

Highland Environment Forum, Health and the environment : meeting notes

17 March 2015, SNH Headquarters - Great Glen House, Inverness

Attending

Abriachan Forest Trust	Suzann Barr
Cairngorms National Park Authority	Andy Ford
Energy Saving Scotland Advice Centre (Changeworks)	Alison Craig
Exova	Christopher Provan
Forest Commission Scotland	Giles Brockman
Forest Commission Scotland	Kenneth Knott
Highland Biological Recording Group	Ro Scott
Highland Council	Cllr Audrey Sinclair
Highland Council	Nicole Wallace
Highland Council	Janet Bromham
Highland Council	Jonathan Willet
Highland Council	Gemma Cassells
Highland Council Chief Executives Unit	Stephen Carr
Highland Council Chief Executives Unit	Daniel Greig
Highland Environment Network	Caroline Vawdrey
Home Energy Scotland	Alan Grant
Home Energy Scotland	Bob Grant
Lochaber Environmental Group	Susan Carstairs
National Farmers Union (Scotland)	Ian Wilson
National Health Service Highland	Jenny Wares
National Health Service Highland	Kate Maclean
National Trust for Scotland	Carol Mackintosh
Police Scotland	Chief Inspector Colin Gough
Police Scotland	Inspector Mike Middlehurst
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Scotland	Pete Mayhew
Scottish Environment Protection Agency	Alastair Duff
Scottish Environment Protection Agency	Judi McDonald
Scottish Fire & Rescue Service	Phil Green
Scottish Government	Christopher Bruce
Scottish Natural Heritage	George Hogg
Scottish Natural Heritage	Keith Duncan
Scottish Natural Heritage	Anne Elliott
Scottish Social Services Council	Nick Wilding
Scottish Waterways Trust	Stephen Wiseman
Soirbheas	Carol Masheter
Trees for Life	Kirsty Ellen
Trellis	Mary Stewart
Wester Ross Fisheries Trust	Peter Cunningham

Apologies

Caithness Biodiversity Group	David Glass
Highland Council	Cllr George Farlow
Highland Environment Network	Vanessa Halhead
Scottish Environment Protection Agency	Mairi Nicolson
Scottish Land and Estates	Drew McFarlane-Slack
Signpost	Jay Muirhead

1) Welcome

George Hogg welcomed people to the forum, and noted the wide range of groups and organisations represented. His introduction included:

- There will be a survey of forum members to ask: what is being done well, what could be done better?
- Update on actions relating to the environmental section of the Single Outcome Agreement (circulated prior to the meeting, and attached)

2) The 2015 - 2020 Highland Biodiversity Action Plan

Presentation by Janet Bromham, Highland Council Biodiversity Officer; Jonathan Willet, Highland Council Biodiversity Officer; Giles Brockman, Forestry Commission Scotland; Peter Cunningham, Wester Ross Fisheries Trust; Anne Elliott, Scottish Natural Heritage; Judi McDonald, Scottish Environment Protection Agency; Ro Scott, Highland Biological Recording Group

The finalised Highland Biodiversity Action Plan will be launched in June, following consultation with prospective partners in delivering the proposed actions. The plan includes 33 priority project proposals which will involve partnership working between groups and organisations (circulated at the meeting and attached). A selection of these proposals was presented by some of the members of the Biodiversity Working Group:

A. Knowledge sharing and good practice:

- i. Training events - for farmers and crofters - to help make successful applications and high quality projects - working with SAC monitor farms and Wildlife Estates Scotland
- ii. Demonstration of large scale landscape level projects
- iii. Peatland Restoration - role out good practice - e.g. Flows to the Future to other parts of the Highland
- iv. Seashore project - the potential for extending this and keeping the interest and skills going. Consideration of a herring-based project
- v. The need for Eco Schools co-ordinator

B. Wildlife crime - set up a Highland Partnership Against Wildlife Crime

C. Forestry - looking at woodland environment in widest context

- i. Lonesome Pine - there are many areas with one or two trees hanging on. This project would get people involved in identifying small pockets of trees, and to look at the potential for securing them or expanding the area of tree cover.
- ii. Developing natural tree lines, such as transition woodlands and scrubby environments - e.g. boggy margins, montane scrub.

D. Marine

- i. Improving protection for seabed habitats - work with Scottish Government and marine protection areas to ensure that protection is there.
- ii. Fish farming - council drafting an aquaculture strategy - this is also potential area of focus for the forum

E. Species reintroduction - eg beaver, lynx

F. Planning

- i. Improving the management of road verges
- ii. Providing wildflower meadow training - for e.g. council workers to establish and maintain wildflower meadows
- iii. Improving ecological input to the local plan process - e.g. biodiversity officers are providing training to planners, but this needs to be increased; looking to create more green networks. A strategy for biodiversity offsetting also needs to be worked up.

G. Volunteering

To improve the volunteering process, both by expanding opportunities and increasing joint working - e.g. Green Gyms around the Highlands

H. Local biodiversity projects grant scheme

Local biodiversity groups would like to have an easy access Highland grant fund

I. Wildlife friendly gardening scheme -

In addition to the wildlife benefits this could have the potential for partnership working and attracting business sponsorship, reducing the presence of *Rhododendron ponticum*, improving health and activity. There are other good examples around Britain - eg Dorset, Somerset

J. Invasive species

Continuation of the project partnership, which was started 2006 and has had some major successes, but which needs continuing in order to consolidate the work and prevent species from returning. Eggs of successes: mink control - benefitting water vole and ground nesting birds; riverine invasive plant clearance e.g. upper Nairn, Findhorn, Orrin - led to spawning ground improvement
Lower Moray Firth - Black Isle, Beauty, Glen Urquhart Bay; *Rhododendron* - large scale clearance on the national forest estate, and other landowners - need to encourage community and garden clearance.

K. Data gathering and management:

Highland Biological database project: The Highland Biological Recording Group has responsibility for gathering data, but biological recording groups are dependant on volunteers - with limited funding. Highland Biological Recording Group is now receiving around 20,000 records per year, and is dependent on the goodwill of one person working with limited financial resource. There is therefore a need for more secure funding for a data management to provide in the order of 1 fte job.

3) NHS public health - introduction to the Director of Public Health's Health and the Environment report

Dr Jenny Wares, Public Health Specialty Registrar, NHS Highland

Report available online on the [NHS website](#)

Jenny noted that the study of public health has been described as 'Preventing disease, prolonging life, promoting health through the organised efforts of society' - Acheson 1988 - an approach which fits well with that of the Highland Environment Forum

Health and the natural environment is the theme of the annual report by Dr Margaret Somerville (Director of Public Health, retired), which contains discussion of many issues of central importance to the Highlands, including the knock-on effects of climate change and the need for adaptation.

The report includes the following recommendations for action:

- Monitoring and reporting carbon emissions across agencies
- Supporting communities to develop resilience to extreme weather events
- Develop joint infrastructure and services across agencies, particularly in relation to transport, catering, procurement and use of renewable energy sources
- Reducing fuel poverty through reducing fuel costs as well as improving energy efficiency
- Raising awareness of the changing natural environment through schools, public engagement and integrated impact assessment
- Promoting physical activity and mental health and well-being through a renewed strategic approach - the importance of active travel networks
- Promoting access to and use of the natural environment by all ages and population groups - including the importance of greenspace and active travel networks
- Helping to reduce overweight and obesity levels through reviewing and reducing the obesogenic nature of the local environment and improving access to affordable healthy food
- Reduce unintentional injuries and hazards through promoting outdoor activity and road safety awareness, awareness of Lyme Disease, testing private water supplies, preventing falls and home safety
- Focus on human impact on environment and vice-versa - discussions across organisations
- Dietary improvements - including a decrease in meat eating and increased consumption of locally produced food

The report recommendations will be put to the Highland Community Planning Partnership in late March 2015
Within the NHS the carbon management group is the most likely to take the recommendations forward.

4) Workshop reports

a) Setting up a Highland Partnership Against Wildlife Crime

Leaders: Chief Inspector Colin Gough, Police Scotland; Keith Duncan, Scottish Natural Heritage (joint meeting notes)

Police Scotland (PS) Chief Inspector Colin Gough and Inspector Mike Middlehurst from "N" Division led the discussion on setting up a partnership against wildlife crime in the Highlands and Islands. This proposal was a key recommendation from the workshops on Tackling Wildlife Crime at our meeting on 18 September 2014.

PS provided feedback on the first Highland Wildlife crime conference held at Divisional headquarters, Inverness on the 12 March. PS provided an update on the restructuring of existing staff roles and increasing staff numbers who will engage with wildlife crime in PS Highland and Island division. Other developments included PS planning for a co-ordinated approach to intelligence gathering and communication with partners in the Highlands and Islands.

PS will review the other PAW partnerships in Scotland and consult with partners to develop a PAW partnership and strategy that meets the needs of the Highlands and Islands. Suggestions on issues that should be covered in the strategy were discussed in the workshop. It was suggested that the process of setting up a highland PAW including a strategy would take about one year.

There was agreement that a PAW group would operate as a sub group of HEF.

b) Could the Highlands develop even greater Climate Change Leadership?

Leader: Stephen Carr, The Highland Council

Meeting notes: Daniel Greig

This workshop discussion and exercise looked at the opportunities to adopt a more collaborative leadership style in relation to climate change in Highland.

The workshop notes will be shared with NHS Highland for consideration of how the Community Planning Partnership can achieve the DPH 2014 report recommendations.

The workshop looked at:

- What the links between health and climate change?
- Where can we all contribute to achieving the recommendations of the Director of Public Health's annual report?
- Do we want to and how do we develop collaborative leadership in the Highlands?

For more information about the workshop, please email Stephen.Carr@highland.gov.uk.

The table below notes the contributions made:

<p>Consider schemes to reduce fuel poverty by reducing fuel costs as well as improving home energy efficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable energy action plan for Highland • National funded schemes to tackle homes in poor condition, particular addressing home owners in fuel poverty • HC citizen panel survey looking at perceptions • Make optimum use of local wood fuel resources (2015 study by LEG) • Community led initiatives • Equalise electricity costs across Scotland/UK • Support “our power” Energy supply company initiative • District heating schemes 	<p>Develop joint infrastructure and services across agencies wherever possible, particularly in relation to: Transport, Catering for schools, care homes, hospitals and other settings at a local level & Procurement of goods and use of reawaken energy sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative mapping of Highland food system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Who grows what, where & what is available locally o Reliance on long supply chains and vulnerabilities of these (links to resilience strand) o What’s already working RE procurement & food that could be built on to support local growing & mental health outcomes o Balance with data on consumption • Shares resources e.g. car fleet • Procurement of food • Joint procurement • Promote and support community based renewables heating/generation schemes to improve health • HEF lead including sustainable procurement • Social media based car sharing
<p>Support communities to develop resilience to extreme weather events through the use of sustainable local resources, community empowerment, and recognition and development of the role of volunteers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop local heat and power generation • Support development of village resilience plans • HEF + Com Planning: celebrate and engage development trusts, transition initiatives, social enterprises etc. Understand resilience as learning together through appreciating how people, places and organisations are already resilient • Integrating climate change mitigation/adaptation into development plans e.g. SUDS • Having community emergency hubs – knowing who your vulnerable members are and where they live. 	<p>Reduce unintentional injuries and hazards through: Renewed road safety awareness, Using information from Scottish Mountain Rescue to promote safety in the outdoor environment, Raising awareness of Lyme Disease, Raising awareness of the importance of testing and treating private water supplies, Continued focus on preventing falls in older people, Promoting safety in the home particularly for young children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cycle safety training • Collaborative engagement and sharing of statistics incident review outcomes/ recommendations • “Living streets” • Average speed cameras on all roads • Cycle only paths • PWS legal annual testing , similar to legionella • Ongoing impact to falls preventions agenda - NESH • Promote greater individual responsibility

<p>Help reduce overweight and obesity levels through: A renewed strategic approach to weight management to include dedicated weight management services, community development and a review of the local obesogenic environment & The availability of affordable healthy food through the NHS Highland area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food growing projects with schools and wider community • Promotion of active travel e.g. Carbon CLEVER Cycles • Sugar labelling • Sugar tax • Stricter advertising to children, rule. Promotion of healthy foods • Increase health as a focus for planning teams • Promote health benefits to managers • Use planning to encourage walking and cycling 	<p>Monitor and report carbon emissions across agencies and develop joint approaches to reducing carbon hotspots, such as procurement and travel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clearer guidance on suitable tools, to monitor emissions - fleet tracking etc. • GP referral scheme for energy efficiency measures • Develop sustained carbon budgets for Highland businesses • Research Highland contribution to visitors choosing not take short or long haul flights for holidays but coming here • Develop eco - tourism offers • GP prescribed Highland eco trips
<p>Promote physical activity and mental health and wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with businesses providing sustainable travel reviews to help them implement active travel policies and initiatives (provided by EST) • Develop physical activity strategy through CPP buy led by public health at NHS Highland • Support implementation of volunteering programmes with social prescribing • Continue to improve cycling and walking networks - link with biodiversity green networks • Address mental health the same as physical • Incentivise GPs 	<p>Raise awareness of the changing natural environment through school curricula, public engagement, high level inter agency support and inclusion of climate change and sustainability in intergrade impact assessment of all service changes and major developments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask at my kids school about marine/fish lifecycles • Change communication medium - social media etc. • Primary school awareness through zero waste Scotland and community energy projects • SEAP • Eco schools • European green leaf award • Continue to promote DPH Annual report and drive recommendations forward in conjunction with CPP • Consider wider health impacts of developments/ service change.

c) The Highland Biodiversity Action Plan

Leaders: Janet Bromham, Jonathan Willet, Highland Council Biodiversity Officers

Meeting notes: Jonathan Willet

It was decided that due to the number of projects in the HBAP that three would be chosen so that they could be discussed in more depth. The list was gone through and those attending voted. The top three were:

20. Improve Volunteering Opportunities . 8 Votes.

1. Promote Land Management for Wildlife. 6 Votes.

25. Nature Connections. 5 Votes.

20. Improve Volunteering Opportunities.

This topic is especially relevant as the forthcoming Highland Biodiversity Conference on the 30th March at Inverness High School will be on the subject of volunteering and how organisations can work better together to the benefit of themselves and also their volunteers.

- Many great opportunities for volunteering in the Highlands, perhaps the most there have ever been.
- Opportunities to capture the interest of people on the cusp of retiring looking for a new interest or activity to take part in when they retire.
- Volunteers with additional support needs would need to take their support worker, but these folk are looking for new activities to get involved in.
- There are various different levels of volunteering and a diversity of activities; ones focussing on the above client group perhaps with a mainly therapeutic focus all the way to highly skilled and independent volunteers doing quite technical conservation tasks.
- Lots of untapped health and volunteering links. Getting practitioners together to discuss how this could work is a key action as is raising awareness of the suitable volunteer opportunities available.
- Some organisations would love to have volunteers for a day to undertake work on their site but they are not equipped to coordinate volunteers but could organise a day or more of work for volunteers to participate in.
- The Cairngorms National Park undertook Volunteer Mapping. Not that many folk were aware of this and Andy Ford acknowledged that even this large piece of work did not capture everything that was going on.
- There is also a HEN Directory of volunteering opportunities.
- 3rd Sector Interface is existing body that would be most appropriate to coordinate the various environmental volunteering opportunities or act as the umbrella organisation for this work.
- What about the role of the Scottish Council for Volunteer Organisations?
- It was highlighted that volunteering in rural areas required more coordination and resource due to dispersed volunteers. Lack of transport etc.
- The question was posed; where would the resources for this coordination come from?
- General working together. Would a website or portal bringing together all the opportunities be an answer?
- Signpost Inverness see <http://signpost-inc.org/index.html>

Key issues.

- There are lots of organisations active in some element of coordinating or supporting volunteering that the environmental volunteering sector is not engaged with. Identifying and coordinating the existing resource is a key first step to avoid un-necessary duplication.
- Coordinating volunteering opportunities and volunteers is a key task but does have resource implications.
- Volunteering is on a spectrum and volunteers are a diverse group with varying needs e.g. in terms of training, support etc.
- There is a massive opportunity contained in this HBAP Action, particularly with health and volunteering.

1. Promote Land Management for Wildlife.

This is a key issue as most of the land in Highland is managed and so eligible for funding through the Scottish Rural Development Programme. The management of this land has a huge impact on Highland's biodiversity.

- NHS Estate, opportunities for biodiverse landscapes aiding the recovery of patients and improving the staff's working environment. Allotments, wildflower meadows. Ponds etc.
- Issue with the above are the companies that undertake the maintenance contracts for the grounds and what they are happy managing. Responsibility for the long term management of new habitats is an issue.
- There are plans for a Wildflower Meadow and general habitat improvements at New Craigs.
- There was mention of the new targeting of SRDP applications. It was unclear what were the top priorities and how would the funding resource be concentrated?
- The SRDP might link with the Highland Land Use Strategy that is currently under development.
- There is funding available for developing collaborative management of land between various landowners.
- Major habitat restoration scheme through SNH's Green Stimulus funding and also now through the SRDP.
- Major woodland expansion through the SRDP managed by Forestry Commission Scotland.

Invasive Non-native Species.

- Peter Cunningham's idea of a wildlife gardening project would tie in well with tackling the issue of Rhododendron in private gardens and how to deal with them when surrounding SRDP-eligible landowners are dealing with their Rhododendron.
- Ken Knott mentioned that Community Groups might be able to register through the SRDP as a landless holding to tackle Rhododendron on land with no clear owner.
- Issues with FCS clearing their land of Rhododendron but adjacent landowners not clearing theirs, leading to reseeding into the cleared ground. E.g. Achnashellach.

Key issue.

- Lack of understanding of the SRDP and what it can do for biodiversity and how it will work, particularly in relation to localisation. There may be the opportunity for a seminar on this for all those people interested in promoting the biodiversity opportunities with the SRDP but who are not directly involved in the SRDP as an officer or landowners.

25. Nature Connections.

The discussion followed on from the volunteering discussion at the start of the meeting. There was a great deal of overlap in this and that discussion. There are many concerns about a disconnect between the younger generations and nature. This project could go some way to address this. In general over 40's did go out and play outside as children and so have a connection with nature and so know how to interact with it without fear or trepidation (well they know but don't necessarily do). Adults with children without that connection are unlikely to interact with nature and so it follows will their children.

- Men's Shed initiative, sharing knowledge and skills between generations is an aspect that is being developed.
- Links with Men's Shed and schools e.g. Muirton Primary or other formal education.
- This is not just about volunteering or going on a guided walk but the sharing of knowledge, sharing experiences, just being there and reflecting on this.
- Promoting awareness of all the good biodiversity/ nature connection projects that are happening to turn the heads of our elected representatives and so direct more funding to them.
- Finding some way to have a local "wild" patch that a community feels they have access to and ownership of, to create a connection. Community woodlands etc.
- Putting the personal stories and connections out there are these are the things that make a huge difference, but we tend not to hear about. Basically, the human element of all this.

Key Issue.

- This project links partly with volunteering but not completely. The issues about coordination groups and providing support are common factors though. Lots of opportunities to take forward through multiple agencies but who will lead on this?

Jonathan Willet. 19/03/15

5) Afternoon Presentations

• Nature walks for Wellbeing – a city partnership project

Stephen Wiseman Scottish Waterways Trust

Stephen described nature walks for wellbeing, run jointly between the Scottish Waterways Trust and Dunain Community Woodland which linked together the enjoying the natural environment and improving mental and physical wellbeing.

Funding was obtained for ten nature based therapy walks, developed in close association with New Craigs hospital, HUG and Birchwood Highland. The walks were devised to be gentle, but to incorporate some additional elements, such as poetry, natural art and mindfulness activities. The walks were popular, with numbers attending increasing through the programme. Two elements were key to the success of the walks - a leader sensitive to the needs of all those attending and . . . tea. Tea and flapjack arrived in a wheelbarrow (complete with rocket stove), providing an ideal relaxed gathering point.

The Scottish Waterways Trust and Dunain Community Woodland are now looking for more funding to continue their work, but in the meantime are putting together month-by-month activity programme.

You can read more about the walks in [Stephen's blog](#)

• **Abriachan Forest Trust - using the natural environment for better mental and physical health**

Suzann Barr

Suzann noted that the key aims of the Abriachan Forest Trust to:

- provide access for all
- improve biodiversity
- increase reforestation
- provide employment
- outdoor learning
- encourage recreation
- improve wellbeing
- expand community involvement

align closely with the aims of the Forum - as does their working with a wide range of partners to deliver their projects. Abriachan Forest Trust encourages a wide range of activities within the forest - including the provision of specialist support to people with mental or physical health issues, or who benefit from alternative learning approaches.

The Branching Out programme for adults who use mental health services, promoted by Forestry Commission Scotland has been important in helping people to gain confidence, to re-assess and re-focus in a communal and supportive atmosphere - Suzann shared Stephen's view of the importance of fire and food shared together. Branching Out pilot courses were also run in Skye and Caithness, and there are now 20 Branching Out leaders across Highland.

Find out more about all that happens at Abriachan on [their website](#)

Find out more about Branching Out on [their webpage](#)

• **Changeworks: reducing carbon emissions and alleviating fuel poverty to improve health**

Alan Grant

Alan highlighted the scale of fuel poverty in Highland - fuel poverty - 1 in 2 in households, rising to 70% in the Western Isles compared to a 1 in 3 households Scottish average. This is due to a mix of factors: older, often 1 1/2 storey housing, fuel prices, lower average incomes, more cold weather, lack of access to cheaper mains gas.

A traditional house takes 25,000kw hours pa to heat compared to 4,000kw hours for an insulated flat - but insulating and improving a house can half this requirement.

This will in turn produce mental and physical health benefits and can also help reduce carbon emissions.

Find out more about all the services that Home Energy Scotland can offer at <http://www.greenerscotland.org/warm-homes> or ring them on 0808 808 2282

Alan recommended watching Sir Harry Burns' (Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, retired) talk '[Closing the Gap](#)' delivered to NHS Highland in Eden Court

6) Plenary discussion: How can we work better together for health and the environment?

- i. The value of community woodlands was recognised and the suggestion made that new ways should be sought to allow communities some involvement in new private woodland plantings - to increase local benefit and a sense of ownership and care for the woodland.
- ii. The value of green prescriptions (New Zealand model) was recognised. Jenny Wares agreed to share the enthusiasm for this approach, and desire to make it more widespread with NHS Highland. Self directed support was seen as potentially offering people the opportunity to get involve in environmental projects in the long term. It was noted that people with additional support needs should be directed to groups led by trained professionals, rather than volunteer-led groups that might not have the right skills to support them. Interest was expressed in finding out what is currently on offer in the Highlands.

7) AOB

Attention was drawn to the destructive nature of scallop dredging and a plea made to always ask whether the scallops have been caught by hand diving the only environmentally acceptable approach.

The September Highland Environment Forum is likely to focus on marine issues - and sustainable sea food could be one of the topics.

The aims of the Highland Environment Forum are to:

- **Foster and coordinate activity on environmental matters, both within and at the Highland level.**
- **Take forward relevant actions identified in the Single Outcome Agreement, and be a valuable source of practical advice on the joint delivery of SOA outcomes.**
- **Identify and respond to emerging environmental agendas, and provide a link between local groups and national strategies, action plans and reporting procedures.**
- **Raise awareness and promote good practice on environmental issues across Highland.**