

SCOTLAND'S FIRST BIOSPHERE RESERVE IN GALLOWAY AND SOUTHERN AYRSHIRE

NATURAL HERITAGE OFFICER POST PROPOSAL

Objective

To produce, collate and interpret species, habitat, landform and land-use information necessary to provide the basis for 'promoting solutions to reconcile the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use'. This will provide the information backdrop 'to contribute to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation', allowing for the 'testing out and demonstrating of integrated management of land, water and biodiversity'. (UNESCO)

Background

In February 2011, an application for Biosphere Reserve status was submitted to UNESCO by the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Partnership. The Partnership comprises a wide range of communities, other stakeholders and public agencies, including Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and Dumfries & Galloway and South and East Ayrshire Councils. The creation of the new style Biosphere Reserve is based on the existing designated SSSIs of Merrick-Kells (incorporating Silver Flowe) and Cairnmore of Fleet. The Scottish Environment Minister, Roseanna Cunningham, has expressed her support for the application and it is hoped that UNESCO will duly confer Biosphere status by June 2012.

In January 2011 former Chief Executive of SNH, Professor Roger Crofts, became Interim Chair of the Partnership Board and in March 2011, under an Ayrshire and Dumfries & Galloway LEADER funded project, Southern Upland Partnership appointed two Biosphere Development officers to continue the momentum already built up within the relevant local communities in Galloway and Southern Ayrshire. Whilst considerable progress has already been made on community liaison and consultation, and will be developed through the LEADER project, there is also a need to address the biodiversity and other ecosystem service interests of the Core and immediate surrounding areas within the Buffer Zone, on which the proposed Biosphere Reserve will be focused.

Following RSPB Scotland Director Stuart Housden's lecture as part of SAC's Crichton Conversations Programme, initial discussions were held between RSPB, SNH, FCS, SUP and Prof Roger Crofts regarding an initiative to identify and collate information on key biodiversity, together with recommendations for potential maintenance and enhancement of these interests. In particular, the aim of working towards an exemplar Biosphere Reserve, spanning community, land management, biodiversity, access and landscape enhancement management was recognised. It was agreed that the area of the study should extend beyond the Core Area, to encompass contiguous areas of open land, including potentially the RSPB's Futurescape initiative at Wood of Cree/Barclye and indeed the wider Cree Valley Woodland Initiative and to explore linkage with Integrated Habitat Networks underpinning emerging proposals for the Central Scotland Green Network in Southern Ayrshire. These discussions resulted in the following proposal.

Proposal

To employ a Biosphere Natural Heritage Officer, initially on a one year contract from August 2011 to collate, digitise and record information on key natural heritage within the Core and Buffer Zones of the proposed Biosphere Reserve. In addition, to identify potential prescriptions and actions for the maintenance and enhancement of priority biodiversity, together with logistical opportunities and barriers and how these might be addressed. This work would also identify any gaps in knowledge and suggest research to address these. It would also identify key opportunities for interpretation and promotion of key natural heritage, including significant geological and geomorphology features.

Logistics

The postholder would be employed by Southern Upland Partnership on behalf of the Biosphere Partnership and would be line managed and hosted by RSPB Scotland at their Crossmichael Office. Work programme and outputs would be agreed and monitored by a steering group comprising these organisations, plus SNH and FCS, and progress would be reported to the Biosphere Partnership Co-ordinator, the Biosphere Working Group and Biosphere Partnership Board.

Estimated Costs

Project Officer Salary, NI	£26,400
PO Transport (6.000 miles @ 45p)	£2,700
Laptop, mobile and other IT	£2,000
Office accommodation etc	£2,000
Project Management	£3,000
Total	£36,100

Funding

RSPB cash	£14,000
RSPB in-kind (office accommodation)	£2,000
Southern Upland Partnership/SNH	£17,100
Forestry Commission Scotland	£3,000
Total	£36,100

Outputs:

These fall into two main categories: **collation of information** and formulation of an **advisory management plan** for enhancement, interpretation and promotion of key natural heritage in the Biosphere.

Collation of information to include:

- GIS maps of key habitats and species in Core and Buffer Zones.
- GIS maps of current grazing and other management relating to open ground.
- Inventory of key biodiversity and relevant status (EU, UK/ScotBAP, LBAP, BoCC etc).
- Inventory of peoples perceptions of the core and buffer area through identifying favourite views, sights, memories and experiences.
- Inventory of key geology and geomorphology.
- GIS maps of geology and geomorphology.
- GIS maps of potential management areas.

- Identification of key access points and routes.
- Inventory of research papers relating to the Core and immediate Buffer Zones.

Production of an Advisory Management Plan to include:

- Priority recommended actions for maintenance and enhancement of key biodiversity.
- Identification of corridors of potential high biodiversity between Core and Buffer Zones, eg with Cree Valley Woodland Initiative.
- Identification of final recommended Core and Buffer Zones.
- Identification of potential barriers to delivery of desired management.
- Identification of means of overcoming barriers to delivery of desired management.
- Identification of current threats to biodiversity and means of addressing these.
- Report on opportunities for interpretation and promotion of Biosphere natural heritage.
- Research needs to address gaps in current knowledge.

Recruitment

The post will be advertised using the Countryside Jobs service and through partners websites. Application deadline will be 12th August.

Interviews will take place on the 23rd August.