

Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF) Minutes

Title of meeting:	Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF)
Location:	Welsh Government Office, Aberystwyth
Date of meeting:	9 th September 2024
Members present:	Prof. Rhys A. Jones (Chair), NRW Board Member Ruth Jenkins, NRW Huwel Manley, NRW Sarah Hetherington, NRW Dr Rosie Plummer, NRW Board Member Elan Evans, FUW Sarah James, CLA Tim Kirk, Confor Elaine Harrison, Confor Hedd Pugh, NFU Cymru Dennis Matheson, TFA Angharad Davies, Wales YFC
Other attendees:	John Clark, NRW Keith Davies NRW
Apologies:	Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru Gareth Parry, FUW Fraser McAuley, CLA Jon Goldsworthy, NRW John Browne, NRW Michelle Griffiths, NRW
Secretariat:	Bronwen Martin, NRW

Item 1. Introductions, Apologies and Declaration of Interest

1. Professor Rhys Jones (WLMF Chair) welcomed all to the meeting and noted apologies. Rhys thanked the group for travelling to Aberystwyth for this meeting and provided some general housekeeping notices.
2. The group went around the table providing verbal introductions.
3. No declarations of interest were raised in respect of Agenda items to be considered.
4. Rhys mentioned that this meeting has a broad 'nature' theme. There are substantive presentations on 'Natur am Byth' and the Designated Landscapes Programme, along with a group-lead discussion on the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee inquiry into 'Halting and reversing the loss of nature by 2030'.

Item 2. Minutes from the last meeting, actions & matters arising.

5. Once the meeting minutes have been reviewed and formally agreed they will be translated and published on the NRW website. The Group reviewed the minutes from the meeting held on 24th June 2024 and accepted them as a true record.
6. The group reviewed the outstanding actions and verbal updates were provided:
 - Sept AP 11 - Fraser McAuley, CLA to circulate a copy of the Cross-Party Group inquiry report when it is published.
 - Sarah James, CLA said she would follow this up if Bronwen sent her a copy of the action and the context.
 - June AP01- Michelle Griffiths to clarify the current Welsh position regarding planting trees next to rivers and report back to the WLMF.
 - This was raised by Robert South, Confor - more clarity on this is needed. Perhaps Welsh Government can provide an update in December. Tim Kirk, Confor mentioned the impact of acid rain and the benefit of trees next to rivers (e.g., cooling river temperatures). The group discussed the wider context including planting next to main rivers, land drainage consents, flood defences, flood risk activity permits, the differences between legislation for England and Wales and the importance of the right tree in the right place.
 - June AP02 - Robert South, Confor to provide further information and specific examples regarding issues encountered when trying to plant trees next to watercourses.
 - Bronwen had not received any further input from Robert and agreed to liaise with Elaine Harrison, Confor to understand if there was anything to feed into the future discussion.

Item 3. Presentation: Natur am Byth

7. The group welcomed John Clark, NRW to provide an overview and update regarding Natur am Byth. John introduced himself as the Programme Manager for [Natur am Byth - Saving Wales' threatened species](#).
8. This is a partnership comprising 10 partners and NRW is the coordinator. It is currently 1 year in to the 4-year project, but it has taken a number of years of development to get to this point. The project funding is provided by the National Lottery, Welsh Government and NRW.
9. The project encompasses several UK species recovery programmes, which aim to save species from extinction and reconnect people to nature. John summarised the 'Delivery Phase' including the costs and income sources. An outline of the key timeline was also provided, including pre-application, submission and an 18-month development stage.

10. The vision of Natur am Byth – people and wildlife thrive, people from all walks of life to enjoy and care for nature, communities working together and organisations to be the fabric.
11. John outlined the programme architecture including:
 - 4 main strands
 - Place based projects
 - Nationally coordinated work packages
12. So far, Natur am Byth has:
 - Hosted/attended >1000 events.
 - Engaged with over 16,000 people.
 - Identified for action 67 species facing the greatest threat of extinction in Wales.
 - Set up 11 partnership projects.
 - Highlighted 146 sites for management or survey.
13. John gave an overview of the project budget including the capital, revenue, non-cash (e.g., volunteers, in kind time etc.), inflation and contingency.
14. There are 5 multi taxa projects, all with similar challenges and there are 6 specific species projects. John showed a map to indicate the geographical spread of projects across Wales and provided a summary of some projects.
15. John spoke to the group about the Species Recovery Assessment which involved looking at the baseline and then looking at where we are hoping to be through reasoning and justification (e.g., data analysis and modelling).
16. The project has involved looking at the skills of staff and volunteers and has provided training. It is key that Natur am Byth communicates with the public, engages new audiences, includes volunteer activities and values Welsh culture and language. John spoke about the importance of Welsh history, art and language.
17. An outline of some of the project strands includes:
 - Conservation grazing – incorporated in multiple projects.
 - Conservation grazing plans – developing a grazing feasibility study.
 - Common land – understanding the issues and challenges and creating opportunities such as public access, dogs, peer-to-peer learning events and advisory and support services.
 - Natur am Byth landowner / land manager declarations (between NGOs and landowner)
 - Natur am Byth Specific NGO Land Management Agreements (cash payments)
 - Non- Natur am Byth NGO Land Management Agreements (voluntary agreements)
 - NRW Land Management Agreements – for protected sites funded by NRW's Grant in Aid.
18. John highlighted some of the land management successes, including:
 - Reintroduction of rosy saxifrage after 62 years
 - Helicopter deployment of fencing
 - Training mountain leaders

- Deployment of no-fencing grazing collars (butterfly conservation)
- 'No fence' goat grazing – Stanner Rocks NNR (upright apple-moss)
- Training volunteers for monitoring
- Inoculation of oak polypores fungus
- Volunteer work
- Release of native oysters
- Coastal stock control measures at Pen Llyn
- Curlew breeding surveys for 2024 – Ynys Mon

19. John outlined plans going forward, including encouraging innovative trials through NGO led agreements.

20. Huwel Manley asked about the positive impact on communities such as local input, the use of contractors, impact on local economies and using skilled farm contractors for management. John said they have seen a positive impact on rural economies and have used an array of skilled farm contractors.

21. Tim asked about the micro versus macro approach and provided an example of the Buglife campaign which promotes the sharing of local knowledge. John said we need to work on how we can look at the management requirements – data and knowledge sharing is a key factor. Local Officers are working with landowners and occupiers as they are the ones who know these sites. Upscaling is also interesting, for example shining a light on what has worked well, and this can be done through communications and engagement. Holding learning events are a way of showcasing those people doing great things. The group discussed barriers and lessons learnt (e.g., years ago farmers were encouraged not to graze the hills and this management practice is now being encouraged).

22. Huwel mentioned coordinating with Farming Connect events as they are generally well attended. Farm businesses need to be viable and engaging with farmers around the economics is important. There are many issues and challenges with producing cattle such as TB, economic costs etc. The group discussed the challenges and opportunities for native breeds.

23. Sarah James, CLA mentioned the Rhos Pasture Restoration Project which is funded by Welsh Government. This project aims to restore biodiversity and raise the cultural value of rhes pastures with both landowners and communities, however, there are barriers to making it financially viable for landowners. Sarah offered to help John engage with CLA members by running events to promote knowledge transfer.

24. Angharad Evans, Wales YFC acknowledged that it was great to see conservation grazing included in some of the Natur am Byth projects and discussed some of the issues encountered by farmers, for example TB, reduction of suckler herds due to viability, supply chain challenges and the price to the consumer as well as the impact of the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations. The group discussed possible solutions such as educating the supermarkets and consumers.

25. Dennis acknowledged the importance of grazing hills to manage and maintain habitats. Dennis recalled the World Nature Event which also promoted grazing as a management tool and suggested that under grazing is worse than overgrazing. The PONT organisation also supported conservation grazing but unfortunately the organisation closed down earlier this year due to the current economic situation and

lack of long-term funding. Dennis suggested that there needs to be a conversation with Welsh Government and NRW about not taking agricultural land out of production for tree planting – perhaps there needs some further discussions around tree planting targets. John said conservation grazing is the only option for some species and habitats and he has been working with a consultant with knowledge of PONT and the work they have done. There are many barriers and financial viability is key. Dennis reminded the group that 30% of the land in Wales is tenanted and many tenancy agreements state that they ‘must make maximum use of the land’. Huwel mentioned that some tenancies are very short term and the number of years within the agreement would affect management practices. The group discussed opportunities for groups of farmers to team up on projects.

26. Elaine Harrison, Confor raised the challenge of climate change and asked how this will impact the viability of projects (e.g., future climate may not support the habitat and therefore the threatened species are unlikely to thrive). John said it is a challenge, but it is not the biggest threat, the sites generally need to be in better condition. This was one of the things which was raised when applying for funding – the habitat is there but it needs to be in a better position through management and restoration.
27. The group discussed the challenges around data capture and storage including ownership, custodianship, trust issues and willingness to share existing data. John mentioned that the data element of the programmes is complex due to the number of partners involved. However, it is an opportunity to set a new standard. In many cases, there is an army of volunteers and citizens willing to participate in data capture. Trust issues are not unique to Natur am Byth, but it is important to explore possible solutions, for example working with landowners and farmers who love the fact that they have these rare species and celebrating them as custodians. These people can be exemplified for their role in managing their sites so that species can thrive.
28. The group discussed the importance of early engagement, building trust, collaboration and learning from specific case studies for future initiatives (e.g., the Sustainable Farming Scheme).

AP September 01: John Clark to share a copy of the Natur am Byth presentation.

AP September 02: John Clark to work with the members of the WLMF as an opportunity to bring people together and look at positive actions for nature in Wales.

Item 4. Presentation: Designated Landscapes Programme

29. Keith Davies, NRW to provide an update on the Designated Landscapes Programme and progress of designating the new National Park following initial presentations to the WLMF in March 2022 and September 2023.
30. Keith reminded the group of the project which is assessing the case for a new National Park in NE Wales. NRW is the designating authority in Wales so is responsible for assessing the case for a new National Park. The timeline for this work is within the current Senedd term 2021-2026 (this is a statutory procedure).
31. The designation criteria include natural beauty and opportunities for outdoor recreation. The forces for change are:

- Economic, environmental, social and cultural trends
- Climate Change and Nature recovery
- Sustainable Management of Natural Resources

32. Keith explained the area of search (this is not a boundary) and the steps involved in the process. NRW is collating evidence, assessing the area, identifying special qualities, holding engagement events and looking at management options.
33. Keith described some of the challenges and concerns raised during the initial engagement period. Some of the key themes included landscape, recognition for the area, tranquillity, wildlife, agriculture and land management, environment and sustainability, tourism, public services and infrastructure, necessity for change, management and controls, costs, funding and bureaucracy, local people and communities and local economy.
34. An overview of the timeline was provided – a key milestone is the upcoming consultation period in Autumn 2024. After considering the consultation responses, NRW will present recommendations to Welsh Government and if there is sufficient evidence, submit a Designation Order. Welsh Ministers will then consider the recommendations and/or the Designation Order and confirm, refuse or vary the Order.
35. Keith provided an overview of the [Wales's New National Park Proposal](#) and mentioned that summary documents will be made available throughout the consultation period. Keith offered to attend a future WLMF meeting to discuss the next steps.

AP September 03: Keith Davies, NRW to attend a future WLMF meeting to provide an update on the new National Park Designation proposals.

36. Elaine asked whether National Parks are outdated and suggested that perhaps we should be looking at Wales as a whole. There are tree planting targets in Wales as well as a demand for timber so another National Park might be a barrier. Surely it would be better to come up with a Wales-wide land strategy which would incorporate timber, farming and land management and work in a more holistic way. Keith discussed logical sequencing and mentioned the Biodiversity Deep Dive and special land use planning. There are specific projects within the wider context.
37. Hedd asked about the consultation and whether there will be roadshows for farmers and the public to engage in the process. Hedd was aware of some concerns that farmers have. Keith said there are extensive roadshows planned across the area and within specific communities. There will be in-person events for farmers and land managers to attend so that key local voices are heard.
38. Rosie asked whether land and energy developments fit in to the context of the assessment. Keith said the area joins 3 of the area outlined in Future Wales suitable for renewable energy and the boundary might encroach this area. There could be issues around policy conflicts because the planning status has an equal priority of the new National Park designation – this would need further consideration.
39. Tim suggested that it is a done deal, and the consultation will not change the outcome and the new designation will be approved. This process has already taken 3 years. Tim wished that the NRW Board would use common sense when it comes to the decisions and takes their staff into consideration – there is no money or resource for this. Keith

reminded the group that the outcome cannot be predetermined, the process requires evidence which must be collated and considered. It is generally desirable, but all of the factors need to be carefully analysed. Funding is a matter for Welsh Government. NRW leads the advice and not at the expense of existing designations. Tim reminded the group that the proposed Cambrian Mountain did not go ahead as Wales could not afford it. Sarah James mentioned the collective approach and suggested that it is not too late for a national conversation (e.g., through the SFS). Farmers need to be a part of early discussions. The CLA are conducting a member questionnaire on their views.

40. The group discussed the location of the park, the location of renewable energy opportunities and the required largescale infrastructure.
41. Sarah James asked if there was going to be a National Park management review. Keith was not aware of a review. Rosie mentioned that this might be linked to discussions around the extent to which they might be better self-funding.
42. Elan mentioned concerns of FUW members around further bureaucracy, poor relationships, trust issues and likely challenges around current infrastructure (e.g., additional traffic, new car parks, toilets etc.) – many areas can't cope with the current number of tourists. FUW members are not against tourists but have raised the need for better education for those visiting rural Wales (e.g., abiding by the Countryside Code, increased incidents of dog worrying etc.). Elan questioned whether the SFS will align with other ambitions like the designation of a new National Park. Keith said these are all common themes which have been highlighted through previous engagement, the project needs to demonstrate how these can be addressed, for example best practice examples from elsewhere in Wales and understanding and managing pressures. Huwel suggested that social media plays a big role in visitor footfall (e.g., waterfall country). The conflict of people versus landscape needs to be sensitively managed. Keith mentioned the principle that if the second element damages the first, then the first is the priority. Keith mentioned some possible solutions such as management plans. Hedd suggested that there should be an important emphasis on those who live and work in the proposed National Park area.
43. Dennis recalled a meeting he attended where there was 100% opposition to the designation proposals. The main concerns were around additional restrictions on what they can/cannot do and access. Dennis mentioned that farmers are struggling to comply with the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations as it is, without additional restrictions on planning permissions.
44. Rhys said there are an important few months ahead for the proposals and encouraged the group to respond to and share the consultation when it is launched in the Autumn.

AP September 04: Keith Davies, NRW to share a copy of the presentation on the National Park Designation process.

Item 5. Discussion: Halting and reversing the loss of nature by 2030

45. The group were significantly behind schedule; therefore, this item was withdrawn from the agenda.

Item 6. NRW Case for Change

46. Ruth Jenkins, NRW provided a verbal update on the NRW Case for Change. The internal consultation with Trade Unions closes on 13th September 2024. Further information is available here - [NRW: Case for Change](#).

Item 7. NRW Updates

47. Prior to the meeting, the WLMF Update Paper was circulated. Members are encouraged to review the document beforehand and come to the meeting with questions. Rhys acknowledged that a lot of time goes into producing the WLMF Update Paper and thanked those who have contributed.

48. Bronwen mentioned that the NRW Forum Review will include a stakeholder survey for members to complete. The survey is in the process of being finalised and will be published using Citizen Space. A private link to the survey will be circulated to members so that they can engage with the process.

49. No further comments were made in respect of the written NRW updates.

Item 8. Updates from FUW / NFU Cymru / Wales YFC / Confor / CLA / TFA / Welsh Government

50. **FUW:** Elan said FUW have recently been meeting with new MPs. It was a busy summer with the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show and various county shows. FUW are also engaging in the development of the final SFS.

51. **NFU Cymru:** Hedd said NFU Cymru have also had a busy summer with the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show and various county shows. It is challenging times for the development of the SFS, but NFU Cymru are actively involved in the stakeholder groups. Hedd asked if there was an update on the situation around the release of beaver in the Dyfi?

AP September 05: Ruth Jenkins to follow up with colleagues regarding the release of beaver in the Dyfi and feedback to the WLMF.

Hedd mentioned Internal Drainage Districts (IDDs) and the lack of maintenance and dredging is causing issues for NFU Cymru members. Huwel provided a brief update and said that this area of the organisation is carrying vacancies which cannot currently be recruited for due to the Case for Change. We are however, looking into exceptions for recruitment. Rosie suggested that the Flood Committee would be interested in hearing this feedback.

AP September 06: Huwel Manley, NRW to alert the Flood Committee to the feedback from Hedd Pugh, NFU Cymru around the impact of IDDs.

The NFU Cymru Sustainable Farming Conference will be held on 12th September in Rhayader.

52. **Wales YFC:** Angharad Davies mentioned that YFC members have been busy competing over the summer. Many of them competed or attended the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show. The Wales YFC AGM is coming up and a new Chair will be

assigned. Wales YCF continue to work closely with FUW and NFU Cymru, particularly regarding the SFS.

53. **Confor:** Elaine mentioned that Confor had a successful time at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show. The forestry section was very busy with seminars, talks and meetings. Elaine said the planting numbers in Wales are well below targets and Confor have been working with Welsh Government to suggest solutions. One of the issues is around finding suitable land to plant.

Confor have also been engaging with the development of the SFS and are sitting on 3 panels. There is a Welsh Timber Industry Strategy consultation in December.

Confor would welcome a future discussion with NRW and Welsh Government on the management of grey squirrel and deer management – we currently do not have the facilities to process deer commercially in Wales. Elaine mentioned that a review on EPS would be welcomed. Huwel suggested that it would be important to also include BASC in discussions around deer management. Tim mentioned the differences in England where there are grants available to help manage grey squirrel and deer.

Elaine mentioned there is a concern around NRW restocking – this is relied on by mills. If trees are not restocked, then it will have a knock-on impact down the line.

The group discussed possible topics for the December WLMF meeting with a ‘tree/woodland’ theme. Rhys and Ruth discussed the possible opportunity to combine the WLMF meeting with the Forestry Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) meeting. It was suggested that another in-person meeting could be possible be considered given the topic will likely lead to in-depth discussions.

AP September 07: Rhys Jones and Ruth Jenkins to discuss and agree an approach to the WLMF meeting in December (e.g., a joint meeting with Forestry RAC).

54. **CLA:** Sarah Jones mentioned the CLA are participating in the Carbon Sequestration Roundtable meetings. CLA have set up ‘Waterwise’ to engage with their members in the Usk Catchment – there are NRW representatives on this including 4RiversforLIFE. A meeting and farm walk is planned, and they are setting up a task force to look at barriers, issues and solutions.

CLA are also working with members on the new inheritance tax and land tax rules (e.g., landowners releasing land for houses, trees etc).

55. **TFA Cymru:** Dennis Matheson said TFA Cymru have been working with Welsh Government on the development of the SFS and how tenants can access the scheme. TFA have been helping to suggest changes to the universal actions which will allow tenants to participate – this work is ongoing.

Dennis raised the disparity of Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations and the difference in approach between NRW and RPW. Welsh Government have been made aware of the issues. Dennis mentioned a case study where a Powys County Council (PCC) agreed to put in a new slurry store for their tenant farmer with the support of NRW officers – this was very positive. However, it has now led to a review of the PCC farms and the future of these 144 farms is now unknown (there is no succession with PCC farms) but there is a meeting next week. Huwel was aware that the NRW Control

of Agricultural Pollution Team has met with some councils and Local Authorities. Dennis said the councils are not reinvesting money into these farms.

56. **Welsh Government:** A representative was not present.

AP September 08: Rhys Jones and Ruth Jenkins to discuss Welsh Government attendance at WLMF meetings.

Item 9. Any Other Business

57. The next meeting will be held on 9th December 2024 and will have a forestry/woodland theme – Bronwen is currently exploring a possible presentation on the National Forest for Wales and woodland creation discussion.

58. Rhys reminded the group that their participation in the forum is vital and that they should put forward potential agenda items and discussion topics.

59. The group were pleased with the in-person meeting and discussed the benefits of being in a room.

60. No other business was raised.

Close meeting