

THE PEATLANDS OF CAITHNESS AND SUTHERLAND:

Interpretation & Promotion Strategy

To address a number of actions in the recently launched management strategy, Scottish Natural Heritage has recently completed The Peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland: Interpretation & Promotion Strategy. The document reviews existing promotion and interpretation of the Peatlands and identifies a range of opportunities, including possible locations for information panels, self-guided trails, publications and so on.

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TALK BACK

We are keen to encourage debate and discussion and hear your views. Please get in touch if you would like to make any comments about this Project, or require further details. Thank you.

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The LIFE Nature Programme provides funding to European Union countries to promote sustainable development and assist in developing positive management for key habitats and birds. This project represents Phase II of the European LIFE funded work in the peatlands. It follows on from the RSPB led 'Conservation of Active Blanket Bogs in Scotland and Northern Ireland' which ran from 1994 – 1998.

The LIFE Peatlands Project 2001-2006
 RESTORING ACTIVE BLANKET BOG OF EUROPEAN IMPORTANCE IN NORTH SCOTLAND



Design by Iain Sarjeant, T.09349 862543

Lifeline

Welcome to the fifth issue of Lifeline - the annual newsletter for the LIFE Peatlands Project. As we come to the end of the project I am pleased to report that all outputs are either completed or nearing completion. This is thanks largely to the dedicated hard work of project partners, contractors and a whole host of other individuals who have contributed in one way or another. In October, we held our end of project conference in Thurso - an event which not only marked the end of over 10 years of LIFE funded work, but also the beginning of a new era for the Peatlands. 'The Peatlands Partnership' - a post-LIFE Project group involving interested parties and stakeholders - was formally launched, and given the responsibility for the delivery of 'The Peatlands of Caithness & Sutherland MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2005 - 2015' to ultimately ensure that our wonderful Peatlands do have 'A Brighter Future'.

Neil Wilkie
LIFE Peatlands Project Manager

PEATLANDS CONFERENCE

On 4th / 5th October 2006, over 80 delegates attended our end of project conference: 'The Peatlands - A Brighter Future' in Thurso. Formally opened by Lord Thurso MP, the conference heard from a range of speakers covering such themes as the international context of the Peatlands; the role of peatlands in combating climate change; the tourism potential for the Peatlands, and the role of communities and partnerships. On Day 2 of the conference, delegates visited RSPB's Forsinard Flows Reserve where a range of project outputs and peatland management issues were viewed and discussed.

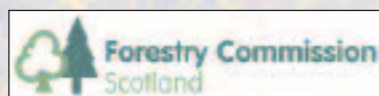
PEATLANDS PARTNERSHIP

The conference also saw the launch of 'The Peatlands Partnership' - a post-LIFE Project group involving interested parties and stakeholders which will take responsibility for the delivery of 'The Peatlands of Caithness & Sutherland MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2005 - 2015' 'The Peatlands Partnership' will be a loose



aggregation of interested parties, providing a public forum for discussion, reporting and accountability. It will be chaired by an independent authoritative figure rather than an agency official and, it is hoped, will include all those who contributed to the Management Strategy. The partnership will be managed by a Management Committee of key organisations and co-ordinated by a Project Officer. Delivery of the strategy will be through a series of sub-groups - each responsible for a particular theme or 'topic'. A 5 year work plan, based on the existing strategy, will be drawn up for each sub-group and the key bodies will form a 'Topic Group' to ensure its delivery. The overall 'Partnership' is responsible for the delivery of all sub-projects and will meet once a year with updates on progress/achievements from each Topic Group and discussions on the work for the year ahead.

www.lifepeatlandsproject.com



The LIFE Peatlands Project is a partnership of the RSPB, Scottish Natural Heritage, The Forestry Commission Scotland and Plantlife Scotland and is supported by European Union's LIFE Nature programme. A representative from the Highland Council also sits on the Steering Group.

Progress Update

	Peatland ACQUISITION		Peatland RESTORATION				
	OPEN BOG (ha)	FORESTRY (ha)	OPEN BOG		FORESTRY		
			Drain blocking (ha)	dams	Felling (ha)	Drain blocking dams	Fence removal km
RSPB	2,304	1,557	14,390	7,730	1,557	2,160	10.1
FES	-	-	-	-	514	3,352	-
FCS	-	-	-	-	142	-	-
SNH	-	-	370	1,038	-	-	-
PL	-	-	1,365	170	-	-	-
Totals	2,304ha	1,557ha	16,125ha	8938 dams	2,213ha	16,125dams	10.1km

As we come to the end of the project, we can now tot up the figures to show just what has been achieved on the ground over the last 5 years. In terms of peatland management, the above table shows the scale of restoration work carried out by all

'95% of the work has been carried out by contractors from Caithness and Sutherland.'

partners. For example, our open bog drain blocking work has restored the hydrology across over 16,000 ha with the installation of almost 9,000 dams. Forestry felling and restructuring has been done over 2,200 ha of the highest priority areas with over 5,500 additional dams installed in the main drains to aid the restoration process. In total, the project has spent around £1.1 million on restoration work which has been completed largely using 14 contractors employing around 30 men. A 'preferred bidder system' has been used by the project meaning that 95% of the work has been carried out by contractors from Caithness and Sutherland.

Attitudes and Awareness Survey

As part of our final year work, we commissioned independent consultants Macpherson Research to carry out a survey to explore the attitudes and awareness of local audiences (including general public, farmers & crofters, landowners, tourism and elected representatives) to the peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland. As this was a repeat of the same survey first carried out in 1996 (and again in 2002), it gives us a useful 10 year perspective on

how people's views have changed over the life of the two projects. Here are a few snippets from our findings:

- In 2006, 67% said that they were either "very or reasonably interested" in the Peatlands (59% in 1996)
- In 2006, 75% described peatland conservation as "helpful for the future of the area" (55% in 1996)
- In 2006, 44% of crofters/farmers "think there are economic opportunities associated with conservation" (14% in 1996)
- In 2006, 48% of crofters/farmers said that conservation groups "had sympathy for local issues and needs" (21% in 1996)

- In 2006, 50% of crofters/farmers agreed that conservation is "helpful for the future of the area" (19% in 1996)

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Illustration by Julian Smith

