

Draft Minutes - Grassland and Heathland Ecosystem Group Meeting – 7th November 2013

Maes-y-Ffynnon, Bangor

Attendees

Helen Buckingham (Chair)	HB	NT
Jan Sherry	JS	NRW
John Harold	JH	GCC
Stuart Smith	SS	NRW
Sion Brackenbury	SB	Commons Vision
Arwel Williams	AW	WG
Charles Morgan	CM	RSPB
Bryn Jones	BJ	NT
Gareth Griffiths	GG	AU
Liz Jones	LJ	NRW

Apologies

Trevor Dines	TD	Plantlife
Amy Vanstone	AV	RSPB
Julian Jones	JJ	WTW
Caroline Wilson	CW	SNPA
Sinead Lynch	JSL	Bumblebee CT

1. Minutes and Actions from previous meetings

The minutes from the previous meeting were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

Actions 1 and 2. On agenda

Actions 3 and 4. JS to speak to Cofnod regarding N Wales SINC layer. S Wales SINC layer under development with new project – JS to talk to GB

ACTION 1: Carry forward JS to follow up SINC data with Cofnod and GB

Action 5. SS to speak to GB about grassland minimum standard sites

ACTION 2: Carry forward SS to contact GB

Action 6. Completed – LRC involved in discussion with WG re proposed data hub

Action 7. Discussed and awaiting decision from JNCC

Action 8. Initial meeting held but WG need to re-organise aborted follow-up meeting

Action 9. Take forward to meeting between NRW and WG in December

Action 10. Completed AW/IR worked with Alys and data should hopefully be provided on BARS

Action 11. Follow up required

Action 12. Discussion arranged following today's meeting

Action 13. Amy will represent RSPB

Actions 14, 15, 16, 18. Carry forward – JS to talk to Amy

ACTION 3: Carry Forward JS to discuss follow-up to chough workshop with AV

Action 17. Agreed

Action 19. Bid has been submitted covering only NT site sin Wales – awaiting HLF decision

Action 20. No further communication see above

1. Feedback From WBP Chairs Meeting

CM provided feedback on discussions about the £6M fund and the Wales Strategy Board Nature Recovery Plan.

There is still much confusion over the £6M fund. Strategy Board members were asked to provide ideas on no more than 1 side of A4. NRW produced a list of 25 grouped projects, which encompass NGO and partner activity. WG are holding 3 workshops on the fund apparently using a speed-dating format (dates available from WG) – NGOs and local authorities are encouraged to attend. It was agreed with WG that WBP Chairs or their representatives would attend. Places must be booked.

SB is submitting a number of initiatives (under discussion later). It was also suggested that the Swansea REF bid which, scored highly should be submitted

ACTION 4: HB to determine how LGHEG will be represented and at which workshops

ACTION 5: All who wish to attend need to contact WG

The Nature Recovery Plan (Biodiversity Strategy) outline caused concern at the meeting. MQ reluctantly agreed to include habitat restoration as opposed to only habitat creation following discussion (this is an EU target!). The WBP groups also questioned the omission of SSSIs from the paper, the NGOs have already raised this at the Strategy Board.

2. REF Fund Update

Three applications, which came through the Ecosystem, were approved at panel:

- National Trust Southwood Farm
- Aberystwyth University
- South Wales Wildlife Sites Project

A number of other projects are relevant to the Ecosystem Group

- RSPB/BTO ffridd research

ACTION 6. HB to contact Gemma to see if the Wildlife Sites Projects would like input/assistance from the Ecosystem Group

3. WBP Evidence Gaps

The Research Gaps list and completed project proposals for each Ecosystem Group and SEG are available on the WBP website. Tracey Lovering is coordinating the project with the universities and the list and proposals are updated monthly.

Three Project proposals for LGHEG are already live. The group needs to identify further strategic priorities if appropriate and develop outline project briefs in the format provided.

RSPB to determine whether any further chough research is required following-on from the workshop

No lowland grassland research needs have been identified at present but SS has some ideas for research priorities.

ACTION 7. All to look through project list and send any ideas for new research priorities to HB/JS for discussion with the wider group. To avoid delay – decisions on priorities can be made via email between meetings.

ACTION 8. HB/JS to forward new priorities and proposals to Tracey

4. Fire Management Training, Biochar etc.

Sion has submitted 2 project ideas to WG –

- 1) Common Land Fire Management - this programme of work will engage with commoners to reduce grass fires across Wales through training a distributed network of farmer trainers to interpret the Heather and Grass Burning code, to produce fire plans and to carry out controlled burning training with the support of partner agencies. The group was very supportive of the project similar attempts to provide training in the past have not received sufficient support but the Move towards a more holistic approach linking management for nature conservation to costs of countryside fire to society is likely to be more favourable within WG new agenda.
- 2) Biochar production from invasive species, plant health operations (Rhododendron, Larch and Ash) and biodiversity 'wastes' - The purpose of this initiative is to pilot mobile fast-pyrolysis technology for the production of biochar from biodiversity and forestry plant health operations whilst producing a high-value product that will contribute sustainably to the low-carbon economy of Wales, contributing a market derived income stream for onward investment in ecosystem management. Sion is meeting with Snowdonia National Park in November to talk about rhododendron pyrolysis (JS will attend).

The Swansea Ref project was also discussed although this did not receive funding it scored very highly and the group felt it was worth putting forward for the £6m pot as it included a lot of elements which

Action 19: SB to circulate his document on potential £6m projects - Completed

Action 20: To talk to Swansea CC regarding the £6m pot

5. Priority Action Maps Review

The maps are being used for various purposes such as funding bids and strategic planning. The maps are reviewed annually. Group members need to put forward any proposals for changes or new priority areas for discussion and agreement.

The WBP Priority maps form part of the overall connectivity mapping work being lead by NRW. At present The Level 1 Network Maps for key upland and lowland habitats and the

Level 3 Biodiversity Priority Action Maps are available from Jon Rothwell in NRW. NRW are now working on the Level 2 Priority Networks Maps. The maps are all explained in a report produced by CCW in March 2013 and available from NRW

Action 10: Anyone needing access to the networks maps, Biodiversity Priority Action Maps or the over-arching report to contact Jon Rothwell

jonathan.rothwell@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

Action 11: All to send thoughts on potential updates, additions etc. to the Priority Action Maps to JS by December 21st

6. Welsh Government Report on EIA work

AW expressed concern at recent responses to EIA consultations from NRW. Staff appear to be overlooking the importance of Phase II sites. SS recently dealt with a case on Anglesey with AW where NRW had expressed no interest. SS and JS need to take these concerns forward within NRW. Meeting between NRW and WG has been arranged for December

Agreed EIA should be kept as a standing item

ACTION 12: JS and SS to discuss NRW approach with Buddug Jones and WG at December meeting

7. 2014/2015 Workshops and Training Ideas

This year's events were

- Marshy Grassland Workshop in Rhondda Cynon Taff in June
- Chough Workshop (and DNA fungi Project review) in Ceredigion in May
- Coal Spoil workshop and Ffridd Workshop in RCT and Merthyr in September (these were not in the original schedule but arose from the marshy grassland workshop)

Provisional events for 2014

- Follow-up event/meeting for 2013 chough workshop to be discussed with RSPB
- Waxcap workshop proposed for Autumn 2014
- Grassland and/or Heathland monitoring workshop for LBAPS

ACTION 13: JS: to discuss chough with AV

ACTION 14: HB: to agree dates and location for waxcaps workshop with GG.

ACTION 15: JS: to find out from Dave Lamacraft whether wax cap grassland proposal has been drafted for Sec 42 and to circulate if available. DL to be invited to the workshop.

ACTION 16: JS/SS: to discuss monitoring workshop, times locations etc.

8. Review Work Programme

Insufficient time to complete this so HB and JS will meet up and produce a draft for circulation

ACTION 17: JS/HB to draft 2014/15 work plan and circulate

9. Membership

Membership list revised. JH to represent LBAPs whilst he is at GCC. Liz Jones will be joining the group for NRW North Operations.

Lack of representation from farming side at recent meetings as farming union reps have found it difficult to find sufficient capacity to engage with WBP Groups. Stella came to earlier meetings. Individual farmers are currently represented by the Somerfields and BJ.

ACTION 18: HB to send revised membership list to Sean McHugh and Dai Harris

10. AOB

WG Pollinator Action Plan – need an update and to determine whether the Group should be involved in the Plan.

ACTION 19: HB to ask SL to update the group on Pollinator Action Plan

11. Date of Next Meeting

The field meeting will be held at Pwllpeiran to look at the grassland plots in late June or early July.

ACTION 20: HB to agree a date and location with GG