

## Highland Environment Forum, 11th September 2018

### Delegates

First Name	Last Name	Organisation
Alan	Smith	CNPA
Alison	Austin	John Muir Trust
Amanda	Bryan	Forestry Commission Scotland
Andy	McMahon	High Life Highland
Anna	Fleming	CNPA
Annabel	Martin	Christie-Elite Nurseries
Anne	Macrae	Wester Ross Biosphere
Audrey	Sinclair	Wester Ross Biosphere
Ben	Leyshon	SNH
Blair	Cowan	Abriachan Forest Trust
Caroline	Vawdrey	Highland Environment Forum
Esme	Leitch	Highland Youth Convenor
George	Farlow	
George	Hogg	SNH
Giles	Brockman	Forestry Commission Scotland
Gordon	Robertson	Assynt Foundation
Hebe	Carus	Scottish Wildlife Trust
Imogen	Furlong	High Life Highland
Judi	McDonald	SEPA
Katharine	Sharp	
Kenny	Taylor	Scottish Wildlife Trust
Kevin	Frediani	National Trust for Scotland
Kevin	Patrick	Lantra
Klare	Chamberlain	Calmac
Lynn	McKelvey	Cromarty Fisheries Trust
Margaret	Carlisle	UHI
Margaret	Somerville	

Mary	Gibson	SNH
Megan	Rowland	Gordonbush Estate
Nathan	Berrie	John Muir Trust
Nicole	Wallace	Highland Council
Penelope	Coles	Bidwells
Peter	Cunningham	Wester Ross Fisheries Trust
Phil	Dowling	RSPB
Ro	Scott	
Roni	Smith	Abriachan Forest Trust
Rose	Norman	SEPA
Sarah	Allison	Soil Association
Simon	McKelvey	Cromarty Fisheries Trust
Stephen	Moran	Highland Biological Recording Group
Susan	Davies	Scottish Wildlife Trust
Tamara	Hedderwick	Greenspace Scotland
Tamara	Lawton	SNH
Trish	Robertson	Highland Council
Victoria	Campen	Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape

## Presentation Summaries

### 1) Welcome : George Hogg, SNH

George updated delegates on the following areas of work:

#### a) Potential Climate Change working group:

Keith Masson, Highland Council Climate Change Officer put in a funding bid to Adaptation Scotland, which didn't succeed, as it was felt to be too ambitious for that funding stream. However, they expressed enthusiasm for trying to find a way to work with the Council and other community planning partners over the longer term. If there is positive news, a working group will be established via the community planning partnership and HEF.

b) The outdoor volunteering group continues to meet. The last meeting was at Dundreggan in August, the next will be in November at Evanton Community Wood. Members find the group a useful way to meet and exchange information and experience. Several alliances between organisations have been strengthened as a result of the working group. Anyone interested is welcome to join the group. There is a Highland Outdoor Volunteers [facebook page](#), to which people are encouraged to add their opportunities. Details on the HEF website.

c) The Green Health Partnership will be interviewing for a project officer in late September.

d) Monday 15th October, Marine Conference in Ullapool. Morning presentations followed by afternoon workshops. Details available at <https://sealifeourlife.eventbrite.com>

e) The biodiversity group will be hosting a spring conference - date and venue to be confirmed.

f) The Cairngorms National Park is holding the international [Europarc](#) Conference

g) Local Community Planning Partnerships have established their Outcome Delivery Groups and have all begun locality planning.

## Youth Leadership in the Natural Environment

### 2) The work of the Highland Youth Parliament and its environmental priorities : Esme Leitch, Highland Youth Convenor

Esme outlined the structure and work of the [Highland Youth Parliament](#) which has 100 members drawn from 8 regional youth forums, and 29 schools. The parliament has one full membership conference a year, and each region runs an area conference. The parliament is run by the youth convenor, with the support of a 16 member executive team.

A 2017 survey of 16 to 24 year olds in Scotland show that this age group had increased concern about environmental matters. Highland schools are involved in discussing and acting on environmental issues through over 200 schools in the ecoschools network; initiatives such as the new environmental group and community orchard in Nairn; the establishment of a Scottish Wildlife Watch group at Milburn Academy; and the campaigns against plastics run by Ullapool Primary School alongside the Scottish Wildlife Trust Living Seas campaign.

The youth parliament is currently looking at ways to get more youth involvement in understanding waste management, and the fact that waste is everyone's responsibility.

### **3) Working at Abriachan : Blair Cowan and Roni Smith**

Blair and Roni described Blair's involvement with Abriachan Forest Trust over ten years, and the opportunities that outdoor and communal work can give to people, including boosting their confidence.

Blair first began working at Abriachan when he was nine, and he has been involved in many projects since - from tree planting and footpath maintenance to building bird, bat and bug boxes. Blair is now beginning his HNC in rural skills at the Scottish School of Forestry.

Both Blair and Roni emphasised the opportunities for people to get involved at Abriachan from young children through to adults, either by joining volunteer days, through referral and partnership working - such as the John Muir Trust and with High Life Highland.

Abriachan now has a bothy for overnight stays, part funded by volunteering at the Highland Cross, and will shortly be opening a childrens' nursery.

### **4) Farming With Nature : Sarah Allison, Soil Association Farming With Nature manager**

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Sarah grew up on an upland organic farm, and became regional chair of the [Scottish Association of Young Farmers](#) which offered her great opportunities for learning and travel. Sarah noted that school and careers advice did not point her in the direction of rural/agricultural work, and suggested that many school leavers might not learn of the opportunities available to them. Sarah studied green technology at SRUC Auchincruive, which has helped to look at agriculture from a different perspective.

[Farming with Nature](#) is co-funded by RSPB Scotland and Scottish Water and encourages farming methods that work for the benefit of nature, and which is profitable. The aim of the project is to be working with at least 600 farmers by 2019. Training and work on farms covers weed control, green manures, crop rotations and animal health planning. It includes projects such as long term rush control, which encourages alternative ways of control rather than using the chemical MCPA, that is dangerous when it enters drinking water. Other work has included managing grassland for pollinators, methods of controlling liver fluke on wetlands, and training for land managers in making SRDP applications.

*Discussion included:*

- the value of transferrable skills
- the opportunities for a range of rural academic and practical employment
- how to get sector-wide change - and the potential of funding for providing public goods
- the role of rural land use in mitigating climate change - eg peatland restoration

### **5) Route to the Cairngorms : Anna Fleming, Cairngorms National Park Authority**

Anna works as Education and Inclusion officer in the Cairngorms National Park, and has travelled there from mid-Wales via Cumbria, and through a love of the outdoors, education and poetry.

Anna echoed Sarah's view that rural work was not encouraged at school. Her desire to have work that gave opportunities to others to visit wild places came about partly through meeting people who don't have these chances - including through delivering shared reading groups in Liverpool.

Anna's work at the National Park includes working with schools and offering travel grants to enable them to visit the park. Anna also works with [Europarc](#) to develop a [Youth Manifesto](#), which encourages young people and organisations to work together to implement solutions to rural challenges, such as the cost living - transport and accommodation, isolation, and learning business skills.

Anna emphasised the importance of young people being informed of rural opportunities through education and work experience, youth business schemes, apprenticeships and being paid a living wage.

*Discussion included:*

- The [Youth Manifesto](#) document
- the value of the arts in connecting people to place
- the value of shared apprenticeships - so that several businesses can make up one full-time post

## **6) From Raptor Monitoring to Deerstalker : Megan Rowland, Assistant Land Manager - Gordonbush Estate**

Megan grew up on Orkney and as a teenager became interested in the subject of food traceability. Before working on the Gordonbush estate Megan had had a variety of conservation roles - working as a long term volunteer with the RSPB; with Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape; and with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust undertaking baseline surveys on their study farm in Aberdeenshire. Through a comment to an RSPB work colleague Megan got the opportunity to try deerstalking, and her interest in deer and integrated land management developed from there. Work at the Gordonbush estate was offered as a result of her blog.

In common with the previous speakers Megan said that there had been no suggestion that there were rural work opportunities when she was at school. Megan has since undertaken a HNC in Game and Wildlife Management through UHI, and in 2018 became Lantra's [Learner of the Year](#). She is now studying for a masters in land management.

Megan talked of the rewards of working in a job that is practically and intellectually stimulating and expressed the view that there was a new generation of land managers coming through that have a broader perspective on land management. Courses, such as those run by UHI and Lantra help to encourage new ways of thinking and best practice.

Common themes were that:

- school and careers advice does not encourage rural/agricultural work
- there is a far greater range of opportunities available than many people are aware of
- the value of events and short term training opportunities in addition to the longer term study for qualifications.
- the value of developing shared apprenticeships - across businesses and land management sectors
- the value of events that get people together so that they can learn from one another's experiences
- the value of learning business skills, and the need for it to be more generally part of education
- that there are many paths to developing a career, if you have the enthusiasm and commitment to follow them.

## **A vision for Highland Biodiversity and Land Use beyond 2020**

### **7) Biodiversity : Susan Davies, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Director of Conservation**

Susan drew delegates attention to the Scottish Wildlife Trust's [Land Stewardship Policy](#), which sets out a costed vision for how land management should be supported in Scotland after the UK leaves the Common Agricultural Policy.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) has identified 24 priority species for protection and conservation - including the Scots Primrose, found on their Hill of White Hamars reserve. SWT runs the successful beaver reintroduction in Knapdale, and is in favour of their wider reintroduction, with management as necessary.

Susan highlighted the importance of Scottish Government committing to ensuring that national and international conservation designations were meaningful and upheld - highlighting the proposal to develop a golf course on Coul Links sand dunes as a test case of their commitment. Susan also emphasised the importance of using these protected areas, and other areas of wildlife

value as notes upon which a network of wildlife habitat should be created - and the need for a funding system that will encourage that approach.

Throughout her presentation Susan emphasised the important role of people in valuing and protecting nature, the need for more and better community engagement and for people involved in land management and nature conservation to avoid thinking in silos. This includes the need for a public debate on what we want from our land - and finding ways to have effective integrated land management that can deliver food production, nature conservation and public good. The SWT work with Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape is an example of just such an approach, working with communities to develop a long term natural, cultural and social vision.

Susan spoke of the need to adopt this approach to managing sea ecosystems, and that their Living Seas work is about highlighting the importance of the marine environment, and how communities can benefit it. This approach will now be expanded from Wester Ross to other parts of Scotland.

## **8) Upland Management : Gordon Robertson, Factor Assynt Foundation**

[Download presentation pdf](#)

Gordon reviewed some of the factors affecting upland management, from estates to crofting.

He emphasised the importance of collaboration and a flexible approach in seeking to find new ways of sustaining livelihoods in remote rural areas. He also stressed how important it was to provide affordable housing and jobs for the next generation and how reassured he had been to hear the morning presentations from some very inspiring young presenters.

Gordon highlighted some of the work being carried out on land owned by the Assynt Foundation. This is aimed at making the estate self sustaining and to provide local benefit. Initiatives include running Glencanisp Lodge as a B+B and restaurant rather than traditional self catered let, with the walled garden being restored to produce food for the lodge and the wider Community. There is also an ambition to set up a local charcuterie, so that local meat can be processed near to source. There is the potential for Assynt, and other estates, to promote themselves for their scenic and wildlife value. Summer deer stalking for families is being planned, with the only shots being fired from a camera.

But there are challenges on much of the neighbouring existing Croft land. 60% of houses belong to owners from England who use them as holiday homes. Three primary schools have closed on the Assynt Crofters Trust land in the recent past and these too are being converted into tourist accommodation. Numerous established crofts are not being worked and are in a dilapidated state. No opportunities exist for young entrants to crofting, so the Assynt Foundation is currently trying to find ways to use imaginative forms of land tenure to enable land and affordable housing to be let.

Traditional crofting has declined in recent decades, with only a third of Scotland's Common Grazing Land being grazed. Croft woodland has the potential to enable land to remain in productive use, whilst the owners make an alternative living.

Creative and collaborative approaches will need to be sought to enable Communities in remote rural areas to continue to be viable. Focusing on the special features of particular areas should lead to a 'sense of place' which will be good for locals and visitors alike.

Gordon presented some valuable parting thoughts:

- Learn from the past, but don't live in it
- Nobody owns anything : we are all tenants for life
- Use education, respect, pride and collaboration
- Reconnection of land with people and wildlife with varied habitats and uses will lead to happy days!

## 9) Forestry : Amanda Bryan, FCS Commissioner

[Download presentation pdf](#)

Amanda continued the theme of the need for less silo thinking - and cited UHI's integrated landuse conference for students as a good example of encouraging cross sector working.

Highland woodlands and forests continue to be of economic significance, providing c. 4,500 jobs in the region. Around 50% of Scotland's native woodland is found in Highland and there are around 50 communities that now own/manage woodlands.

In providing a summary of how Forestry Commission Scotland had developed since its 1919 beginnings Amanda highlighted the shift to encouraging native woodland expansion in the 1990s - crediting the post Rio influence of pressure from the environmental sector, but suggesting that they might afterwards have been guilty of complacency.

The current focus is on meeting ambitious planting targets, with an emphasis on fast growing productive softwood to contribute to carbon sequestration and also the needs of a timber processing sector which employs a considerable number of people contributing to regional economic development. Using national targets to indicate Highland commitment this could mean a target of 3,000 ha of new planting per year, this of course would be based on the right tree right place principle and this is something that it would be worth having a discussion on. The preferred FCS option would be to have good quality mixed woodland, with a planting pattern that takes into account underlying soils and significant habitats - eg riparian grassland and woodland.

The Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Act 2018 will be separating Forestry Commission Scotland from Forest Enterprise Scotland (i.e. the regulator from the regulated) and bringing both under the direct control of Scottish Government. There will be an obligation to produce a national forest strategy and a duty to promote sustainable forest management. FCS will become Scottish Forestry and FES Forestry and Land Scotland (two easily distinguishable titles!).

Amanda noted some of the challenges and opportunities facing forestry in the region:

- **Challenges**

- steep ground
- limited road infrastructure
- to change forest age structure so that there can be a move to continuous cover forestry where conditions allow
- scarcity of prime and sub prime land
- changing climate and increase in pests and diseases

- **Opportunities**

- forestry integral is an part of visitor and public access
- the importance of woodland and forestry to physical and mental health
- there is greater community interest both in influencing and engaging with forestry as well as community ownership
- more local markets are developing which makes thinning and management more financially viable e.g. woodfuel
- there are increase opportunities for native species
- there is the potential to have more locally added value to timber production
- create species refuges to protect against disease spread eg for oak, ash, elm
- increased deer management and development of markets
- expansion of croft forestry
- sensitive integration of housing and woodland
- to set new native woodland targets in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (which is where this target resides)

*Discussion included:*

- agroforestry has not yet become part of wider forestry thinking. There are good examples in Belgium and France. Further information can be found at <http://www.eurafagroforestry.eu/welcome>

- agroforestry could use the low density woodland creation grant - but the challenge is getting the right advice on managing this approach. Some useful links can be found on the [Soil Association website](#) and the rural payments website has details of what [grant funding](#) is available.
- the potential of developing local markets for native woodland and for the expansion of orchards

**Common themes highlighted the importance of:**

- listening, collaboration and compromise
- thinking and working across sectors rather than in silos
- public good and ecosystem services being taken into account in land management