



Peatland
ACTION

Peatland ACTION

Annual review 2023-24



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Peatland ACTION is funded by the Scottish Government and delivered in partnership with NatureScot and other agencies

Minister's Foreword



2024 has been a significant year for Scotland's peatlands.

I was delighted to announce that the Peatland ACTION partnership put over 10,000 hectares of degraded peatlands on the road to recovery this year, a record achievement that all the partners should be proud of. This has not been easy, and I would like to thank everyone involved for their sustained efforts and tenacity in getting us to this milestone figure.

The Flow Country in Caithness and Sutherland has been granted UNESCO World Heritage Site Status, ensuring its protection, and joining Scotland's six existing World Heritage Sites.

The Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Act 2024, which was passed earlier this year; is a significant step in our wider journey to ensure Scotland's environment is managed sustainably. The Act will help to protect our valuable peatlands by limiting the purposes for which muirburn can be undertaken on peatland and ensuring that anyone undertaking muirburn is qualified and licensed to do so.

In September Scotland will host the 2024 IUCN UK Peatland Programme Conference in Aviemore, where everyone from policy makers to restoration practitioners will have the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience.

We still need to build on this momentum in 2024-25 and beyond – despite budget pressures – and increase delivery to meet our 2030 target.

Scotland's peatlands are a globally significant habitat and their restoration and protection is essential for meeting UK's net zero targets and Scottish Government's commitment to have restored and regenerated biodiversity across the country by 2045. Well-functioning peatland habitats will also increase the resilience of communities vulnerable to extreme flooding events that are becoming more frequent and severe due to effects of climate change. The peatland restoration industry will support the creation of good green jobs and stimulate skills and investment in people and the environment, a fantastic example of a just transition that aligns positive climate action and economic growth.

Scotland has the potential to go further and become a global leader in peatland restoration delivery. The challenge remains for us to continue to build delivery momentum in line with 2030 targets. We need more contractors to take up peatland restoration and we need more investment into our peatlands that adequately values the benefits that this natural capital resource provides to us.

This is the first, in what will become a series of annual reports produced by the Peatland ACTION partnership and illustrates the scale and ambition of this world-leading collaboration that is successfully restoring Scotland's peatlands. I look forward to seeing the continued growth and success of our peatland programme in years to come.

Jim Fairlie
Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity

Peatland ACTION



Peatland ACTION is funded by the Scottish Government and delivered in partnership with NatureScot, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Forestry and Land Scotland, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority and Scottish Water.

Peatland ACTION funding comes through the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan for Net Zero, with a commitment to invest £250 million to support the restoration of 250,000 hectares of peatlands by 2030. There is an interim target of 110,000ha by 2026.



Peatland ACTION provides funding and support to landowners to develop peatland restoration projects. So far, approximately 75,000 hectares of previously damaged peatland habitat have benefited directly from restoration activities.

NatureScot Peatland ACTION supports the programme through a range of services, including Data & Evidence; Communications; Workforce Development; Technical Advice; Finance; and Governance & Co-ordination. It also manages a team of Peatland ACTION project officers, who support landowners and managers interested in restoration through all stages of the planning, grant application and delivery stages.

Successes 2023 – 2024



Peatland ACTION Partnership

- Since 2000 we have contributed to the delivery of approximately **75,000ha** of peatland restoration.
- **Delivered over 10,300ha** of peatland restoration work in 2023-2024.
- Peatland ACTION won the Holyrood Climate Action Award for Nature and Climate.
- Looking forward to the year ahead the Scottish Government Programme for Government 2024-25 has made a commitment to restore at least **10,000ha** of degraded peatland.

Cairngorms National Park Authority

- In 2023-24 we put **1,345ha** of peatland on the road to recovery. This brings the total to **5,400ha** since we started delivering under Peatland ACTION in 2015.
- 18 projects delivered in 2023-24.
- In February 2024, the Park Authority was awarded £10.7 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to take forward Cairngorms 2030, a five-year programme which will see the Cairngorms become the UK's first net zero national park. An ambitious set of 20 complimentary projects that have peatland restoration and other nature-based solutions

at their heart, Cairngorms 2030 will double the value of our peatland restoration funding.

- We continued our work with landscape-scale partners, and undertook estate-wide appraisals on many of our larger landholdings, identifying thousands of hectares of projects for the future.
- The Park Authority helped 45 new peatland restoration designers on their journey to support future restoration via Peatland ACTION-supported and SRUC-led courses.
- We co-hosted Peatland ACTION contractor open days alongside NatureScot and Scottish Woodlands, as well as giving talks on the benefits of peatland restoration to interest groups, school leavers and community groups.
- We supported other Peatland ACTION-led workforce development schemes, for example the NatureScot new operator scheme.
- As part of our Cairngorms 2030 programme, we are funding a full-time post - hosted by the Scottish Land Commission - to look at green finance potential for projects and to consider community wealth building options for publicly funded nature-based projects which create revenue.





- We are actively exploring models that can help land managers build expertise to support design and delivery in-house, as this provides future resilience to sustain delivery and projects. We've also continued exploring options with future funding partners who can help with longer-term commitments.
- We continue our innovative work trying to understand more about the effects of herbivores and exposure on restoration outcomes at higher altitude sites across the Cairngorms National Park.

Forestry and Land Scotland

- Trebled the number of hectares of peatland it restored from 2021-2022 to 2023-2024.
 - 2020/2021 achieved **828ha**
 - 2021/2022 achieved **579ha**
 - 2022/2023 achieved **918ha**
 - 2023/2024 achieved **1480ha**
 - 2024/2025 target **1500ha**
- Procured a contract for restoration across the whole of FLS, securing works for the next five years.
- Contributed to the IUCN publication on Forest to Bog restoration success: [New report showcases successes in forest to bog restoration | IUCN UK Peatland Programme \(iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org\)](#).

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority

- Completed four projects in 2023/24.
- Restored **448ha** of peatland across the National Park – this is the size of 498 George Squares.
- Employed three different contractors to deliver these projects, providing 320 person-days of work for skilled rural contractors.
- Delivered projects in partnerships with private landowners and conservation trusts.
- Expanded the LLTNPA Peatland ACTION team to four full-time staff to scale up our output.

NatureScot

- Contributed over **6,800ha** of peatland restoration to the Partnership target. We exceeding our target by over 10%.
- We delivered a 35% increase from 2022/23 in the number of hectares put on the road to recovery, as well as securing a significant pipeline of substantial projects going into 2024-25.
- We converted interest into action with 59 projects delivered in 2023-24.
- Consulted on a new Monitoring Strategy to help ensure we can collect the right data to drive effective peatland restoration.
- Introduced new initiatives which helped us exceed our peatland restoration target in 2023-24, including: application of new Bird Breeding Guidance/protocol to allow year

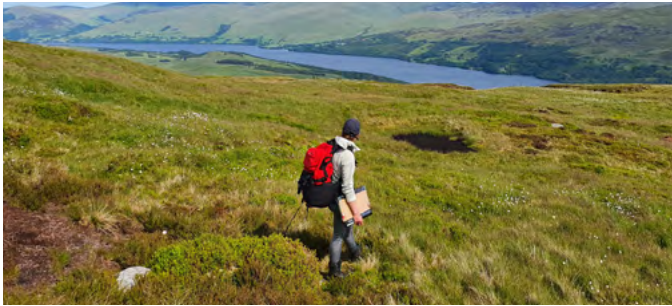
- round restoration; updated the Technical Compendium to share good practice; and roll out of Project Development Incentive Scheme to support and de-risk project design;
- Secured nearly £1m from the Shared Islands Initiative to support increased peatland restoration.
 - Promoted the benefits of peatland restoration at 59 events - major shows, NFUS and SLE conferences, parliamentary receptions, webinars and site based events with farming and landowning organisations.
 - Published eight new written case studies highlighting best practice, the geographical spread and type of projects, and the wide range of benefits, and challenges, that peatland restoration can bring.
 - Through a range of training and skills development offered by NatureScot Peatland ACTION over 270 attendees gained the skills to design and deliver peatland restoration.
 - Carried out pre-restoration monitoring at six sites using specifically designed field protocols for monitoring actively eroding blanket bog, drained blanket bog, drained raised bog and forestry-to-bog.
 - Undertook over 25 feasibility studies to inform future restoration plans.
 - Carried out 105 species surveys through approximately 80 survey contracts over the year to ensure that peatland restoration work didn't conflict with species protection and management on project sites.

Scottish Water

- Completed a total of **290ha** of peatland restoration in key Strategic Water Catchments throughout Scotland.
- Throughout the 2023/2024 peatland restoration window, Scottish Water has successfully restored **290ha** of peatlands within some of our strategic drinking water catchments.
- Restored peatlands bring many benefits to the organisation, namely in relation to improved source water quality, catchment water retention / long term yield, carbon sequestration, biodiversity and rewetted peatlands are known to significantly reduce the risk of wildfires.
- We are currently working on a peatland restoration project on the west side of the Isle of Lewis. Here we have explored new perspectives by stepping away from treated timber and plastic piling as means of ditch blocking. Instead we are using a combination of locally sourced stone and on-site peat to create bunds to slow offsite flows and raise the water table. Follow up surveys suggest this has been successful. The added benefit of stone dams is the resident sheep use them as watercourse crossing points.



Workforce development and training



An example of our work to lay the foundations for an increase in the pace and scale of restoration: Workforce development and training

Peatland restoration is a rapidly expanding area of work across Scotland that provides a major boost to green jobs and our rural economy as part of a just transition.

NatureScot Peatland ACTION provides technical advice and training for individuals and companies wanting to move into the sector across project design and groundworks.

Key workforce development activities:

[Crichton Carbon Centre](#) hosted two-day peatland restoration training events across Scotland for agents, land managers and factors; Ecological Clerks of Works; contractors; and consultants. It also worked closely with the Buccleuch Estate in 2023 to run an onsite mentoring scheme for eight people to learn about peatland restoration project design.

A Peatland Assessment and Restoration course from SRUC in partnership with NatureScot Peatland ACTION which covers peatland

ecology and hydrology and an understanding of the causes of peatland degradation. The course covers all stages of planning, funding and delivering a restoration scheme.

NatureScot Peatland ACTION ran a New Entrant Training Scheme – Machine Operator in 2023/24 to help develop capacity in the workforce delivering restoration work on the ground. By supporting employers to offset some of the costs of training machine operators during their initial learning phase, this short-term training scheme aimed to increase the number of new entrants being brought into the sector.

Peatland ACTION offers a regular series of site visits to peatland restoration sites, normally on a monthly basis, to discuss and learn about restoration techniques with experienced contractors, designers and Peatland ACTION project officers.

Cairngorms National Park Authority continues to operate its highly successful new entrants' scheme, which creates opportunities for less experienced contracting firms. This scheme has now introduced five new firms to this work and most now have peatland restoration as a significant part of their order book.

Peatland ACTION partners



Forestry and
Land Scotland
Coilltearachd agus
Fearann Alba



NatureScot
NàdarAlba



Cairngorms
National Park Authority
Ùghdarras Pàirc Nàiseanta a'
Mhonaidh Ruaidh



Scottish
Water
Always serving Scotland

Peatland ACTION is a national programme to restore peatlands across Scotland. It is led and funded by Scottish Government and delivered in partnership with NatureScot, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Forestry and Land Scotland, Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park Authority, and Scottish Water.

NatureScot

NatureScot is Scotland's nature agency. It works to improve our natural environment in Scotland and inspire everyone to care more about it, so that all nature in Scotland - our biodiversity, geodiversity and the natural elements of our landscapes and seascapes - is maintained, enhanced and brings us benefits. In addition to funding peatland restoration through Peatland ACTION, NatureScot Peatland ACTION teams provide a range of support to the Partnership as a whole.

Cairngorms National Park Authority

The Cairngorms National Park Authority provides leadership for the Cairngorms National Park, tackling the big issues in the National Park in a collaborative way, based on the aims as set out in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. The Cairngorms Peatland ACTION Programme provides funding and technical support for peatland restoration projects that deliver quality outcomes and provide multiple benefits at a scale that makes a difference within the National Park boundaries.

Forestry and Land Scotland

Forestry and Land Scotland looks after national forests and land to enhance biodiversity, support tourism and increase access to the green spaces that help improve Scotland's physical and mental health and well-being. It also provides vital

timber supplies to support the rural economy. It aims to manage peatlands in an optimal way to maximize the benefits they can provide. To achieve this, it works with other organisations, contractors, and people to help deliver peatland restoration on Scotland's forests and land.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park is Scotland's oldest National Park covering 720 sq. miles. The Park and those who live, work within and visit the Park are facing unprecedented challenges of the climate emergency and nature loss. The National Park Authority provides leadership and facilitates collaboration to tackle the twin crises and achieve a more positive, sustainable future for us all.

The National Park's Peatland ACTION work is a crucial part of stopping the decline and restoring nature in the National Park. This work is fundamental in helping achieve the vision for the future of the National Park, as outlined in our [National Park Partnership Plan](#): 'by 2045 the National Park is a thriving place that is nature positive and carbon negative'.

Scottish Water

Scottish Water delivers water and waste water services to 2.62 million households and 159,219 business premises, and supports a flourishing Scotland. Its focus is on delivering an excellent service, providing great value for money, and reducing our effect on the environment, going beyond net zero emissions. Scottish Water carries out peatland restoration on its land through Peatland ACTION to help improve water quality and achieve Scotland's Net Zero targets.

Visit our web pages for more information www.nature.scot/peatlandaction
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LLTNPA • Stephen Varwell

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