



Scottish Environment LINK

Nature Connections:

benefits of a National Ecological Network in Scotland

A roundtable event on current examples of ecological networks, key learnings and benefits; the policy changes needed to develop a national approach.

25th June 2019

Post Event Summary Report

Wildlife Subgroup, Scottish Environment LINK

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PARTICIPANT LIST

1. INTRODUCTION

Scottish Environment LINK¹ organised a roundtable event at the Scottish Parliament on 25th of June 2019. Sponsored by Claudia Beamish MSP, the event “Nature connections: the benefits of a National Ecological Network in Scotland”, focussed on showcasing examples of ongoing projects within Scotland. Presentations also included current research on this approach of enhancing and restoring our environment. The event was attended by 34 participants, 5 speakers and 2 MSPs (Claudia Beamish and Mark Ruskell). The presentations were followed by a discussion on the multiple benefits a national ecological network could deliver.



Claudia Beamish MSP addressing Nature Connections roundtable event attendees

2. PRESENTATIONS

Claudia Beamish MSP opened the event, with remarks that the twin challenges of climate and ecological emergencies, require ambitious action to protect and enhance nature. Strategic global platforms such as the Convention on Biological Diversity will provide opportunities in 2020 to showcase nature-based solutions, such as the national ecological network (NEN) in bringing transformative change. Claudia’s speech was followed by presentations from: Paul Sizeland (SNH, EcoCoLife Project Manager), Prof. Alison Hester (JHI, Habitat connectivity research), Jeremy Roberts (Cairngorms Connect Programme Manager), Dr. Catherine Jones (Buglife Pollinator Officer, B-Lines Project), Jo Pike (CEO Scottish Wildlife Trust, The need for policy change).

- i. **Paul Sizeland, EcoCoLife Project Manager** gave a presentation on Scottish National Heritage’s (SNH) broader approaches to ecological networks. **EcoCoLife**² is a habitat creation and restoration project within the Central Scotland Green Network, with the aim of

¹ Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland’s voluntary environment community, with over 35 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

Its member bodies represent a wide community of environmental interest, sharing the common goal of contributing to a more sustainable society. LINK provides a forum for these organizations, enabling informed debate, assisting co-operation within the voluntary sector, and acting as a strong voice for this community in communications with decision-makers in Government and its agencies, Parliaments, the civic sector, the media and with the public.

² EcoCoLife presentation available here- <http://www.scotlink.org/wp/files/documents/SNH-Paul-Sizeland.pdf>

improving ecological coherence and provision of socioeconomic benefits. The ‘improved ecological coherence’ aims to restore habitat connectivity and species resilience and concentrates on four habitats: peatlands, wetlands, freshwater and open mosaic. The project has developed an ‘ecological coherence protocol’ to determine a decision-making method that identifies the best places for ecological coherence and contributes to wider ecosystem services. To summarize, while ecological network approaches vary, SNH recognise their beneficial role and as solution, see them aligning with other policy areas.

- ii. **Prof. Alison Hester from James Hutton Institute (JHI)** shared research examples on the **importance of habitat connectivity**³. Climate change and other drivers have caused changes in Scotland’s biodiversity over the last 40 years. Research at JHI is testing whether the connectivity and extent of habitat fragmentation has affected these long terms biological changes. Research is being conducted on native pine forests and woodland expansion planning. The mapping exercise for woodland expansion planning will be completed for the whole of Scotland later in the year. JHI would welcome the opportunity to work with stakeholders such as local authorities and other organisations to trial this.
- iii. **Jeremy Roberts, Cairngorms Project Manager** shared highlights of the **Cairngorms Connect Project**⁴, one of the biggest habitat restoration projects in Britain. Cairngorms Connect is a partnership of four land managers- a private landowner, two Scottish Government land managers, and an environmental NGO: Wildland Limited, SNH, Forestry and Land Scotland, RSPB. The project partners consider ways in managing without boundaries and collectively manage across 60,000 ha. The project aims to expand the forest to its natural limit, an additional 13,300 ha of potential new forest, doubling the area of forested landscape. The landscape scale woodland expansion will contribute towards Scottish Government’s net-emission reduction targets.
- iv. **Dr. Catherine M. Jones, Buglife Pollinator Officer**, presented the work on **B-Lines**⁵ in **Scotland**. B-Lines are a network of ‘insect pathways’ along which Buglife, with their partners, are creating and restoring wildflower-rich habitats to connect and enhance existing wildlife friendly areas. The B-Line methodology initially maps the best existing wildflower-rich sites, then maps corridors connecting them, with a buffer of 1.5km either side of the route. Working with Local Authorities, wildlife groups and other partners, Buglife identify sites and opportunities for pollinator habitat management, enhancement and creation. Scotland’s first B-Line project runs along the John Muir Way and is led by Buglife Scotland. The John Muir Pollinator Way project aims to establish Scotland’s first pollinator corridor by creating a wildflower-rich habitat at selected sites along the 134-route of the John Muir Way. Buglife Scotland identified sites and opportunities in partnership with Local Authorities, Communities, Schools and other groups. Working with these partners, the project has enhanced a total of 40 sites (so far) and over 13 hectares of habitat at sites along the entire 134-mile route of the John Muir Way. Buglife’s goal is to see B-Lines mapped across the whole of Scotland, and to create a network of pollinator friendly corridors.

³ JHI research examples of habitat connectivity: presentation available here- <http://www.scotlink.org/wp/files/documents/JHI-Alison-Hester.pdf>

⁴ Cairngorms Connect presentation available here- <http://www.scotlink.org/wp/files/documents/RSPB-Jeremy-Roberts-.pdf>

⁵B-Lines in Scotland presentation available here- <http://www.scotlink.org/wp/files/documents/Buglife-Catherine-Jones.pdf>

- v. **Joe Pike, Chief Executive Scottish Wildlife Trust** in her talk, indicated that we need commitments at the highest level for the adoption and implementation of a national ecological network. First Minister Nicola Sturgeon is committed to deliver ‘transformative change’⁶ and measures such as the national ecological network that deliver multiple benefits, should be part of the delivery strategy. In addition to seeking high level commitments, we also need new champions for the NEN. We need to explore opportunities where other stakeholders such as private sector organisations support the creation of a national ecological network. We also need to do more to demonstrate how many building blocks we already have in place. For example, we already have protected areas (PAs) where land is being well managed. In addition to this we should also be able to demonstrate inclusive growth in practice.

3. QUESTIONS EMERGING FROM THE DISCUSSION

- Can we get private funding for the NEN, given that public funding is diminishing?
- How can public funding be steered in the right direction, for example public funding within agriculture?
- Can we have a ‘land resilience to climate change’ class, like the agriculture and land use classification?
- In order to enhance value of land as an asset, could carbon credits be added to land value?
- With regards to the work that is already being done, how can we learn from that and improve on that?

4. KEY POINTS RAISED BY SPEAKERS AND ATTENDEES

- **Embed biodiversity and environmental net gain across all strategies and policies:** All Scottish Government policies and strategies should have a consistent message about the NEN. This should start with strengthening frameworks at the highest-level, such as National Performance Outcomes and Indicators. The Government should also have stronger actions within policy areas where the NEN can be further embedded.
- **Increase awareness of existing initiatives:** The Scottish Government should be aware of, acknowledge and refer to the good examples that are being developed in many parts of Scotland. Programmes such as Cairngorms Connect – in addition to conservation are also monitoring programmes that serve to demonstrate the benefits of these landscape-scale initiatives, for wildlife, the economy, and society. Significant contributions from individuals should also be acknowledged. For example, philanthropists such as Lisbet Rausing through the Endangered Landscapes Programme⁷ and major landowners such as Anders Povlsen at Wildland, are making significant contributions to habitat restoration and its associated benefits. MSPs should also engage with these initiatives, through visits.
- **Support testing new mapping methodologies:** JHI’s mapping exercise for woodland expansion planning will be completed for whole of Scotland later in the year, the Scottish Government could support and facilitate trials with local authorities, other organisations.

⁶ Meeting of the Parliament 09 May 2019: Biodiversity Transformative Change
http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12083&mode=html#iob_109348

⁷Endangered Landscapes Programme: <https://www.endangeredlandscapes.org/>

- **Provide further support to successful initiatives:** The Scottish Government should coordinate efforts with organisations that share a commitment in enhancing and restoring biodiversity and are already delivering work on the ground. Management at-scale delivers the best benefits for the public - in terms of biodiversity, water quality, flood alleviation, carbon storage, and many other ecosystem services. For example, Buglife's B-Line project has been successful in creating 37 pollinator sites along the John Muir Way, contributing to a network for people and wildlife. Based on the successful delivery of the John Muir Way project, Buglife's goal is to complete B-Line mapping for the whole of Scotland. For B-Line to be an ecologically functioning network only 10% of each stretch of B-Line would need to be filled with wildflowers. In order to deliver these outcomes, the network could receive agri-environment funding for pollinator habitat creation. Support from MSPs for initiatives such as B-Line and the benefits these bring to our environment and society has already been expressed⁸, this should now be backed by further commitments.
- **Support partnership work across projects which deliver environmental net gain:** The Cairngorms Connect project has been successful because the four land managers have made decisions for the whole project area through collaborative management. For delivering large-scale benefits and networks, land management partnerships are critical. B-Line has been delivered through collaboration between farmers, land owners, wildlife organisations, businesses, local authorities and general public. The Scottish Government can do more to encourage partnership projects, which aim to bring environmental net gain and other associated benefits.
- **Ensure that payment mechanisms for land managers, reward collaboration.**

5. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS:

The round table event fulfilled its aims of bringing together stakeholders from different sectors: MSPs, environmental NGO's, academics and public sector officials to share examples of ongoing projects and discussions on how learning from these different pieces of work could inform the wider narrative of national ecological network. Attendees expressed an interest in exploring further opportunities through collaborations and this has resulted in formation of new partnerships, through proposals of follow up workshops. We hope others will keep the momentum going, LINK will build on the learning and continue its work on the national ecological network.

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⁸TFN News: Bee corridor project hits major milestone: https://thirdforcenews.org.uk/tfn-news/bee-corridor-project-hits-major-milestone?utm_campaign=Oktopost-2019-07+General+Campaign&utm_content=Oktopost-twitter-&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter

AGENDA

Arrive from 18:30, refreshments.

19.10: Claudia Beamish MSP- Welcome and introductions

19.15: Paul Sizeland, Scottish National Heritage - *Learning from the EcoCoLIFE project*

19.25: Alison Hester, James Hutton Institute- *The importance of habitat connectivity: key scientific learnings.*

19.35: Jeremy Roberts, Cairngorms Connect- *Case study: Cairngorms Connect*

19.45: Catherine Jones, Buglife- *Case study: B-Lines*

19.55: Jo Pike, Scottish Wildlife Trust- *The need for policy change*

20.05: Q&A moderated by **Claudia Beamish MSP**

20.45: Event closes

PARTICIPANTS

NAME	ORGANISATION
Allan Bantick	Scottish Badgers
Chloe Bellamy	Forest Research
Matthew Bird	Scottish Government
Stuart Brooks	National Trust for Scotland
Alice Broome	Forest Research
Peter Cairns	The Big Picture
Zoe Clelland	RSPB Scotland
Ally Corbett	Glasgow and Clyde Valley Green Network Partnership
James Curran	LINK Honorary Fellow
Hugh Dignon	Scottish Government
Chris Ellis	RBGE
Alison Hester	James Hutton Institute
Catherine Jones	Buglife
Maggie Keegan	British Ecological Society Scottish Policy Group
Anna Lawrence	Community Woodlands Association
Beryl Leatherland	Scottish Wild Land Group
Deborah Long	Scottish Environment LINK
Thomas MacDonell	Cairngorms Connect
Isobel Mercer	RSPB Scotland
David Michie	Soil Association Scotland
Malcom Muir	South Lanarkshire Council
Arina Nagy-Vizitiu	Woodland Trust Scotland
Douglas Peedle	Scottish Wildlife Trust
Jo Pike	Scottish Wildlife Trust
Karen Ramoo	Scottish Land and Estates
Jeremy Roberts	Cairngorms Connect
Derek Robeson	Tweed Forum
Jane Rosegrant	Community Woodlands Association
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