

Pennine Peat LIFE

Background

Global importance of peatlands

Peatland, or 'blanket bog' as the habitat is known in the uplands, is of international importance for its biodiversity and carbon storage. The Forest of Bowland's landscape and conservation designations are based on the importance of these upland environments and the species they support. Whilst peatlands only cover 3% of the world's land area, they contain nearly 30% of all carbon stored on land.

A healthy, functioning blanket bog is extremely important in providing various 'ecosystem services' for society, which include:

- potential reductions in downstream flood risk and siltation
- reduction in wildfire risk on moorlands
- improvements in water quality
- reducing carbon loss and promoting sequestration of atmospheric carbon
- biodiversity improvements
- improvements in landscape quality and natural beauty

Lancashire Upland Peat Partnership and the AONB

Lancashire Upland Peat Partnership (LUPP) is a steering group of officers from the Environment Agency, Natural England, Forest of Bowland AONB, Pennine Prospects, United Utilities and the Wildlife Trust. The principal aim of the LUPP is to co-ordinate peatland restoration projects within the uplands of Lancashire and its border areas. It is intended that through co-ordination and prioritisation, partners avoid duplication and maximise increasingly limited resources for project delivery.

In 2011, the Forest of Bowland AONB and the Environment Agency jointly commissioned the Wildlife Trust to prepare a 'restoration plan' on behalf of the LUPP. The plan, titled 'Moorland and Fells: Lancashire's Upland Peat Restoration Plan' was published in 2012 and identified several high priority areas for restoration including Forest of Bowland AONB, West Pennine Moors and the South Pennines.

Since the publication of this plan, more detailed work has been carried out during 2013/14 (by S Robinson Consulting on behalf of LUPP) to establish current site conditions, restoration work required and estimated costs in order to have the information available to take advantage of future funding opportunities as these arise. These have been compiled into two 'Priority Peat' reports covering Forest of Bowland and Rossendale.

In addition, during 2013/14 the AONB successfully managed the delivery of a £250,000 moorland restoration project on SSSI land on the Bleasdale Estate in Bowland. This project was jointly funded by the Environment Agency and the AONB, building on a first phase of restoration work on the estate funded by Natural England's Environmental Stewardship during 2012.

Pennine Peat LIFE Programme

LUPP are just one of several partnerships involved in planning, managing and delivering peatland restoration projects across the north of England, including the North Pennines AONB, Northumberland National Park and Yorkshire Peat Partnership.

The above organisations came together during 2013 under the umbrella of a 'Pennine Peat Partnership' with the principal aim of co-ordinating and applying for European Union LIFE+ funding to support a large-scale £multi-million project from the Bowland to the Scottish border. The proposed total value of the programme is approximately £9million. £4million is being sought from EU LIFE+ and match-funding from Yorkshire Water, United Utilities, Environment Agency, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority has been ear-marked.

With the aid of the 'Priority Peat' reports, LUPP have identified six restoration sites in Bowland and one in Rossendale to be included in the funding bid, based on priority and availability of match-funding from the Environment Agency and United Utilities.

The total value of the restoration work on these seven sites will be almost £1.5 million, with c.£1.2m of this in Forest of Bowland.

Programme Management and Contracting

The accountable body for the Pennine Peat LIFE Programme will be the North Pennines AONB Partnership (via host authority Durham County Council). Forest of Bowland AONB has been proposed as the lead programme partner for the Lancashire restoration sites.

The project will appoint a board which will provide overview and scrutiny and will have the accountable body, Durham County Council and other programme partners represented (Forest of Bowland AONB, Yorkshire Dale National Park Authority, United Utilities, Yorkshire Water, Environment Agency). This board could include member representation.

In addition, the project will appoint a technical group to manage, advise and support a project team. This technical group will mainly include officers/practitioners.

A project team will be employed through North Pennines AONB and Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. A restoration officer (employed through YWT) with responsibility for Lancashire restoration sites will be based in the Forest of Bowland AONB office in Dunsop Bridge.

All restoration project work will be contracted via the accountable body.

Implications for the AONB Partnership

Forest of Bowland AONB will commit £3000 per annum from the existing AONB revenue budget to support the costs of employing a restoration project officer to work on the Lancashire restoration sites.

In addition, limited "in-kind" officer time estimated at 2 - 3 days/month will be contributed from the AONB Unit/Lancashire County Council towards project management, mentoring for the Lancashire-based restoration officer and attendance at project steering group meetings.

Next steps

The bid will be submitted to the EU in October 2014. If the bid is successful, the project will commence in spring 2015 and be delivered over 5 years.

Decision required

The Committee is requested to:

- i. consider the report and offer comments