

Notes from Sustainable Land Connectors Spring Meeting 13 March 2025

Attendees:

Chair: Kerry Waylen, Notes: Sally Matchett

Attendees: Chris Leakey (marine hub chair), Hannah Rudman (SFNC co-chair), Alison Baker, Alistair McVittie, Amelia Heath, Andy Tharme, Cameron Reid, Chris Leakey, Deryck Irving, Eleanor Harris, Hannah Rudman, Helen McCallin, Henry Leveson-Gower, Jamie Gordon, Julia McCarthy, Kate Heightman, Katrina, Kerry Waylen, Kirsty Blackstock, Leo Peskett, Louise Muir, Lucy Stanfield-Jenner, Martin Faulkner, Paul Sizeland, Ross Johnston.

Agenda and minutes

1.05-1.15 Welcome and Introduction to Sally Matchett and other new members

Kerry Waylen

- Welcome to new members (introductions were shared in the chat)
- Sally Matchett for SFNC introduced to the hub
- Minutes from Feb leadership forum included in chat for members:
https://storage.3.basecamp.com/4322753/blobs/8c8974e0-fff3-11ef-ab36-0242ac120004/download/SFNC_Leadership%20Meeting_Land.docx?attachmen t=true

1.15-1.40 Renewal of the Connectors chairing: proposal to shift chair to Lucy Jenner, with opportunity for a new co-chair and/or me continuing until summer 2026.

- Kerry Waylen, looking to step down as chair after 3 years.
- Lucy Jenner nominated as replacement but is unable to do so until July 2026. Kerry can continue until then, with Sally assisting, alternatively other co-chair(s) could join and replace Kerry sooner. It is open to anyone from any sector or career stage
 - So far the role has entailed organising 3-4 meetings every year, occasionally in person field trips, inputting into the basecamp platform.
 - More liaison with other hubs will also be important in future.
- **Action: please nominate yourself as cochair if you would be interested by Fri 11th April**
 - Eleanor Harris may be interested to (co)chair

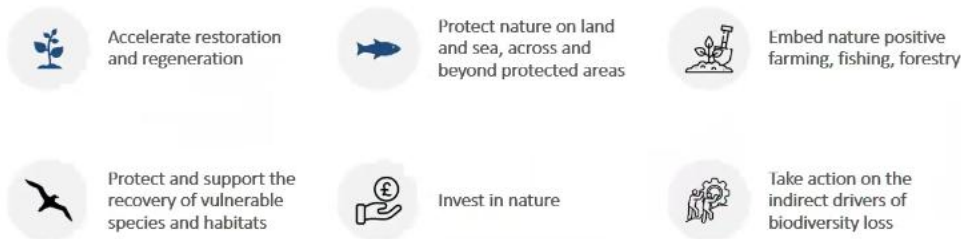
1.40-2.00 Update from the Scottish Government (Ross Johnstone) and NatureScot (Martin Faulkner – focused on the SBS)

Ross Johnstone Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, Delivery Plan and Natural Environment Bill

Scottish Biodiversity Framework

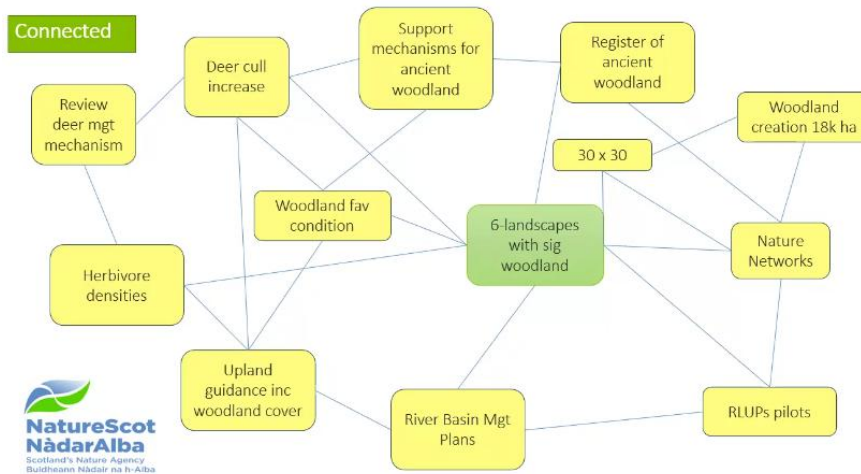


- Vision: By 2045 Scotland will have restored and regenerated biodiversity across land
- Delivery plan contains 6 different objectives:



- They have 31 Priority Actions – with some key items:
 - Publication of Natural Environment Bill (21 February 2025)
 - Programme for Ecosystem restoration (e.g., six landscapes projects to deliver or regenerate nature and they should all have a significant woodland component)
 - Strengthening National Parks
 - Expand Nature Networks
 - New planning and development measures for biodiversity
 - Scotland’s urban green and blue spaces
 - Priority species and habitats

- Of the 136 actions – although seems daunting, they are all interconnected (i.e., by supporting one such action often supports other actions). See below:



Questions:

- Tracking Action Status** – The Biodiversity planning document (available online) provides details on actions, leads, supporting roles, and timelines.
- Landscape/Catchment Scale Projects** – NatureScot has an initial shortlist (over six projects). Stakeholder engagement will follow, aiming for ministerial review by the end of Q2.
- Shortlisting Process for Landscape Projects** – Some shortlisted projects are already well-established. Selecting such projects might be seen as lacking ambition.
- Alignment with EU National Restoration Plans & CAP** – The EU framework has not yet been reviewed, but there is interest in aligning with it and promoting landscape-scale approaches.

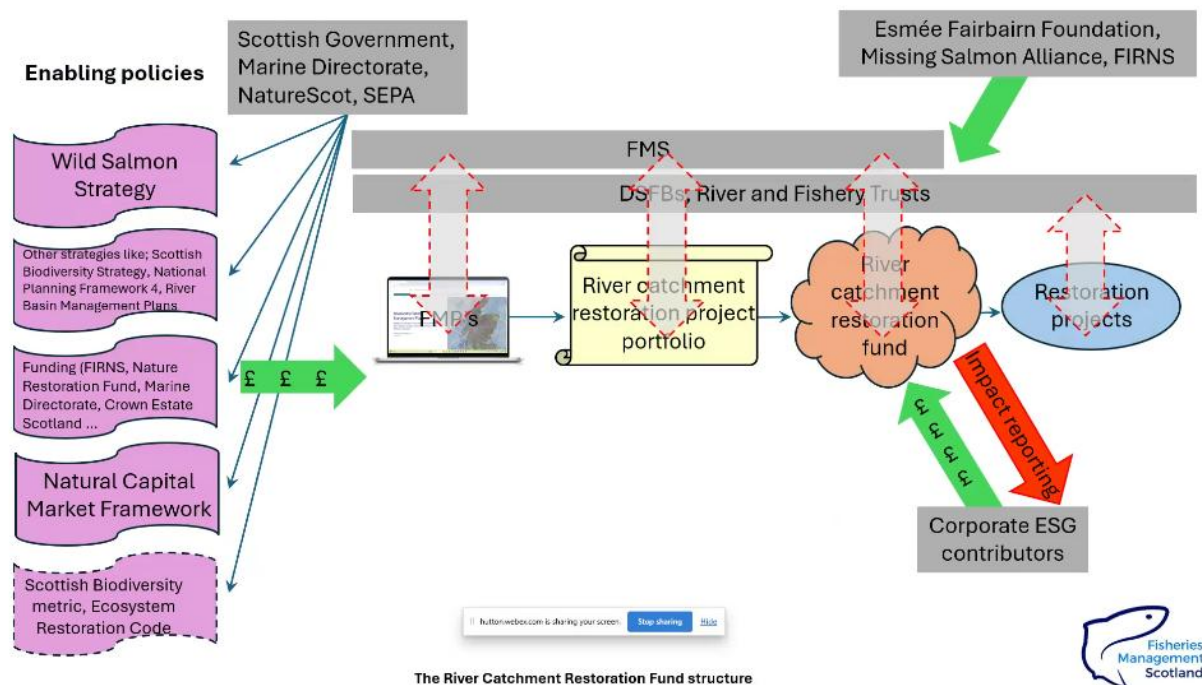
Update from Ross Johnstone covered various topics, including:

- [Natural capital - importance to the Scottish economy: research](#). Renewed research into annual economic value of activity supported by natural capital (£40 billion per year – excluding oil and gas)
- [Natural Capital Asset Index](#): Index has increased this year – important to understand why, part of the reason for this year is the reduction in fertiliser use (covid, Ukraine etc). Interesting illustration to use these figures to make direct linkages for context of land use (even in crisis). Nature Scot will be looking at policy commitments for conditions of freshwater and forestation that directly link the capital asset index and the efficacy of policy levers.
- The UK government [BSI standards](#) - will be published end of March the carbon standard and community standard by the end of March. While these standards apply to voluntary nature markets, they also explore best practices for land use

projects more broadly. Their release will prompt important discussions on meeting the standards we expect from others. This will be free to use and accessible to public

2.05-2.25 Paul Sizeland - Insights on land-river monitoring, from the Source to Sea project

- River Catchment Restoration Fund (Source to Sea) Monitoring Framework
- Funded by FIRNS, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, and Missing Salmon Alliance.
- Key to this is Scotland's Fishery Management Plans – inclusive of all kinds of actions to support river systems to sea areas – which has quite a lot of actions – fairly substantial potential – paying for to improve Scotland's Rivers (over £200 million pounds worth).
- Exploring funding models, including [SMEEF](#).



- Monitoring Framework Goals: Flexible, adaptable, supports high-integrity projects, easy to use and communicate, enables portfolio-level reporting.
- The fund will soon enter voluntary markets, engaging corporates through ESG strategies to attract funding.
- What outcomes will the portfolio deliver?
 - Biodiversity and ecosystems,
 - cool and clean water,
 - water quantity,
 - climate adaptation and resilience.
- Investor-Driven Approach: Outcomes align with investor priorities, shaping the River Catchment Framework for market readiness.

- What data is appropriate to collect to demonstrate outcomes?
 - State of nature metrics (GBF and TNFD)
 - Important to link actions to outcomes via indicators
- Important to the process to inform the framework formed from discussions from project developers
 - How prescriptive should the monitoring framework be?
 - Should there be some methods or indicators that are always used?
 - What makes this high integrity?

2.25-2.40 Deryck Irving – The challenges of developing water metrics, the Water Metrics and Standards Group

- Broad membership – academics, agencies, some FIRNS members,
- Focus to look at NbS delivering benefits water
- For those codes to sit aside emerging codes and not be a standalone alternative
- Water quality, other pollutants, sewage related debris, colour, natural flood management, surface water management, water supply continuity
- These metrics need to be
 - Robust, high integrity
 - Understandable by key stakeholders
 - Credible
 - Usable at a range of scales
 - Practical and affordable
 - Need to support project and portfolio development
 - Need to be beneficial to those buying into the projects – needs to be return for someone buying the benefits
- Interesting and significant challenges to developing water metrics vs. carbon
 - Water systems are very complex and very specific
 - Quite costly to get granularity and specificity across scales and environment types
 - A lot of current metrics have not been tested in north Atlantic environments and there are questions around transferrable metrics from other parts of the UK
- Risks
 - If carbon and biodiversity are the ‘only’ markets – we will get suboptimal results
 - Delaying action until complexities are resolved will result in inaction— continuous development and testing are needed.
- What’s next

- The group exists, funding grants are underway, learning a lot from what's going on. They aspire to act as a sounding board, technical review panel, within these constraints of being voluntary.

2.50-3.15 Questions and discussion

Topics included:

- We need to be very clear about the purpose of any monitoring - linked to the purpose and ideal of the intervention – and to be clear about what cannot be monitored/easily /quickly understood. Water systems are very complex and dynamic.
 - Easy to quantify metrics – often relate to quantity and may be of interest to corporates – but are not always indicators of true system change.
 - Temporary events can be difficult to detect – and NbS might help with them - but monitoring might not pick these up if it isn't continuous.
 - Water temperature not often considered in current metrics. But v important for fisheries.
- Not only in-stream monitoring may be relevant– e.g. soil attributes also relevant.
- Drought is not being given much attention by current policy frameworks e.g. NPF so hard for some public sector partners to justify attention to mitigating it.
- To deliver change at scale we need to not (just) work in the (sub)catchments in which interventions have already been delivered – but this is not the easiest path, as we need bespoke interventions as well as bespoke monitoring for every catchment.
- Why aren't natural flood management projects more often commissioned? NFM projects – as with many NbS – offer multiple benefits that are overall the sensible choice, but each benefit may have higher uncertainties and less control over delivery than 'traditional' approaches such as building concrete flood defences. This makes it hard for local authorities doing CBA to prioritise NFM.
 - Climate change affects risks and should affect choices – Scotland is becoming more vulnerable to drought (and floods).
 - To overcome the persistence of “business as usual” approaches, it may be useful to communicate and costs and risks of not investing of the business as usual, rather than tailoring how we monitor and communication just about NbS.
- The limitations – especially for water – of approaches premised around carbon credits.
- The potential opportunity of working with key sectoral partners (e.g. distilleries) or businesses in landscapes (e.g. LENS) - not necessary for-profit returns, but to secure supply chains or manage business risk.

- This then makes it difficult to satisfy lots of different sectoral needs and interests with ‘one size fits all’ metrics and monitoring.
- Relates to earlier discussion about Blended finance – different public and private sector partners have different needs.
- Responsibility
 - Who should or could pay for monitoring, especially if we want it to be not just focused on easy /quantifiable metrics?
 - Who should pay if projects fail and intended water-quality or quantity goals are not achieved?

Action: please suggest to Kerry or Sally topics for future meetings (ideally by 11th April, but whenever they occur is fine!)