

Highland Biodiversity Conference 2015: *Environmental Volunteering*

Held at Inverness High School
on 30th March 2015



www.highlandbiodiversity.com



Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba
All of nature for all of Scotland
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad

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Introduction



The Highland Biodiversity Conference 2015 focussed on the environmental volunteering and was attended by 52 people representing organisations from across the region. Presentations and workshops looked at opportunities available in the Highlands and the potential for collaboration between organisations in order to encourage more volunteering and provide an improved service thereby enabling more places/organisations to benefit from volunteer input.

In his introductory remarks to conference, Cllr Thomas Prag outlined some of the benefits of volunteering, and introduced the aims for the day ahead.

Cllr Thomas Prag

Chair of Planning Development & Infrastructure

Thomas Prag is Chair of Planning Development & Infrastructure at Highland Council where he has been a councillor since 2007.

Cllr Prag came to Inverness to set up BBC Highland in 1976. In 1982 he founded Moray Firth Radio which he ran for nearly 20 award winning years.

He helped set up and run Media Support Solutions which involved work in Africa and Afghanistan. He has had a range of public appointments (Radio Authority, Ofcom, Inverness Harbour Trust etc) and is currently vice Chair of Hitrans and Highland Opportunity Limited and sits on the boards at Eden Court Theatre and Inverness Airport Business Park and Highlanders Museum.

He is a Fellow of the Radio Academy and holds an hon Fellowship with UHI.

Cllr Prag welcomed delegates to the 10th Highland Biodiversity Conference, hosted by the Highland Environment Forum with funding from Scottish Natural Heritage and the Highland Council.

Cllr Prag reviewed the progress of the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan (2015 - 2020) and referred to the 33 priority projects that it aims to take forward when it is launched in the summer. One of the priorities is environmental volunteering which, through local biodiversity groups, has been key to much of the success of previous plans.

Cllr Prag introduced the speakers for the day, and highlighted the range of volunteering experiences that they would be presenting - starting with the policy drivers and running through to a volunteer's perspective. The second half of the afternoon was to be dedicated to working in smaller groups to discuss volunteering and collaborative working, answering the key questions "How can we improve co-ordination and work better together?" and "How do we encourage more people to volunteer in Highland?"



Conference Programme

Environmental Volunteering in Highland: Do we need a Collaborative Approach?

10.00 am	Registration <i>Tea / coffee & biscuits</i>
10.30 am	Welcome and Introduction Cllr Thomas Prag, Conference Chairman (Chairman, Highland Council Planning, Development & Infrastructure Committee)
10.45 am	Volunteering, the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan and the Single Outcome Agreement George Hogg, Highland Environment Forum Chairman www.highlandbiodiversity.com/highland-bap.asp
11.00 am	Highland Green Gyms Ullie Wenzel, The Conservation Volunteers www.tcv.org.uk/greengym
11.15am	Cairngorms Nature: Environmental Volunteering in the National Park Alan Smith, Cairngorms National Park Authority www.cairngorms.co.uk/
11.30 am	Nature and Wellbeing Stephen Wiseman, Scottish Waterways Trust www.scottishwaterwaystrust.org.uk/profile/stephen-wiseman/
11.45	The REAL project: Developing employability skills John Rutter, Inverness High School Headteacher
12.00 am	Questions & Answers
12.15 pm	Lunch
1.15 pm	NHS – Health benefits of volunteering & how to work collaboratively Dan Jenkins, NHS Highland
1.30 pm	Highland TSI – What we do for Volunteering & the Saltire Awards for Young People Mhairi Wylie, Third Sector Interface www.htspinterface.org.uk/
1.45 pm	A Volunteer’s Perspective – what works and what is challenging Megan Rowland, Saltire Ambassador / RSPB Volunteer
2.00 pm	Questions & Answers
2.20 pm	Introduction to Workshops Jonathan Willet, Highland Council
2.30 pm	<i>Tea / coffee to take to workshops</i>
2.40 pm	Each workshop will discuss the questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can we improve co-ordination and work better together?• How do we encourage more people to volunteer in Highland?
3.30 pm	Workshop Feedback Workshop Representatives
3.50 pm	Conclusions and Next Steps Cllr Thomas Prag
4.00 pm	Close

Presentations

Volunteering, the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan and the Single Outcome Agreement

George Hogg, South Highland Area Manager, Scottish Natural Heritage

George moved to Inverness to join the Nature Conservancy Council in 1986 and has stayed and worked in the Highlands ever since. He currently works for NCC's successor Scottish Natural Heritage managing it's South Highland Area. He represents SNH on the Highland Community Planning Partnership, leading on the environment theme, looking at how sustainable management of the natural heritage can contribute to wider environmental, social and economic aims. In his own time George is amongst other things: a member of a local community woodland group at Upper Reelig; an enthusiastic, if technically challenged, dinghy sailor; and, a member of the Highland Childrens Panel.

George Hogg introduced the many benefits of environmental volunteering to an individual, including for mental and physical health, career development and social opportunities, citing his own volunteering to illustrate the diversity of work someone might be interested in. George made particular reference to the potential for volunteering to play a role in reducing health inequalities, including through a GP prescription service.

Attention was drawn to Scottish Government's recognition of the importance of biodiversity to Scotland's economic and social wellbeing, including the important role of local biodiversity action. This is highlighted by the Minister for Environment and Climate Change in the foreword to "The 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity".

(The full document can be seen at <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2013/06/5538>)

George noted the importance of volunteering in helping to deliver all elements of the Highland Council Single Outcome Agreement with Scottish Government. Voluntary work delivers across the full spectrum of this agreement – from keeping older people active and socially engaged; helping young people develop social skills and prepare themselves for employment;

getting long term unemployed back into work; to helping with physical and mental health needs. Of particular relevance to the conference is the volunteer contribution to delivering on environmental outcomes.

The environmental strand of the Single Outcome Agreement is supported by the Highland Environment Forum, which is funded by the Highland Council and SNH, but which is open to all groups and organisations with an interest in environmental issues to join. The Forum works across sectors and currently has a number of working groups, including on biodiversity, climate change, land use, wildfire and wildlife crime.

The work of the Forum illustrates the value of collaboration between organisations to maximise the benefits of work undertaken, and George encouraged a similar approach to environmental volunteering.



Highland Green Gyms

Ullie Wenzel, The Conservation Volunteers

Ullie Wenzel is a Community Project Officer, who has been working for The Conservation Volunteers (and before that BTCV) since 2007, with a year as a volunteer officer in the same organisation prior to that. Over the course of those years she's been running regular Midweek Conservation Volunteer teams in Aberdeen as well as several Green Gym teams in Inverness and Dingwall. Working with those groups and in partnership with other environmental bodies has given her the chance to improve the Biodiversity and improve access to and the enjoyment of greenspaces in the north of Scotland. Ullie currently manages a People's Health Trust funded Community Engagement Project in the Culloden and Smithton area of Inverness.

Ullie described the work of The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), which includes:

- Mid-week conservation teams
- community based Green Gyms
- People's Health Trust funded project in Culloden and Smithton

Many of the TCV projects involve working in partnership, for example with Subsea 7 on sand dune restoration near Wick, and projects with the Cromarty Firth Fisheries Trust which have been carried out over the last 8 years.

People volunteer with TCV for many reasons - they may have been referred by the Job Centre, or they may wish to gain relevant experience, or simply just to get out to the countryside.

The Green Gym volunteers have often been referred, and may not have otherwise thought of environmental volunteering, most find that they enjoy it.

The People's Health Trust funded project undertakes work that has been suggested by the community - in this case Culloden and Smithton. This involves visiting and building up a rapport with community members before any work takes place.

You can find out more about the work of The Conservation Volunteers on their website www.tcv.org.uk/greengym



Cairngorms Nature: Environmental Volunteering in the National Park

Alan Smith, Cairngorms National Park Authority

Alan is the Outdoor Learning Officer for the Cairngorms National Park Authority and John Muir Award Manager for the Cairngorms and has been working at the Park Authority for 10 years. A key element to this work is engaging people of all ages in the natural environment, to date nearly 25,000 people have completed a John Muir Award through the Park Authority and over 200 young people have taken part in a Junior Ranger Project; putting something back into nature is a core part of these programmes. Previous employment include managing a holiday programme for Guide Dogs for the Blind that involved training and managing volunteers as sighted guides for visually impaired clients.

Alan described the Cairngorms National Park approach to encouraging and developing environmental volunteering, which had begun with a commissioned report in 2013. This found just over 2,000 people carrying out environmental volunteering through 25 organisations.

The report found that the key impacts on volunteering were:

- Lack of time and resources, in particular due to perceived time constraints created by health and safety/risk assessment considerations.
- A lack of organisations primarily requiring volunteers with specific skills.
- A prevalence of volunteers from outside the National Park volunteering on a short-term, residential basis.
- A lack of local volunteers and a difficulty in recruiting them.
- A correlation between population centres with organisations nearby offering environmental volunteering opportunities.
- A lack of environmental volunteering opportunities in Perth and Kinross.
- It was almost impossible to find accurate data on annual numbers of volunteers within each organisation.
- Most organisations had not made specific efforts to align their voluntary activities with the aims of CNPA or Cairngorms Nature, although in many cases their own aims are similar in practice.

The Report recommendations included:

- having a dedicated National Park staff member
- setting up community based volunteer groups
- recruiting a team of volunteer rangers.

The National Park is now in the process of developing an environmental volunteering policy.

Plans to encourage more volunteering include developing a community-based volunteer ranger scheme, where rangers will be recruited in partnership with community councils, and trained to a standard where they can supervise and co-ordinate community volunteering groups.

The Park hopes that this approach will achieve long term sustainability by building the role of volunteer co-ordination into Community Councils' remits, with an appropriate level of support available through CNPA.



Environmental Volunteering in the
Cairngorms National Park:
Opportunities and Potential
November 2013
Andy Ruck

Nature and Wellbeing

Stephen Wiseman, Scottish Waterways Trust

Stephen Wiseman is the Heritage officer with the Scottish Waterways Trust on the Caledonian Canal. The canal heritage project is all about engaging people with the natural and cultural treasures of the canal for mutual benefit – good for body and mind and for the canal's local and national values. The partnership work around Inverness, looking at wellbeing through time spent in nature, is a great example of how they want to help make a difference in the Highlands.

Stephen's talk emphasised the health benefits and the enjoyment of time spent out of doors.

Many out door activities can work well as inter-generational activities, sharing skills and stories, and Stephen described his work with Men's Sheds (where men gather for projects and socialising), the John Muir Trust Award, and the many events and activity days that take place along the canal.

Stephen highlighted a recent project run by the Scottish Waterways Trust in association with Dunain Community Woodland. This was based on health walks, with particular emphasis on mental health. The walks took place over an hour and a half, employed mindfulness techniques, and were run with a calming structure along easy access routes.

The walks might include some contemplative activities such as poetry, art or 'forest bathing' - absorbing the sights and sounds of the space around you - and always ended with a fire, and some tea and flapjack.

A short film about the Nature Walks for Wellbeing can be seen at <http://youtu.be/3Qiulan6Fj0>



The REAL project: Developing employability skills

John Rutter, Inverness High School Headteacher

John Rutter has been headteacher at Inverness High School since April 2014. He is a geography teacher and formerly worked in sustainable tourism and as an environmental scientist in many different countries. This background has given him a keen interest in global sustainability which he has endeavoured to promote at all stages in his work in education.

REAL (Real Education Active Lives) is a charity based in Inverness High School and that operates over an acre of the school grounds. Of the school's 420 pupils around 80% have additional support needs, and so REAL is invaluable in the opportunities it can give for pupils to gain good employability and life skills.

The idea for REAL started with pupils being offered painting and gardening on school activity days, and now employs one member of staff full-time on the farm, with additional support from a youth worker. Activities carried out by REAL include growing crops and then processing them - for example, fruit which pupils learn how to turn into jam.

The school also has other projects to improve pupils confidence and employability, including leadership groups - where pupils help out at parents evenings and community events; S5 and S6 pupils help at the feeder primary schools and pupils get involved with the Merkinch Community Centre including with regular 'Golden Gadget' sessions where they help people to learn how to use technology - such as using skype.

Through REAL the school has also developed an employability certificate, which is supported by companies such as Stagecoach, Tulloch and local hotels. To achieve the certificate pupils have to carry out 40 hours of work in their own time and show a number of skills, such as timekeeping, listening and volunteering. This programme had been started to provide an opportunity for pupils leaving in S4, but many of them enjoyed it so much that they have stayed on for S5 and S6.

The school holds a careers event for S5 and 6 pupils each January. This includes discussion groups on what employers are looking for. They are now looking to have a similar event for parents, which will help them to best support their children. In order to further improve opportunities for pupils the school is seeking to improve work experience opportunities, so that a from S3 a pupil could, for instance, work one afternoon a week for an employer.

Increasing pupil resilience is another thread of the school's approach, and plans to help this include providing a residential experience for pupils, with funding to enable all to go.

Currently 95 % of Inverness High School pupils go on to 'positive destinations'.



Inverness High School Careers Fair

Discussion

Q Is there funding that provides for projects that benefit people (eg health) and nature?

A George Hogg: Yes. There is an increasing recognition of the links between the two areas, and funding streams are now beginning to follow this.

LEADER was pointed to as a funding stream where this change is happening.

Q How can the multi-benefit approach (eg reducing health inequalities) get long term support?

A Stephen Wiseman: There needs to be more regular talking and working between groups and organisations. Approaches such as 'green prescriptions' need to become more widely adopted and embedded within the system.

Alan Smith: long term sustainability is the aim for the Cairngorms National Park volunteering development.

Gail Duff (Signpost) commented that they hold volunteer manager networking meetings, to which all are invited.

Q How do you get people who aren't interested in nature involved?

A Ullie Wenzel: Many of the people who attend Green Gyms come from agency referrals, and may not have wished to come, but many find that they enjoy it. Existing volunteers often recommend to others to come along. Trees for Life works in partnership with other charities - e.g. for mental health - so that they can offer suitable volunteering opportunities.

Several people pointed out the importance of a staged and supported approach to getting less confident people involved in volunteering. Ullie Wenzel echoed this view as a result of her experience of poor uptake of places offered through the Inverness volunteer centre.

Q Are there difficulties in having under 18 year olds volunteering

A John Rutter: No. All that is required is that one or more leaders have been through Disclosure Scotland.

Ullie Wenzel: The Conservation Volunteers offers youth placements to pupils.



The health benefits of volunteering & how to work collaboratively

Dan Jenkins, NHS Highland

Dan Jenkins has worked in various roles in Health Promotion, Community Development, Training, Support and Counselling in the public, voluntary and private sectors. As Health Promotion Specialist with NHS Highland Dan is now involved with taking forward their Healthy Weight Strategy, with a particular focus on promoting enjoyable, health enhancing physical activity. Emphasising partnership working and a broad view of the factors that affect healthy weight, Dan is keen to promote the standpoint of being "healthy at any and every weight". His role is to foster the provision of services throughout Highland that empower healthy choices around diet and physical activity, and develop a balance of self-management and structural and systematic support.

Dan Jenkins talked about the NHS view that a healthy weight is that which someone is at when they are living a healthy lifestyle, and how volunteering can support this, both physically and mentally.

He described the knock on benefits of volunteering - where an increase in health and confidence means that people are more likely to help others and get involved in wider community activity.

Dan encouraged organisations to work together, to help harness enthusiasm, make volunteering more inclusive and provide more support to volunteers.

Dan encouraged everyone to create a paper airplane on which they wrote the top benefit to them of volunteering. The results . . .

Top Health benefits:

Improve wellbeing / mental health (mine and others)	16
Connecting with others / social interaction	13
Sense of purpose – helping with something important/contributing	10
Physical activity benefits	9
All of the above (for those who just couldn't pin one down)	4

And a few interesting individual ideas:

Helping ourselves by helping others	1
Improved biodiversity	1
Reduced visits to health professionals	1
Slows life pace down – lowering blood pressure, breathing naturally	1
Doing stuff I choose to do	1
Living in the now	1



Highland TSI – What we do for Volunteering & the Saltire Awards for Young People

Mhairi Wylie, Third Sector Interface

Mhairi Wylie is the Chief Officer with the Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI) which she joined upon its establishment in 2012. This followed almost seven years with Ross and Cromarty CAB, first as a Migrant Worker Project Officer then later as Manager.

Since leaving Dornoch Academy she has worked and volunteered within the third sector, including with young people both at home and abroad and most recently as a Glasgow 2014 Frontrunner and Clydesider. She is currently also a director with Ross-Shire Women's Aid.

Mhairi provided an overview of the work of Highland Third Sector Interface - which is the umbrella body for all the Highland local council for voluntary service groups, and acts as their representative on the Highland Community Planning Partnership.

Highland volunteering statistics are that:

- The formal rates of volunteering are 1.5 times the national average
- Volunteers contribute an estimated 10 million hours, equivalent to a £146.2 million contribution to the Highland Economy
- Almost half of all volunteers volunteer for more than one role

Mhairi noted that volunteering can give:

- A boost in skills and experience at a significantly reduced cost.
- A happier workforce or individual
- Experience of leadership
- Increased empathy and understanding
- Increased adaptability
- Increased influencing and negotiation skills

The Third Sector Interface can help groups and organisations with volunteer recruitment, management and support. They also help younger people, aged 12 - 25, to take part in the Saltire Award.

The Saltire Award operates at 4 different levels:

Challenge - An introduction to volunteering as a team

Approach - a regular commitment to volunteering for 10 & 25 Hours

Ascent - a sustained commitment to volunteering for 50, 100, 200 & 500 Hours

Summit - The Pinnacle of the awards. This is peer awarded for outstanding contribution to volunteering

All candidates who achieve the 200 Hour Ascent and above are encouraged to become Saltire Ambassadors.

Nominations for a Saltire Award have to come from the organisation they volunteer for, their school, college, or university or the local Saltire delivery office (or TSI)

Find out more about the Highland Third Sector Interface and the Saltire Award from their website www.highlandtsi.org.uk

A Volunteer's Perspective – what works and what is challenging

Megan Rowland, Saltire Ambassador / RSPB Volunteer

Megan introduced her work volunteering for the RSPB and the Scottish Wildlife Trust for over two years, and outlined some of the benefits and challenges of that experience.

Megan has spent the last two years as a volunteer with RSPB Scotland, based in the Golspie office in Sutherland, dedicating over 1500 hours to the charity. She has assisted the RSPB team with fieldwork, mapping and administrative work. She has also spent the last 9 months as Marketing Coordinator with the Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape project, again a voluntary post. In addition Megan is undertaking a BA degree in Environmental Studies with the Open University.

Benefits:

- Gaining new skills - e.g. public relations, marketing, wildlife and habitat surveying, land management
- Networking with others in the field, making new friends and connections
- Confidence building, though undertaking new tasks
- Increased fitness
- Exposure to new ideas

Challenges:

- Lack of official training
- Lack of staff support
- Hard to be accepted and involved as part of the organisation
- Lack of trust
- Lack of opportunity to attend conferences and events

Suggestions for a good volunteering experience:

- Make sure that volunteers are appreciated for their work and the contribution made to the organisation
- Have a set standard of training for long-term and residential volunteers
- Include volunteers who have been present for over a year in decisions and meetings
- Keep long term volunteers up-to-date with conferences, training, meetings, events, learning opportunities, networking events, etc.



Discussion

Q Are the people drawn to volunteering the people who are most likely to get a health benefit?

A Dan Jenkins: No, support and guidance is needed for those people (see earlier discussion).

Q Is there a mechanism or central point for finding volunteers?

A The Highland Third Sector Interface, through organisations such as Signpost (Inverness) are the main ways to find out about volunteering opportunities, otherwise it is through informal community contacts. Volunteer Scotland also hosts a volunteer opportunity search engine.

Workshops ~ summary

The afternoon workshops each discussed the two questions:

- How can we improve co-ordination and work better together?
- How do we encourage more people to volunteer in Highland?

Workshop feedback highlighted the:

- Need for a central contact/hub
- Highland-wide, up-to-date website of opportunities
- Need to increase GP awareness of opportunities through information dissemination and training
- Opportunity for increased cross-sector collaboration - eg with community health workers
- Contribution social media can play in highlighting opportunities
- Value of training and accreditation
- Value of awards, such as the Saltire Award
- Importance of fitting the work to the volunteer
- Potential for shared work days
- Potential for volunteers/pupils to act as ambassadors to interest others
- Importance of building in volunteer support - training, mileage etc - to a funding bid

Full details are provided in Appendix 1



Conclusions

Cllr Thomas Prag gave thanks to the speakers for taking the time to prepare such interesting presentations and stimulate discussions, and to the workshop chairs and presenters for their facilitation.

It was agreed that a further workshop would be convened by Jonathan Willet, Highland Biodiversity Officer to take forward some of the recommendations from the workshops.

Thanks were given to SNH and the Council for funding the event, to Inverness High School for providing such a great venue, and to Caroline Vawdrey of HEN (Highland Environment Network) for co-ordinating it.

Appendix 1: Workshops Reports

The three workshop groups addressed the questions:

- How can we improve co-ordination and work better together?
- How do we encourage more people to volunteer in Highland?

The workshops were led by Janet Bromham (Highland Council Biodiversity Officer), Marina Swanson (Highland Council Ranger), Jonathan Willet (Highland Council Biodiversity Officer)

Group led by Janet Bromham

1) What mechanisms are there already?

- Informal connections in rural highlandf - community groups, word of mouth
- Area websites - eg strathnairn, drumnadrochit
- Social media - including facebook events and adverts
- community development officers -in vol orgs
- NHS community health development officers - merkinch, alness, wick, fort william
- Existing national vol orgs eg RSPB, JMT, NTS
- National websites - eg Let's Get On With It Together, Volunteer Scotland

2) What would be useful? / encouraging more people to volunteer

- Make sure that you are clear volunteers are wanted and that the project is suitable for them.
- Encourage volunteers to have a sense of ownership of the work/place
- more information is required on the specifics of what opportunities are where, and better descriptions of activities to be undertaken
- Better matching of volunteer skills and expectations with the activities on offer - e.g. leadership skills - a searchable database could be used for this
- Promotion of volunteer related courses
- Link together 'one stop shops' to provide a broader information and opportunity service
- Ensure that all websites are up to date
- Volunteering on prescription, with the appropriate levels of support
- Coordination between groups so that they can offer the right volunteer experience - e.g. for a teacher looking for a project
- Joint fundraising bids
- Plan workforce training and development
- Build training and volunteer expenses into the project design
- Be clear about what the volunteer is getting out of it.

Group led by Marina Swanson

1) How can we improve co-ordination and work better together?

- Share information
- Have central database with information about volunteering organisations and associated opportunities for volunteering. Information on timing/job descriptions. E.g RSPB model – search via interest.
- Be aware of other groups & where to look e.g use portal similar to HEN, hold register of volunteering organisations and associated opportunities for volunteering.
- Make sure organisations register with volunteer service
- Ensure webpages/contact details are validated each year so information is kept up to date.
- Speed organisation dating – to raise awareness of different volunteering groups. Signpost have done this. Circular table works best – sharing business cards.
- Continue with clear themed events. Specific volunteering events.
- Share volunteering days – different groups come together to work on joint projects.
- Network through existing groups e.g. signpost, CVG etc. Each organisation must be responsible to provide information on opportunities and keep it up to date.
- Share mailing lists

2) How do we encourage more people to volunteer in Highland?

- Most volunteers volunteer in different groups, difficult to recruit new volunteers.
- Use social media such as facebook, twitter
- Continue with celebration of volunteering e.g Saltire awards
- Highlight benefits of volunteering more, raise awareness of health benefits
- Ensure volunteers are valued and appreciated at all levels.
- Find out what volunteers actually want- individual needs must be identified for each volunteer
- Run specific events for specific groups e.g. mental health
- Ensure volunteers and organisations are committed
- Use younger volunteers so recruit new volunteers e.g. presenters at schools- pupil ambassadors who can relate better
- Speak to our own volunteers and ask why they got involved. Use info to recruit new volunteers.
- Constraints: funding, transport, accessibility (Revenue costs difficult to sustain – capital costs easier)
- Volunteering is wonderful but should not be at expense of paid positions.

Group led by Jonathan Willet

1) How can we improve co-ordination and work better together?

- Do we need a collaborative approach? Yes.
- There is a real need for some kind of central contact point/ coordinating body is required. HEN?
- A directory of Env NGOs and their volunteering opportunities is required. Does it exist already?
- Volunteering should be a core Scottish Government Responsibility particularly through improving health and encouraging activity.
- Certainly there is more that can be done by the government to support this.
- Environmental Volunteering should not be separated from other types of volunteering, there is overlap in the activities undertaken and also volunteers may participate in different types of volunteering.

There are two key aspects of volunteering to address:

1. At the organisational level coordination of activities etc is required.
2. Facilitation and support of volunteers has quite different demands from the above.

Environmental volunteering can be used to brand/ badge a volunteering activity that has primarily social or health benefits but such an activity may not be so attractive if branded as such.

Health and Volunteering.

NHS needs evidence to prescribe volunteering - But this is a very formal and reductive approach, so maybe not sustainable in the long-term as it is not through a patient's choice. It could be "sold" as part of a suite of opportunities that a patient can choose from to help a particular condition.

A key action is to make GP's aware of the volunteering opportunities that are available to suggest to patients.

Publicity

- Volunteering needs to be much better advertised so that people are aware of opportunities out there but also the benefits that individuals, communities and society gain from this activity.
- A central compendium of facts and figures (a justification for funding?) needs to be compiled and made available to funders and policy makers to make the point as to why volunteering is worth supporting.
- Research needs to be undertaken (or found) that looks at what volunteers want, their economic impact, the numbers of folk involved etc.

Collaboration potential

Whale and Dolphin Conservation Trust - They have surveys from Dunnet Head. Two, ten minute watches one hour apart. What can volunteers do in this hour? There could be opportunities to train volunteers to do Bumblebee surveys, seabird nest counts, HBRG surveys, seashore surveys. There are organisations that can help train volunteers if this is required.

Note

Larger organisations need to be sensitive to the impacts on local communities e.g. volunteers seen as taking work away from local contractors. On the other hand much volunteer work will only be delivered through volunteers as there is no budget to pay people to do this work. Volunteers need to feel that they are not being used as “free labour” inasmuch as doing a job that someone really should be paid to do.

2) How do we encourage more people to volunteer in Highland?

- Treat them professionally. Make them feel valued.
- Don't just focus on Inverness or even the Highlands. There is a grey area at the edges where volunteers may come from outwith Highland.
- Work with Community Health Coordinators to link those potential volunteers in the poorest areas needing more support to get involved in volunteering.
- Create an association of voluntary organisations within Highland.

Potential Issues.

Organisations may perhaps be competitive for funding or volunteers who may themselves be a funding resource through their hours being used as match funding. They may wish to have “their” volunteers so that they can encourage them to become members of their organisations?

But do volunteers align themselves more closely with an organisation or the activity or its outcome?

Integration between large national organisations and very local ones is poor to non-existent. There needs to be bottom up and top down integration and communication.

Annex 2: Feedback Report

Summary

Twenty-eight feedback surveys were received.
A summary of these is outlined below.

Timing and Venue

100% of respondents thought the timing of the event was good for them.
93% thought that the venue and food was excellent or good.
The main comment on the venue was that it was a little chilly.

Organisation

100% of respondents thought the organisation was excellent or good
99.5% felt that they had received all the information they needed for the event - 1 respondent had only heard of the event by word of mouth (though they are on the email mailing list)

Content

68% of respondents found the presentations very useful, 32% found them quite useful
57% of respondents found the workshops very useful, 43% found them quite useful

Future activity

19 people said that they would be taking action following the conference

Future help from the Highland Environment Forum

The following suggestions about how the Highland Environment Forum could help in the future were made:

It would be helpful to share delegate contact details - not possible to talk to everyone.
Advertise Shorewatch as a volunteer opportunity
Keep the info flowing. Encourage organisations to register with local TSI volunteering centres.
A what is it like to volunteer event, especially for volunteers and volunteer managers to network, and gain presentation experience.
Maintain a directory of organisations working in Highland.
A bit more archaeology/cultural heritage organisations, We have an important role to play and would be willing or good partners.
Develop core volunteering strategy for the Highland Community Planning Partnership. Continued leadership.
I find the newsletters and conferences useful - thank you.
Need support to keep on top of volunteer opportunities and management.
Stay in touch
Keep up the good work
The forum could put some info on the iWeb regarding the role and contacts for Third Sector Interface to help communities and volunteering.
Pass on any information in future. Feedback from day's events. More event days for volunteer groups.
Central contact point developed. More support for community organisations to provide up-to-date contacts/register of contacts and opportunities.