (Wales Environment research Hub) to explore opportunities to find out about past/current research with a view to seeing if it is relevant today and if so how it can be applied to practical management of the Uplands.

Action: All to consider what the key issues are that require further research and send to JK before December 9th 2011.

Action: PJ, PD and MF to find out what they can about UK research activity for the Upland and feedback to JK before the next meeting.

Action: JK to put a discussion based on the above 3 actions on the Agenda for the next meeting.

Action: All at next meeting to prioritise research needs and CM to feedback to DEFRA/WG or other as appropriate.

Action: JK to build research priorities into the Upland workplan and keep under regular review with group members. (annually?)

3. Regional Workshops

South Wales will hold a workshop on 16 November in the Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP). Gareth Ellis is organising.

Agenda to include: Presentations on Priority mapping /work planning (**JS**), the PONT burning / off roading project (**CM to secure**), Upland Peat (**PJ**).

Workshops on the Elenydd Project (Reg Thorpe, **DL to secure**), dealing with development projects (**??**), Peat issues (**PJ**)

Action: JK to design programme and send to GE

Action: GE to send out invitations

Action: GE, PJ, Reg Thorpe, JS and CM to run and contribute

Action: JK and PJ to organise a North Wales workshop before Easter

4. Grant Assessment

The rest of the meeting was used to assess the applications to the Welsh Government (WG), Ecosystem Diversity and Resilience Fund. The following application were assessed inset here

MWT Pumlumon	83	(Funded)
NT Migneint-	77	(Funded)
NT Abergwesyn	72.5	
BBNPA Waen Fach	72	
CCW Elenydd	66.5	
BBNPA wildfire	63 .5	
BBNPA Hat ridge	63.5	
BBNPA Landscape	56	
BBNPA Woollen Line (SMALL PROJECT)	51.5	
SNPA Bracken / Heather firebreaks (SMALL PROJECT)	41	
SNPA Footpath	1.5	

The Chair has been asked to recommend to projects plus one low cost project. The Upland group agreed that the low cost projects were those under £20,000. Two were assessed for this BBNP Wool project and the Conwy Mountain project and the BBNPA Woollen Line project was put forward and received funding.

The Llanymynerch Limestone project was forwarded to the Lowland Grassland and Heathland Group for assessment and received funding

Basic principles were agreed. All present were able to vote based on their understanding of the projects from the written applications (participative exercise).

One representative from the group spoke about each of the projects for one minute to set out why they should receive the funding.

As a group each project was scored against the essential criteria. Any member with a vested interest in a project was not able to get involved in the scoring for that project. The scores were recorded

CM scored the desirable criteria at home as the meeting ran out of time. This was an inclusive process however, there was a degree of subjectivity as it was often difficult to score against the criteria. The applications were initially sent in before the criteria were agreed and some had been refined, others hadn't. In part this was addressed through to the shared expertise of the members of group.

5. Date of next meeting

January 12th – venue tbc

July 5th – venue tbc - to include field visit.

Messages to feed back to the Welsh Government

1. **An application pack is essential for future funding.** This would include criteria, general rules, FAQs and contacts to discuss proposals as well as a application form.
2. **General Rules need to be established e.g. need to be clear what the grant will support e.g. direct action, research, assessment, awareness etc.** Some applicants included many elements and not sure which elements can be funded with the money this year. Also we weren't sure if a project could be recommended but only as a scaled down project? It is important that general rules for the applicant and the those involved in the assessment are clearly communicated.
3. **The criteria and consequently the scoring sheet need to be SMARTER.** An example is the priority habitat and species, these could be assessed together (i.e. Annex I/II and Section 42 but divided up into a quality and a quantity criteria?
4. **This year each group was asked to choose 2 projects but unsure that this results in the best projects going to Panel.** Some groups e.g. Upland had many (very high quality) projects, other only had to assess 2 or 3 (and some had none at all). If there had been more time application packs could have gone out through the Ecosystem groups etc and hopefully they could encourage applicants for their EGs etc, however there still needs to be a way to balance the needs of groups that receive many applicants and those that don't.