

The Environmental Alliance for the South of Scotland (EASOS)

Two South Scotland meetings took place in the last week of March 2023

Note of meeting that took place at Newtown St Boswells on 28th March 2023:

Present:

Andy Tharme	South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE)
Clare Sturla	Scottish Land & Estates (SLE)
Derek Robeson	Tweed Forum
Donald McPhillimy	Reforestation Scotland/Greener Melrose
Gethin Chamberlain	Go Wild Scotland
Jane Bower	Borders National Park Campaign
Louise Cox	Scottish Borders Council (SBC)
Raffaella Diesel	SBC
Charles Dundas	Borders Forest Trust (BFT)
John Thomas	BFT
Gordon Stewart	National Trust for Scotland (NTS)
Martin Lyall	NTS
David Bethune	Selkirk Regeneration
Apithanny Bourne	Butterfly Conservation
Michael Scott	The Wildlife Information Centre (TWIC)
Pip Tabor	Southern Uplands Partnership (SUP)
Chris Miles	Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) and SUP

Apologies:

Cat Barlow	South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project
Alan Bailey	SLE
Julia Gallagher	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Teyl Bordes	Whitmuir
Charlotte Maberly	Food Connects
Luke Fisher	Destination Tweed
Claire Pencak	SUP
John Bathgate	Emtelle
Anna Griffin	Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)
Barry Dunne	NatureScot

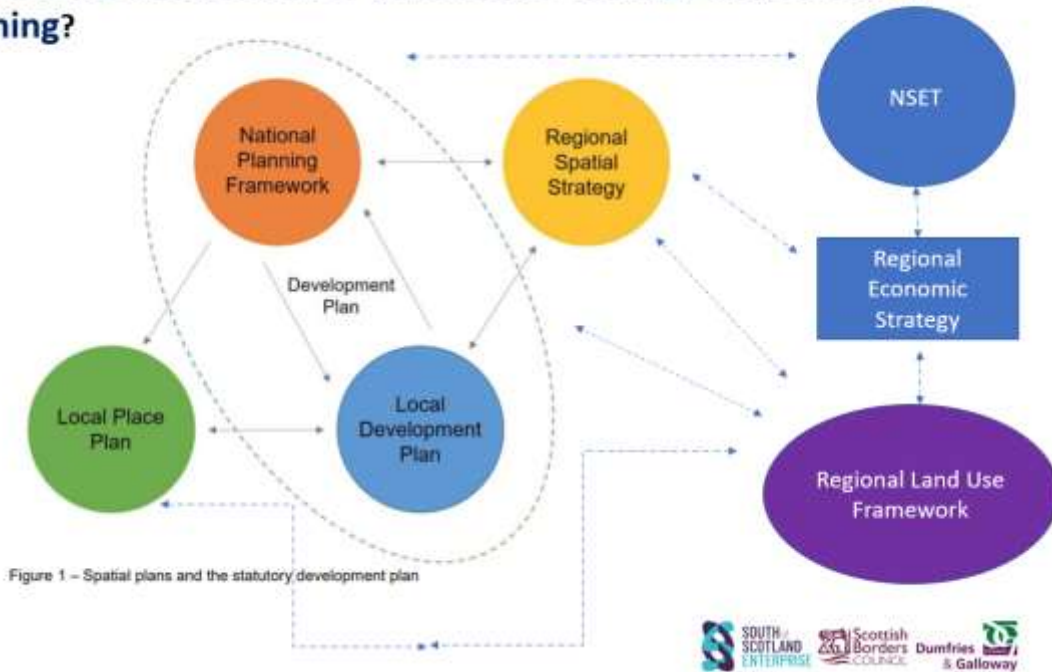
Dr Andy Tharme gave a talk on the progress being made with the Regional Land-Use Partnership pilot project; the Natural Capital baseline audit and the Borderlands Initiative.

Scottish Government Land Use Strategy sets out an ambition for sustainable land use and notes platforms for change (towards Net Zero 2045 including the Green Recovery and a Just Transition and the biodiversity emergency) and specified Regional Land Use Partnerships and National Planning Framework NPF4. The Scottish Land Commission gave advice to Scottish Government on the Establishment of Regional Land Use Partnerships in Nov 2020. Our pilot is one of 5 pilots along with: Aberdeenshire, Highland, CNPA and LLTNP and is being co-ordinated by SOSE, SBC, DGC.

The aim was to explore the establishment of a partnership structure and to produce a Regional Land Use Framework that could guide land-use decisions so as to deliver better outcomes for climate and nature as well as the economy.

A broad consultation process had taken place (26 live events and 4 online) and a report on the views of the participants would be published later in April.

Relationship between RLUF , Economic Strategy and statutory Planning?



Borderlands Natural Capital Initiative

This project consisted of 6 pilots

- Data pilot- natural capital audit & opportunity areas (SOSE)
- Natural Capital Investment plan (SOSE)
- SCAMPP – Seagrass, saltmarsh and oysterbeds (DGC)
- Biosphere Whole Farm Plans for Natural Capital (DGC)
- Sustainable livestock management & species rich grasslands (SBC)
- Integrated land use & woodland creation (SBC)

A total of £5M was allocated for spend in Scotland over 8 years.

- Approved as part of Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal in March 2021
- Programme Business Case being signed off by Govts
- Business cases being developed with implementation due to begin later in 2023/4

A version of the presentation can be viewed here:

<https://south-scotland-regional-land-use-partnership-pilot-luc.hub.arcgis.com/pages/phase-2-workshop-materials>

Questions to Andy:

Q. How appropriate is it to use monetary values to drive nature recovery rather than recognising the intrinsic value of nature?

A. It is not all about monetary value. A range of metrics are being developed with the aim of attracting more private funding to the issue as public funds are unlikely to be sufficient to reverse declines. This is the way the Govt is taking things.

Q. How will implementation of any RLUP process be funded and who will do the required work?

A. This will be up to Govt to decide. It is unclear what will happen, but it looks likely that further pilots will be funded, and current pilots may be extended. Overall, it is recognised that there are opportunities here for green jobs and the role of land owners and managers is also recognised as vital.

Q. What support is there for the development of nature-based tourism which lots of potential but currently has no support.

A. This is an area which is of interest to the tourism section of SoSE and an action plan is being developed which may assist.

Q. How can an informal forum such as EASoS be expected to play a role in the RLUP Advisory Group?

A. This is up to EASoS to decide. The offer is there if people want to take it up.

Dr Chris Miles then gave a talk on the recently published BSBI 2020 Plant Atlas. Data collected (over 3million records) over recent years by many volunteers has allowed plant distribution trends to be mapped for the UK. Basically, the picture is not encouraging, with most native species in decline (some local examples being globeflower and downy willow) and many non-natives spreading (with Sitka Spruce the most obvious). BSBI were using the data to identify “hot spot” areas – locations where a number of scarcer plants were recorded. It was agreed that this would be a valuable data set to help guide developments (especially forestry) away from the more biodiverse areas (although TGWIC already provide a service of this nature).

The data also indicated some changes that were being driven by climate change with the spread of bee orchid being one.

BSBI were moving forward with ambitions to enhance public interest in botany and concern for habitats, soil and water condition and less “plant blindness”. They recognised the importance of engaging young people in particular with natural history now largely dropped from the curriculum.

View online: plantatlas2020.org/

Buy the book: princeton.press/plantatlas

Find out more: bsbi.org/atlas-2020

Questions to Chris:

Q. Is there a grassland masterplan to address the worrying loss of this habitat?

A. No there isn't as yet, but the hot-spot maps may help flag-up areas that should not be planted with trees.

Q. How is BSBI engaging with young people

A. Through work with schools and teachers – but it is a small organisation so it can only do so much. BSBI runs courses and training events for interested people.

There was some discussion about the need for forestry schemes to be screened by biological record centres (this is best practice – but not mandatory). It was agreed that very small patches of “valuable” habitat could easily be missed and therefore lost under planting. Leaving small areas unplanted is not sufficient for their conservation as they will rapidly become rank. Some sort of grazing or cutting regime may be required, a role for volunteers perhaps.

Q. How do we make the “best” decision for land – does it have to be an economic choice or can we encourage a biodiversity choice using public support?

A. Difficult to determine what is best without good quality data which we don’t have and which is expensive to obtain.

Q. Need to note that foresters will design planting around “constraint maps” – but these depend on availability of data. Land managers do not want to damage biodiversity and will usually do the right thing – if they know what this is.

We talked a bit about sources of good advice and it was agreed that there was shortage of appropriately trained people.

We also talked about the need to follow existing policy – such as verge management where guidelines said one thing – but contracts tended to deliver something else.

We then went **around the room** and attendees gave a brief summary of the work they were involved with:

Charles Dundas and John Thomas - BFT - Since 2020 BFT have celebrated their 25th anniversary, and expanded their land holding by doubling the size of their site at Ettrick marshes to 17 hectares and at Ericstane next to Corehead by 116 hectares (uniting both halves of the Devil’s Beef Tub under one owner). It is also expected that a legacy will add over 200 hectares of agricultural land in the eastern Borders in the next few weeks. The staff team has also expanded up to 10 staff now including a new Site Manager for the Wild Heart sites, an assistant education and communities officer and a project officer to work on the Destination Tweed project. BFT have also been collaborating with SUP and Tweed Forum on NatureScot’s Wild Heart Expansion Project (WHEP) in an attempt to get private investment money to private landowners to plant new native woodlands around the BFT Wild Heart sites.

Derek Robeson - Tweed Forum: Perhaps you could send folks to our projects page online, here?

<https://tweedforum.org/our-work/current-projects/>

Jane Bower - A new Scottish National Park - The Scottish Government has announced its intention to designate at least one new Scottish National Park in this Parliament, i.e., by mid-2026. The primary legislation was enacted in 2000, and the expectation is that the new NP(s) will be created through secondary legislation. Nevertheless, the timetable is tight. Two consultations have taken place and it is expected that there will be a call for proposals over this summer and decisions about which proposal(s) to take forward by the end of 2023. The responsible Minister, Lorna Slater of the Green Party, is hoping for lots of proposals. She would like to put much more emphasis on “Nature

Restoration” than on the other purposes laid out in the 2000 Act, - protection of natural and cultural heritage and of the socioeconomic wellbeing of the local community – but it is not clear that there will be time for this, although something might be included in other planned legislation with the intention of having that effect.

At present there are two proposals which have been thoroughly worked up and are ready to go, the CSBNP proposal and Galloway National Park Association proposal.

The CSBNP is in close contact with the officials who have been developing the process of selection and evaluation of proposals. Malcolm Dickson, one of our core team, is currently reviewing and updating our proposal. This now includes a substantial section on best practice in visitor management and how it could be applied in the South of Scotland, based on research carried out by CSBNP team member Marion Livingstone. The study is posted on our new website www.scottishbordersnationalpark.com, designed by team member Simon Clew.

The proposal will be very much in the spirit of the 2000 Act. CSBNP will not be downgrading the importance of cultural heritage and the socioeconomic wellbeing of the community which will, after all, have to play an important part in making a success of the Scottish Borders National Park, if it is designated.

The 12 Towers of Rule - Our “12 Towers of Rule” programme, initiated in late 2019, reflects our thinking that communities need to understand the interplay over time between their cultural and natural heritage in order to build a sustainable future in harmony with their environment. Some of the outputs are on our website, and data about the 12 towers themselves can be found on the Towers of Rule research site <https://sites.google.com/view/towers-of-rule-research/home>.

Working with a range of public and private partners CSBNP is exploring the life of the rural community in the Rulewater Valley and its environs in the late mediaeval period. The idea for the project came from the local community and they have been active in supporting it. Funding has been raised from a range of sources. With the expert help of Archaeology Scotland and local resident Roger Curtis of HES a fair amount of surveying and exploratory excavation of the structures which framed the everyday lives and relationships of the community has been carried out and is continuing. We are about to commission a review of archival records which will complement the archaeological findings. Over 200 Borders schoolchildren and 20+ adult volunteers have now participated in the excavations and associated workshops and had an opportunity to acquire some of the sophisticated surveying techniques employed in modern archaeology. The ongoing programme has regular media coverage locally and even internationally, with the Turnbull Clan following its progress through their eNewsletter, and links developed with Beijing through to Heriot-Watt in Gala.

Walks, cycle routes, and associated information are all being developed in the course of the programme.

For more information about the Campaign and to send ideas and comments, contact the Chair, Professor Jane Bower FRSE, d.jane.bower@googlemail.com

David Bethune - Selkirk Regeneration is a SCIO, a community membership charity - like a development Trust - for the whole TD7 area. It has sustainable development written into its governing document. Over the years, it has initiated a variety of projects for the benefit of the people of Selkirk. Some 10 years ago, we tried to develop a community-owned wind farm, but sadly this project which might have brought £0.5M per annum into Selkirk for 25 years, was blocked by a combination of the MoD, the planning authority and a change of mind by the landowner. More

recently, we are working towards a community solar array on Common Good Land, which should benefit the town and the environment - interesting questions raised about the effect on the botany of a field currently used to graze sheep. We also run the Selkirk Community Energy Advice Centre in a renovated shop in the town centre, offering home energy advice and visits, recycling of hard-to-recycle materials and e-bike hire, facilitated by CCF and now Lottery funding.

Donald McPhillimy - Greener Melrose - We are a Climate Action group with 9 action areas. The land-based ones are:

1. Community orchard, Forest Garden and food growing plots at Drygrange near Leaderfoot. Collaborating with Buglife on the Pollinators along the Tweed project.
2. Gardens for the Future which encourages people to start growing their own fruit & vegetables in their gardens and forming little self-help groups. We are part of the SBC led Grow Borders network for community food growing projects such as Abundant Borders.
3. Dialogues between local food producers and consumers to make it easier to buy local thereby avoiding long supply chains.

In addition, I am involved with Reforesting Scotland and help to administer the Rewilding Scotland Facebook group which has over 25,000 Followers.

I really think that EASOS should give serious consideration to setting up a similar private Facebook group as a place to post and discuss new information and ideas. With good administration, I believe that most of the pointless arguments can be avoided. It reduces the need for in person meetings to the bare minimum.

Gordon Stewart - National Trust Scotland (NTS) - please see below as shared on Tuesday (working west to east):

- Grey Mare's Tail – lead by Dan, we are applying for NRF funding for exclosures; The National Trust for Scotland plan to protect and expand the Downy Willow *Salix lapponum* population on Rough Craigs, on the northeast-facing slope of White Coomb at an altitude of 580 – 760m. An area of 15.23 ha would be stock fenced, within which is most of the downy willow on White Coomb. This is one of the most important locations for this species south of the Highlands. Other uncommon plants are present, including a reintroduced population of Oblong Woodsia *Woodsia ilvensis*, which is Endangered within Great Britain. A fenced exclosure is necessary to protect the willows as NTS does not control the sheep grazing, with the rights being owned by a heritable grazier who has his own tenant. The exclosure would give us the opportunity to increase the willow population, as currently they are only found on crags which provide some protection from sheep and feral goats. Even so, most of the willows suffer from browsing which suppresses the number of catkins produced. Protection from grazing would also benefit tall herbs and dry heath. There is a known Black Grouse lek nearby at an unusually high altitude on Carrifran Gans, and birds are occasionally seen around Midlaw Burn below White Coomb. Improving the habitat would be of potential benefit to black grouse, providing shelter and an improved food resource. Key point is getting buy-in for this from the grazing rights owner and the tenant farmer.

- Robert Smail's Printing Works – participating in the Connecting Threads project and currently have an artist in residence for a 6-week period; arranged through collaboration with The Southern Uplands Partnership.
- Melrose gardens – growing graftings of an unidentified apple tree found on Arran.
- St Abbs NNR – looking forward to the seabird season with some trepidation, given the ongoing Avian Flu. We have a seasonal engagement ranger commencing in April to drive community engagement and lead educational activities. Working with various stakeholders regarding the Berwick Bank Offshore windfarm proposal and addressing the challenge of communicating about protecting nature and conservation whilst not being negative about sustainable energy.

Apithanny Bourne - Butterfly Conservation has identified the central Borders region as a priority landscape in their national strategy - giving us more scope to focus our efforts here. Over the past few years, we have had huge success surveying Northern Brown Argus (NBA) sites and work on this priority butterfly species will continue in 2023. Loss of species-rich grassland to commercial forestry is a growing threat to NBA, so we will keep momentum going on this survey scheme which will feed into the Borderlands Project Officer role in 2024. We will also continue to advise on forestry proposals when we hear about them and are currently commenting on three schemes which will impact known NBA habitat.

We will use the NBA survey scheme as a blueprint for another very under-recorded butterfly species, the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. Following a successful trial with experienced butterfly recorders in 2022, we are now ready to advertise the survey scheme to the wider public and provide training. Butterfly Conservation have identified 27 priority butterfly and moth species occurring in Scotland and the committee are currently forming an action plan for the remaining species.

We have a new national campaign called 'Wild Spaces' which will encourage people and community groups to create butterfly and moth habitat. Free resources (including an online hub where people can log or pledge a Wild Space) will be available shortly. This will be a significant public engagement campaign as we have ambitious plans to create 100,000 Wild Spaces across the UK. The scheme will not only increase habitat but reach new audiences and help people to connect with nature in urban environments. We're currently recruiting volunteers to deliver talks and there is great potential to work with Borders Schools.

Michael Scott - TWIC manages 3.75M species records as well as extensive habitats and designated sites data from organisations, groups and individual recorders across SE and parts of central Scotland, including the Scottish Borders. As a charity and non-profit company, TWIC has SLAs with most of its local authorities and the growing database is key for screening their weekly planning applications as well as for LBAPs, Local Biodiversity Sites, etc. Ecological consultants and NGOs are other major user of TWIC services. Support for recorders and promotion of biological recording to new audiences is a key part of TWIC's role and an exciting programme of recording events, workshops and outreach events are being planned for the upcoming season. Borders events in May will include participation at the Traquair Bioblitz near Innerleithen on 14 May and an outreach stall at the Borders Countryside Schools Day in Kelso on 16 May, which will be attended by 1250 P5

children from all 65 schools in Scottish Borders. In 2023 TWIC expects to unveil a new website and will continue its involvement in the Scot Govt and NatureScot-funded Better Biodiversity Data project Better Biodiversity Data project – Key roles appointed - National Biodiversity Network (nbn.org.uk) to improve LERC coverage in Scotland and help create more consistent services across the country.

Finally, we agreed that this event had been useful and should be held more regularly, perhaps every 6 months. Those in attendance agreed that emails could be shared.

It was also agreed that the offer of a seat on the RLUP Pilot Advisory Group should be taken up – and it was suggested that this could be rotated between organisations.

Note of meeting that took place at Dumfries on the 31st March 2023:

Present

Clair McFarlan	Solway Firth Partnership
Nick Chisholm	Dumfries & Galloway Council (D&GC)/ Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership (GGLP)
Doug Howieson	Scottish Forestry
Ed Tooth	RSPB
Karen Morley	D&GC
Vicky Johnson	Crichton Carbon Centre (CCC)
Greer Blackadder	CCC
Carys Mainprize	CCC
George Moore	SLE
Ed Forrest	Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere
Stuart Graham	NatureScot
Jan Hogarth	GGLP
Darren Flint	SUP
Pip Tabor	SUP
Chris Miles	BSBI and SUP

Online

Morag Paterson	Communities for Diverse Forestry
Jane Sayers	Woodland Trust
Katy Ewing	SUP
Donald Greig	Talla Hartfell

Apologies

Andy Tharme	SoSE
McNabb Laurie	D&GC/GGLP
Juli Titherington	FLS
Katie Haggman	D&GC
Mary-Ann Smyth	Craig Farm
Jamie Ribbens	Galloway Fisheries Trust
Alice Campbell	Dalhanna
Andrew Bielinski	RSPB

Karen Morley (D&GC) gave a talk on the progress being made with the Regional Land-Use Partnership pilot project; the Natural Capital baseline audit and the Borderlands Initiative, as above by Andy Tharme at Scottish Borders meeting.

Questions to Karen:

Q. Is it fair to have just one person representing the range of groups here today on the RLUP Advisory Group?

A. Some of today's participants already have a seat so you could argue there is already more than 1. This is up to EASoS to decide. The offer is there if people want to take it up.

Comment on the scale issue – catchments were good for people – they understood the land at that scale.

It was suggested that there was sense in making more of a link between the place planning process (which had a link to the statutory planning process) and the RLUP so that any land-use guidance could be fed in. It would require place plans to consider local land-use, which is not always the case at present.

It was agreed that at least for now EASoS should retain a focus on the nature crisis rather than merging with local climate action groups, but we should liaise with such groups where possible.

There was a suggestion that we needed more environmental champions within the Council and a comment that EASoS could have some lobbying role (although it would be difficult to ensure there was consensus before doing so).

There was some discussion about education and lack of nature-based education in current policy and curriculum. England has a nature-based GCSE. There are benefits in doing this at a top-down level but encouragement at a grassroots level – a bottom-up approach could prove fruitful. While not uniform across the area, this instilling the importance of nature into nursery and primary schools does already happen e.g., at Castle Loch with mid Annandale and Georgetown schools, Jim Rae at Lockerbie, Friends of Gallow Hill with Moffat and Beattock schools and the Carbon Centre (see below). Should we be joining this up and seeking to plug any gaps? Examples include: schools outreach project (paid/voluntary) – nature in a box, habitats in a box that are taken in to school classes or assembly. (e.g., Beachbonkers Beach in Box project in Suffolk). We could also seek to roll out the Biosphere education toolkit more widely.

Dr Chris Miles then gave a talk on the recently published BSBI 2020 Plant Atlas, as above for Scottish Borders meeting.

Questions on Chris's talk:

Q. To everyone - can we do something about the lack of a Biodiversity Officer at the Council?

A. Yes, we could lobby or seek to make councillors more aware of the problem. We need a nature champion. Current situation is driven by resources so a new post would have to be funded by a loss elsewhere. The LBAP refresh and the Woodland Strategy review would be commissioned sometime this year.

Q. Were the group aware of the likely impact of the SPEN Tongland power line which would result in the loss of 43 ha of ASNW/PAWS woods?

A. Some awareness – but it was almost too late in this case. There may be a role in future for EASoS to garner a stronger voice in these cases.

There was then a discussion about the pitiful state of nature awareness generally and in schools in particular. While GGLP and CCC were active in some schools, the need was significant.

Chris mentioned a strong market for botanical training among groups, and there was some discussion about access to the BSBI mapping so that it's more possible to identify and protect localised endangered species and the complexities of competing plant/habitat interests in terms of very localised habitats, e.g. where broadleaf woodland planting might inadvertently threaten species-rich grasslands. Doug highlighted courses he was making available to his staff with the aim of improving the identification of valuable sites for nature.

There was also discussion about the imbalance between understanding of the need to act for climate change and the need to address the nature crisis – the two really ought to be seen as the same thing. It was rather easier to set targets for carbon and the developing carbon market was already driving action (if not always the right action). The lack of reliable measures of biodiversity (and the complexity of data storage, access and ownership) made setting targets and monitoring change rather harder.

There was some discussion about the need for forestry schemes to be screened by biological record centres (this is best practice – but not mandatory). It was agreed that very small patches of “valuable” habitat could easily be missed and therefore lost under planting. Leaving small areas unplanted is not sufficient for their conservation as they will rapidly become rank. Some sort of grazing or cutting regime may be required, a role for volunteers perhaps.

Q. Noted that foresters will design planting around “constraint maps” – but these depend on availability of good data. Land managers do not want to damage biodiversity and will usually do the right thing – if they know what this is.

We then went **around the room** and attendees gave a brief summary of the work they were involved with.

Morag Paterson - Communities for Diverse Forestry - We continue to campaign for more diverse, resilient and biodiverse forests and community participation in planting designs and long-term management plans. We are also exploring woodland schemes and projects incorporating community benefit/wealth building and thinking about how local place planning and community action plans can include land use to help facilitate this.

Carys Mainprize - Crichton Carbon Centre currently focuses on peatland restoration, carbon management, sustainable land-use and environmental education. We act as the Peatland Action (PA) Project Officer for the South of Scotland and advise and assist landowners with their PA restoration and Peatland Code projects. We do research and are particularly focusing on forest to bog restoration

and how to use technology to our advantage in future restoration and long term monitoring projects. Our education officer is working to advance the understanding of eco-anxiety and eco-grief in young people, and particularly in young people with learning difficulties and additional support needs. We have a number of environmental education projects with primary and secondary schools in the region. Finally, our community engagement project, Peatland Connections, shifts perceptions of peatlands so that these spaces can be seen as important places full of awe and wonder by commissioning creative and scientific work on several aspects of peatlands. We have a number of other projects in development that we are not able to share as of yet – see our website for more information in the future. <https://www.carboncentre.org/>

Nick Chisholm: Part time with Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership till September 2023

Most projects are now completed with some finishing touches to be added and promotion opportunities. 18th of May A Walk on the Wild Side at Threave, an opportunity to see the work that has been carried out there by NTS. Work continuing with Galloway Fisheries Trust on the tracking of salmon through the Dee system. Provided funding for the continuation of goose tracking work beyond Galloway Glens and making the data publicly available through OpenLayers (goosenews.org). Additional funding of Dumfriesshire Archival Mapping Project to digitise and georeferenced old estate maps, pulling habitat types out of 18th Century estate maps that can be overlaid onto modern maps, demonstrating change and potential for restoration.

Part Time Black Stank Project 18 months

The Black Stank is a watercourse that runs through Stranraer. DGC is working with SEPA and WEF funding to restore the Stank into good ecological condition. In addition, we are working on the land surrounding the Stank to look at opportunities for creating a 20ha reserve in the centre of Stranraer that is accessible and understood by the community, the main body of the work is preparing a tender for a feasibility study and working with the community to get their ideas embedded in the project. The project could be described an urban rewilding opportunity. Additional funding is being sought to maximise benefits.

Courses mentioned by Doug Howieson:

Grasses, sedges and rushes - 3rd July -

<http://events.cieem.net/Events/EventPages/03072023000000IdentificationofGrassesSedgesandRushes.aspx>

Indicator plants of woodland - 4th July -

<http://events.cieem.net/Events/EventPages/04072023000000IndicatorPlantsofWoodlandWetlandHeathandAcidGrassland.aspx>

George Moore - SLE's Regional Manager for D&G.

My role involves keeping in contact with members, to ensure their requirements are catered for, and organizing SLE events. Here's some info about what SLE does –

<https://www.scottishlandandestates.co.uk/about-us>

SLE is very interested in environmental issues and SLE runs the Wildlife Estates Scotland initiative which aims to promote the best habitat and wildlife management practices, build recognition and raise standards through the introduction of an objective accreditation system.

<https://www.scottishlandandestates.co.uk/wildlife-estates-scotland>

SLE members control around one third of Scotland's land, so they have a vital role in making things happen!

Jane Sayers - Woodland Trust:

I've spoken to the policy and advocacy team about the point raised in the meeting about electricity infrastructure. WT are in the early stages of opening up lines of communication in regards to new infrastructure projects. We are trying to engage early with grid providers to advise on route options to avoid habitat loss. The loss of ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees is always unacceptable to the woodland trust and we will always object to plans which will affect these habitats negatively.

In terms of what members of EASoS can do, please let WT know about any potential plans for new infrastructure which may be communicated to members at an early stage. It may be that they aren't on the WT radar yet and this will open up a dialogue as early as possible. As infrastructure plans already approved progress, works for biodiversity 'compensation' should also progress. If any members have concerns about the quality of the 'compensation' or feel it doesn't meet requirements, this would also be of interest to WT. The more information we have the better.

As Outreach Advisor for south Scotland, I'm happy to advise on native woodland management and creation, as well as ancient and veteran tree management.

WT is contributing to a number of project in D+G and the Borders, most of which have been highlighted already by other members.

- South of Scotland tree planting grant in partnership with TF, BFT, SF, GGLP
- Keir Wood restoration project in partnership with GGLP
- The formation of Dumfries and Galloway Woodlands as a new SCIO, based on the BFT model, covering D+G
- Partnership with Tarras Valley Nature Reserve advising on all woodland matters on the community owned land
- Engaging with private land owners on ancient and native woodland management, ancient and veteran tree management, woodland creation (from small MOREwoods schemes to FGS and bespoke plans which do not necessarily fit within any existing grant models) and habitat restoration.

Donald Greig - Talla-Hartfell Wild Land Area

1) GIS mapping - funded by SOSE and working with Leeds-based Wildland Research Ltd, we are creating a natural capital map of the Talla-Hartfell Wild Land project area, including two community mapping workshops held recently at Tweedsmuir and Ettrickbridge. Explicit GIS detailing of a range of features combined with articulation of community views and aspirations will aid both SUP and the communities of the project area in identifying opportunities for sustainable economic, environmental, social and cultural development.

2) Wild Land Area Film - funded by SSE and Rewilding Britain, we are in the process of producing a short film about the Wild Land project area, including the communities of Moffat, Tweedsmuir and Ettrick and Yarrow. The aim is to highlight the unique attributes of the area and capture community opinion about 'What makes this place special?'

3) Ecomuseum - launched 18 months ago with funding from RCTC grant through Scottish Borders Council, we continue to populate the online ecomuseum. We are looking for someone in the Ettrick/Yarrow area to be the local ecomuseum contact, plus we shall shortly be scoping an editorial/curatorial role for which we hope to secure funding.

4) Walking/cycling - there is considerable local support for a Wild Land Area circular walking and cycling loop. To be progressed!

Jan Hogarth - activities related to Galloway Glens Education and Community Engagement:

Wellbeing in Winter – We worked with Galloway Activity Centre and Propagate (an organic food organisation) to deliver 7 day “Wellbeing in Winter” sessions with primary schools in January and February 2023. This is to encourage children to put on their water proof clothes and get into the great outdoors to have fun in nature. As well as canoeing, climbing and archery the children took part in a food session which looked at carbon footprint of food and the health benefits of locally sourced food. Children then helped make soup for everyone’s lunch.

Design a Tree/Treeplanting - As part of our Fantastic Forest Festival four schools have taken part in a “Design a Tree” competition where the prize for participating is 10 trees per class to plant in the school ground or a community space. My Colleague Jonathan and I have been going into schools and working with the children to plant the trees. The ultimate learning is we cant design a tree as good as nature has. We now have over 100 tree drawings which will be displayed at Castle Douglas Gallery at the end of May over 4 days during the Spring Fling Open Studios weekend.

Design a Fantastic Forest - I have been working with secondary school children to look at the issues around Waterside Hill which is the community in Dalry’s nearest hill to walk. Commercial Forestry have bought it and the community are trying to work with them to ensure community gets public access and a decent amount of native trees are planted. The children have been learning about the issues around this new plantation and the biodiversity of various types of woodlands. They went on to design their own Fantastic Forest for Waterside Hill.

Go Wild Camps – We have been running “Go Wild” camps for children transitioning between primary and secondary school in three different woodland locations in Galloway Glens. The aim is to help young people fall in love with nature, explore wildlife, biodiversity and conservation, learn bush craft skills have fun and feel safe in the countryside. This has been particularly important on the back of the covid lockdowns. During the camps we help the children achieve their John Muir Discovery Awards. We plan to run these camps again this summer and help find a home for them with partners for the following year.

Internships – We support a number of 6-month internships with landscape, renewable and ecology-based companies. We have had 4 internships with the Galloway Fisheries Trust, a geo-mapping

internship with the Crichton Carbon Centre, an internship with a Commercial Forestry Company, an business administration internship with Drax Hydro, an internship with Natural Power, a social media internship with Better Lives Partnership, a rural arts curator for Catstrand and an apprenticeship with Carsphairn Community Woodland. Our last internship is with Mr Pook's restaurant in Castle Douglas who uses locally produced sustainably sourced produce.

Threave Education Project - Galloway Glens have worked with Threave National Nature Reserve to create the Threave Landscape Restoration project. A hundred year or more landscape restoration project taking the land out of farming as such and exploring how to manage and restore land for the benefit of biodiversity. As part of this we have commissioned 5x5-minute films from ecological filmmaker John Wallace which are linked to the school curriculum and help children engage with the natural world and see Threave as a place to come and learn. The films are on, Trees, Grasslands, Water, People and Biodiversity and will have downloadable resources linked to them. Although aimed at second and third level Primary and secondary children they also help the public understand what is happening at Threave and why in a beautiful accessible way.

Although Galloway Glens comes to a close in September, we have a busy fund packed summer of archaeological digs and surveys, Forest Festivals, exhibitions, walks, talks, seminars and conferences.

I should say my colleagues are also working on a portfolio of projects including tree planting grants, the establishment of an ancient woodland between Keir Mill and Auldgirth, so I am sure Nick will be keen to feed into this list!!

Stuart Graham – NatureScot. We are the Government's Environment Agency and we input to the Government agenda to combat the twin crises of Biodiversity and Climate Change through:

- Input to development Control/Wind Farms particularly where impacts are on designated sites or protected species.
- Input to management of designated sites such as SSSI through Management Agreements or AECS agreements.
- Develop better ways of delivering Agri-environment Schemes through POBAS and Biodiversity Application.
- Encourage Private investment in natural heritage through the FIRNS App.
- Progress towards 30% of land being designated for positive management by the year 2030 "30x30" then link these areas through "Nature Networks".

Ed Forrest - GSA Biosphere is currently very focussed on working with partners to complete the Borderlands Whole Farm Plan Natural Capital project submission that will operate across 12 pilot farms developing an audit to measure NC and measuring the impact of key intervention to enhance it.

We are also supporting the NithLife group through a UK National Commission to UNESCO and Manchester University project that is piloting community engagement using a technique called Ketso and Roundview. We are running sessions with communities all along the Nith to ascertain their relationship with the river. In relation to this we are planning on submitting a FIRNS eoi to look at the

wider Nith catchment and opportunities for environmental enhancement and for involvement of NithLife in citizen science, tree planting and cultural celebration.

We recently launched our Education for Sustainability Toolkit that was developed in partnership with a wide range of organisations from across the Biosphere. This has also led to the development of a new Biosphere Scouting and Guiding badge focussed on understanding of the SDGs and the regions wildlife that will be launched end April/early May.

We're really pleased that the new Greener Events Toolkit developed by DGC and SUP has made good reference to the GSAB Sustainable events toolkit that was launched last year and hope that this partnership will help both community events and larger more commercial events in the region lead the way in highlighting D&G's sustainability commitments.

Finally, we currently have a PhD student working with us who is researching how land use decisions are made in the Biosphere and need for 'trade offs' between different stakeholder groups.

Clair Mcfarlan – SFP.

Marine Natural Capital Pilot Project - SCAMPP

SFP is continuing to development work on SCAMPP through 2022/23. This work is in collaboration and funding from Dumfries and Galloway Council, Crown Estate Scotland and South of Scotland Enterprise. Work so far includes: -

- Seagrass survey – the consultant produced a report on the 2022 survey work with future recommendations for completion of baseline surveys in 2023.
- Seagrass propagation – work continues with Edinburgh University to assess the feasibility of propagating seagrass in the laboratory.
- Saltmarsh opportunity mapping – a report has been produced to highlight potential areas for saltmarsh expansion on the Solway coast
- Oyster survey methodology – SFP is liaising with Herriot Watt University to look at surveying the native oyster population in Loch Ryan in spring / summer 2023.
- Mini Buoy research into hydrodynamics for habitat restoration – a report has been produced by University of Glasgow on the data downloaded from D&G coastal sites.

Positive Action for a Cleaner Solway Project

This project, funded by Marine Fund Scotland, encouraged volunteer beach cleans across the region through promotion and providing practical support. Regular beach cleans have been undertaken by D&G EcoWarriors and ONUS SW Scotland and a number of one-off cleans have been supported. Over 25 beach cleans have been carried out and more than 6 tonnes of debris removed. Objects that can be identified as coming from an identifiable source are being used to show where the plastic on our shores originates – including fishing debris from North America!

A Solway Hoard Exhibition was developed with Museums of the FutureNow to encourage people to take a look at marine plastic as if viewed in a museum set 1,000 years in the future. The exhibition and accompanying booklet is currently on at Kirkcudbright Galleries until 15 April.

Darren Flint - SUP Project Officer - Mainly working on a large uplands habitats and species restoration project primarily focusing on black grouse as an indicator species. This is building on the last 10 years of black grouse research and partner working across southern Scotland. The current

phase is being led by SUP along with Julia Gallagher of RSPB Scotland and is part of the NatureScot Nature Restoration Fund development funding working with landowners across 5 core areas (Galloway Forest, Lowther hills, Tweedsmuir Hills, Langholm Hills, Moorfoots) to identify 'on the ground' habitat restoration actions. The plan will be completed by the end of June when a delivery funding application will be submitted.

Concurrently we are exploring match-funding for the habitat restoration work, plus funding for community engagement and cultural elements, with the currently plan to make this a 5-year project.

Katy Ewing - SUP Project Officer - Most recently I'm finishing up work that SUP Services (our trading arm) was commissioned to undertake for D&G Council Events Team, producing a 'Greener Events Toolkit' to replace their 2021 Community Events Toolkit; a slim but comprehensive document to help small events organisers plan events. The Greener Events Toolkit includes all of this advice, but after researching existing greener events best practices in Scotland and wider, we have added specific elements to help small events organisers consider how they can be more environmentally sensitive in their planning. The main challenge has been to make the advice substantial enough to be meaningful, while also being approachable by a wide range of community events organisers, many of whom are volunteers running very small events, but we hope this has been successful!

The other piece of work I thought relevant to this group is that since last year I have been trying to find ways to better link South Scotland environmental organisations with the various local higher education institutions offering environmental programmes, initially with the University of Glasgow's Dumfries-based School of Interdisciplinary Studies. One strand of this is the idea of a specifically environmental graduate scheme, another is an infrastructure which better links student placements with organisations. Everyone consulted agreed that both were great ideas, however, funding it, as ever, is challenging. A third aspect was an idea to hold an annual event where academic institutions and organisations can present their work and network – perhaps now that EASoS is being re-established, this could be looked at within its remit.

Karen Morley - DGC Environment team update

Regional Land Use Partnership Pilot – DGC partner with SBC and SOSE.

Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal – Working on DGC pilots – Integrated farm plans (with Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere & Solway Coast and Marine Pilot Project with Solway Firth partnership. Business cases underway hoping to start later this year.

Following on from the above starting development work on the roll out of coast and marine habitat restoration on a larger scale across the Solway combining with community engagement and access infrastructure – working with a wide range of partners.

Working with partners to set up Dumfries and Galloway Woodlands, a new organisation to promote native woodland planting in D&G following on from the success of Borders Forest Trust and the South of Scotland Tree Planting Scheme. Starting in autumn 2023.

Nearing completing of the Rhins of Galloway Coast path a new 80-mile coastal trail around the Rhins of Galloway coast starting in Stranraer.

Continue to improve, maintain and resolve issues on our core path network.

Continued improvements to the Southern Upland Way including a new suit of interpretation.

Recent RTIF work on coastal and upland tourism infrastructure provision and requirements.

Finally, we agreed that this event had been useful and should be held more regularly, perhaps every 6 months.

It was also agreed that the offer of a seat on the RLUP Pilot Advisory Group should be taken up – and it was suggested that this could be rotated between organisations.

There was also a suggestion that one place for environmental NGOs was not enough and that we should be asking for a more notable presence because the public sector partners are often restricted by government policy on what they can say in a public forum in a way that NGOs are not. It was generally agreed that the environment badly needed a stronger voice at such fora.