

Habitat and Degraded Ecosystem Restoration

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Aim

An 'ecosystem' is considered to combine the physical characteristics of the environment with the habitats and species it supports. Where the interactions between these elements function well, with natural processes unhindered, a wide variety of species is supported. Degraded ecosystems have lost much of that function due to pressures such as:

- **pollution** [1]
 - **land use intensification and modification** – leading to fragmentation of habitat
 - **spread of invasive species** [2] and wildlife disease
 - **climate change** – requiring adaptation in habitat management and conservation approach
1. Catchment Management for Water Quality is a separate Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priority
 2. Control of Invasive Non-Native Plant Species is a separate Environmental Co-operation Action Fund priority

Degradation has had a significant impact on biodiversity in Scotland, with reduced species diversity and declining species populations. Restoring affected habitats and their processes is critical to 'halting the loss of biodiversity' as set out in the [EU Biodiversity Strategy](#). It will also deliver the EU target of restoring 15 per cent of degraded ecosystems.

As pressures outlined above tend to operate across large areas, landscape / catchment-scale action is needed to address them. Dealing with these pressures adequately requires well co-ordinated, collaborative action across multiple land holdings, rather than more piecemeal work on smaller scales.

For this reason, and because of the potential for action through the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, Habitat and Degraded Ecosystem Restoration is a priority within the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund.

The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, [2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity](#), identifies the following habitat types as priorities for restoration:

- native woodland
- peatland
- freshwater and wetland
- species-rich grassland
- coastal habitats

Large-scale collaborative restoration of these will involve:

- **re-establishing habitat**, including expanding it and increasing connectivity – e.g. removing trees from sand dunes, re-seeding species-rich grassland, or re-planting in native woodland
- **changing habitat management** – e.g. suitable grazing or cutting for grassland or wetland, or removing exotic species from native woodland
- **addressing previous physical** modification – e.g. restoring modified watercourses, reducing diffuse pollution, or reversing artificial drainage of soils

Examples of projects working to deliver ecosystem restoration are further detailed in the [Route Map to 2020](#), under Priority Projects 1, 2 and 3.

Ecosystem restoration generally involves a process of improvement in natural function and biodiversity, rather than an end point. The model described in the document below can help you understand the role and effect of appropriate restoration actions. Work set in place to improve ecosystem function and so 'move' an ecosystem up a level would be considered restoration.



[Ecosystem restoration \(PDF, Size: 132.1 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Ecosystem-restoration.pdf> European Union 4-tier Arcadis model

Eligibility

In addition to the generic eligibility requirements, you must also confirm that all land holdings within the project area contain at least one of the priority habitats listed above and that active restoration will take place on all land holdings.

The [Habitat Map of Scotland](#) shows the approximate geographical location of habitats ([EUNIS Level 1 habitats](#)) across Scotland, but will not be used as a targeting map to assess eligibility.

Expertise required

Your application will be scored on the evidence provided on the facilitator's experience and knowledge of co-operative processes and project management.

In addition, it is also very important that the proposed facilitation activities are informed by experience in the restoration of the habitats involved in the project. In some cases this could involve sub-contracting to specialists.

Potential Agri-Environment Scheme and Forestry Grant Scheme options

All projects should focus on restoring the priority habitats listed below, whether through the Agri-Climate Environment Scheme, the Forestry Grant Scheme or other funding sources. Work must be located appropriately both within the holding and throughout the project area, to provide optimal biodiversity benefits.

Native woodland

[Woodland Creation](#)

[Woodland Improvement Grant](#)

[Ancient Wood Pasture](#)

[Managing Scrub of Conservation Value](#)

[Habitat Mosaic Management](#)

Peatland

Lowland Bog Management
 Management of Buffer Areas for Fens and Lowland Bogs
 Moorland Management

Freshwater and wetlands

Wetland Management
 Lowland Bog Management
 Management of Buffer Areas for Fens and Lowland Bogs
 Habitat Mosaic Management
 Restoring (Protecting) River Banks
 River Embankment Removal

Species-rich grassland

Species-rich Grassland Management
 Wader and Wildlife Mown Grassland
 Wader Grazed Grassland
 Corn Buntings Mown Grassland
 Corncrake Mown Grassland
 Corncrake Grazing Management
 Management of Cover for Corncrake
 Chough Mown Grassland
 Habitat Mosaic Management

Coastal habitats

Heath Management (Coastal, Serpentine, Lowland and Special Interest)
 Chough Grazing Management
 Coastal Embankment Breaching, Lowering or Removal
 Wetland Management

Priority-specific facilitation activities

While the scale and nature of each project will dictate the types of facilitation activities that will be appropriate, there will be certain activities that would be expected to feature as part of most types of project. There are other activities that, while potentially supportable via the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund, may not be relevant for every project.

Highlighted here are the facilitation activities that are specific to this priority. Please use the Costs and Activities Table for the generic information.

Phase 1 activities – up to the point that Agri-Environment Climate Scheme applications are submitted for individual landholdings		
Work activity	Description	Verification
Site visits, surveys and evidence gathering	Basic baseline mapping of the extent and condition of habitats across entire project area to at least EUNIS Level 2 (except for woodland). More formal baseline mapping of the condition of areas proposed for restoration, using methods described under Monitoring requirements. Drawing on specialist knowledge to determine appropriate management at both individual and collaborative landscape scale.	Maps completed and available as a GIS layer. Submitted to the Biodiversity Action Reporting System.
	Submit new species and habitat records to the National Biodiversity Network.	Records submitted

	Records collected with public money must be publicly available.	
Strategic management plan	Identifying which areas require physical restoration, habitat expansion or habitat management.	Strategic plan completed
Securing participation	Depending on numbers of participants – relevant communications to ensure all are kept up-to-date on progress and next steps needed.	Newsletters etc

Application requirements

You need to include information and / or evidence for the following priority-specific requirements in your application:

- a basic digitised map of the project area showing distribution of protected nature sites, water bodies and / or semi-natural habitats the project will help restore, expand or maintain. This should be uploaded to [Biodiversity Action Reporting System website](#) once the application is successful
- available evidence of the condition of any land proposed for habitat restoration (including the status of any protected nature sites as monitored by Scottish Natural Heritage, and the status of any water bodies under the Water Framework Directive), and the potential for restoration
- proposed methods for formal baseline mapping and end-of-project repeat mapping as described in the Monitoring requirements section below
- evidence of any previous or ongoing habitat restoration within the project area, showing why the project is necessary to secure any previous investments, and that there is no double funding
- evidence of any plans already in place for undertaking habitat or degraded ecosystem restoration on holdings that are ineligible for Scottish Rural Development Programme funding
- evidence of any plans for monitoring and recording restoration outcomes within the project once the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund support has ended

Any work that has been carried out prior to the project start date will not be eligible for Environmental Co-operation Action Fund funding. Where essential facilitation activities have been carried out prior to applying to the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund, you should provide documentary evidence that these activities have been completed satisfactorily.

Appropriate minimum spatial scale

The objective of this priority is to facilitate large-scale conservation restoration across a number of priority habitats. The appropriate minimum scale at which this work should be undertaken will vary considerably between the habitat types, and in some cases also between different types of project.

Specialist advice on minimum spatial scale may be available from Scottish Natural Heritage provided it is sought before an application is submitted.

Peatland

For lowland raised bogs and upland peatlands, the scale of individual projects will vary but must include multiple land management units within and / or adjacent to the peatland site. You should demonstrate how the combined scale of those units will contribute to the restoration of the hydrological and ecological functioning of the habitat.

Freshwater and wetland

The wide range in the nature and size of these habitats means that appropriate minimum spatial scale is not being quantified. Through the application requirements above, you should demonstrate sufficient scale to meaningfully address the habitat condition issue identified.

Species-rich grassland

This habitat tends to occur in scattered patches of a few hectares in size, not necessarily linked by situation or topography. You should demonstrate that collaboration will contribute to the restoration of two or more individual patches and if possible projects should aim to increase connectivity between species-rich grassland patches.

Coastal habitat

The area proposed for restoration should be sufficient in scale and location, relative to the cause of degradation, to restore habitat functionality. It is expected that in most instances this will require a minimum area of 20 hectares.

Assessment criteria

Scoring matrix for selection criteria			
Criteria	High	Medium	Low
1. Project has the potential to improve / maintain the condition of features of protected nature sites to / at "favourable" or "unfavourable recovering"	Good potential for Natura features	Some potential for SSSI features only	No potential for SSSI or Natura features
2. Potential contribution to improving the water body status for the physical condition of water bodies (morphology)	Status raised to Good	Status raised to Moderate	Status raised to Poor or no change
3. Project has potential to restore degraded semi-natural habitat outwith protected nature sites	Potential to restore to Level 1 (as described in the Ecosystem restoration document)	Potential to restore to Level 2 or 3 (as described in the Ecosystem restoration document)	No potential
4. Project has potential to create or re-establish habitat to enable expansion and increase connectivity between protected nature sites	Natura or SSSI sites well connected with appropriate habitat	Natura or SSSI sites partially connected with appropriate habitat	No connectivity provided between Natura or SSSI sites
5. Project has potential to provide connectivity to other semi-natural habitats outwith project area	Potential to provide good connectivity to other semi-natural habitats	Potential to provide moderate connectivity to other semi-natural habitats	Potential to provide poor or no connectivity to other semi-natural habitats
6. Project has identified and addressed pressure leading to degradation of habitats and ecosystems such as grazing, diffuse pollution, invasive non-native species etc	Suitable habitat management plans in place across all relevant land holdings, which identify and address pressures	Suitable management plans in place that address some (but not all) pressures across the land holdings	Management plans not addressing pressures that have resulted in habitat or ecosystem degradation.
7. Project can restore habitats or degraded ecosystems across all relevant land holdings	All relevant land owners willing to participate	Most land owners willing to participate	Most land owners have not been contacted yet
8. Proposals include a sustainable strategy of monitoring and follow-up management, including after the end of Environmental Co-operation Action Fund funding	Well-planned strategy	Ad-hoc or incomplete strategy	Monitoring and follow-up inadequately addressed

Monitoring requirements

Progress against the project's key deliverables will be monitored through the quarterly claims process and the verification required for these.

In addition, an annual report will be required. The format of this is to be published shortly, but will provide a progress overview, as well as explanations for any variation from the agreed plan.

Formal baseline mapping of the condition of areas proposed for restoration should be undertaken within the project as specified below, unless it was recently done to the same standards. The results should be summarised within the relevant annual report and appended to it.

Repeat monitoring for comparison with the baseline mapping should be undertaken close to the end of the project, with the results summarised within the final year's annual report and appended to it.

Intervening annual reports should report on the condition of managed habitats only in more general terms. This recognises that several years are generally required for habitat recovery / establishment.

All habitat types: designated sites

Assessment of any designated sites within the project should follow Scottish Natural Heritage's Site Condition Monitoring protocols (current at the time of application). These are specific to each habitat type, and sometimes to individual sites. Scottish Natural Heritage staff will be able to provide these on request at any time.

Woodland outwith designated sites

The Native Woodland Survey of Scotland provides mapped data on condition and extent of native woodlands in Scotland. This should be used as baseline mapping. The Native Woodland Survey of Scotland methodology should be repeated for the end-of-project monitoring.

Peatland outwith designated sites

Baseline mapping and end-of-project monitoring should follow guidance on appropriate hydrological monitoring and vegetative monitoring on the Scottish Natural Heritage website.

Freshwater outwith designated sites

Freshwater ecosystems can comprise a variety of habitat types. You should provide details of appropriate methods for the baseline mapping and end-of-project monitoring.

Species-rich grassland outwith designated sites

Baseline mapping and end-of-project monitoring should follow guidance on appropriate grassland assessment on the Scottish Natural Heritage website.

Coastal habitat outwith designated sites

Coastal ecosystems can comprise a variety of habitat types. You should provide details of appropriate methods for the baseline mapping and end-of-project monitoring.

Other potential funding streams

Landfill Communities Fund

Restoration of natural habitat within 10 miles of a landfill or waste transfer station.

Big Lottery Fund

Provide grants from £300 to over £500,000 to organisations ranging from small local groups to major national charities.

Heritage Lottery Fund

Various funding streams aimed at maintaining or restoring the natural, built or cultural heritage.

Scottish Environment Protection Agency – Water Environment Fund

Provides funding to projects which aim to help restore Scotland's catchments from the source, through rivers, lochs and floodplains, into estuaries and out to sea.

Scottish Natural Heritage grants

Provides funding which increases volunteering, outdoor learning, physical activity, and empowers communities. Engages people in the development of the National Walking and Cycle Network and supports nature-based tourism, wild foods and innovative enterprises based on sustainable use of natural assets.

EU Life Fund

Supporting environmental, nature conservation and climate action projects

Charitable trusts

There are a number of charitable trusts that provide funding for habitat restoration projects, from land acquisition to education and community engagement. A summary is provided, but there are many more trusts supporting this work in Scotland.

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