

Information Note:

Peatland Management for Crofters, Farmers, and Land Managers



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Restoring Peatlands

With COP26 concluded, and increasing international scrutiny on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the UK's agricultural sector, crofters, farmers, and land managers may be looking for ways to reduce their carbon footprint and diversify their business.

Historically considered waste land, peatlands have been drained, burned, and planted with commercial forests. However, the environmental benefits of these sensitive ecosystems are being increasingly recognized. Government regulations and financial support are in place to halt further damage, and to restore peatlands

If peatlands form part of your land holdings, you'll want to be aware of the risk and opportunities they represent. Recent developments in government funding and carbon markets may present an opportunity to restore damaged landscapes and generate income.



Healthy Peatlands:

- ✓ Sequester CO₂ from the atmosphere
- ✓ Protect water quality
- ✓ Support biodiversity

Degraded Peatlands:

- × Are a GHG source (releasing between 3 and 30 tCO₂e per hectare per year)
- × Are a source of dissolved organic carbon and sediment in surface water
- × Can be a physical hazard to humans and livestock through open ditches, unstable slopes, and eroded hags

What are Peatlands?

- Waterlogged, wetland landscapes, often defined by peat > 50 cm deep
- When saturated, organic matter accumulates faster than it can decompose
- Forming 100 cm of peat can take over 1,000 years
- Over 3,000 million tonnes of carbon are stored in UK peatlands



Scottish Government
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For more information about peatlands and farm biodiversity, see the FAS website www.fas.scot

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What is Peatland Restoration?

Hydrology is central to peatland formation, and is also a primary component of peatland restoration. A peatland restoration plan will identify which areas of peat are most degraded and affected by drainage and active erosion. Blocking ditches raises the water table, and can allow moss to form. Given time, ongoing monitoring, and the right conditions, peatlands can return to sequestering carbon. Restoration efforts can also include re-profiling eroded hags and slopes, and covering bare peat with live peat turves.

To aid these efforts, the Scottish Government has announced £22 million available for peatland restoration in the 2021-2022 budget. Over 10 years, £250 million will be spent with the goal of starting restoration of over 20,000 hectares in Scotland.

Carbon credits can be generated by initially reducing the greenhouse gases (GHGs) emitted from damaged land, then from CO₂ sequestered by a functioning peatland ecosystem.

The carbon market is still relatively new, and is developing rapidly. Land managers are advised to thoroughly research their options before entering into a carbon credit scheme with private investors; once sold they are lost to your business.

Additionally, you may consider joining with adjacent landholders to create a larger, single restoration project area. The larger project footprint could lead to reduced individual expense and be more attractive to funding groups and investors.

- Check out NatureScots' **Peatland Action** for funding opportunities. They can provide direction and financial support for early stages of a project, including a feasibility study, and connections to other resources.
- Check out IUCN UK's **Peatland Code**. This is a voluntary project registration that helps managers bring the benefits of peatland restoration to the market in the form of verified carbon credits.
- Check out **Agri-Environment Scheme (AECS)**. If your peatland falls within a designated site such as SSSI, SAC, or SPA, you may be eligible for capital payments on works such as ditch blocking and or hag re-profiling.

Further Reading

- fas.scot, "Protecting Scotland's Peatlands" webpage
- Peatland Action (NatureScot)
- Peatland Code (IUCN UK)
- Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS)
- National Development Plan for Crofters (Scottish Government)
- Scotland's National Peatland Plan (NatureScot)

What can you do?

- ✓ Know what you have: survey existing peatlands
- ✓ Stop further damage: avoid draining or burning peatlands, and phase out use of horticultural peat
- ✓ Plan ahead: is peatland restoration project is right for your land?



Key Points

- Peatland restoration and protection is an integral part of the UK's climate strategy
- Healthy peatlands provide a wide range of environmental benefits
- Consider peatland restoration and climate schemes as part of your business strategy



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