The State of UK Peatlands

JNCC Soils, Uplands and Lowland Wetlands Lead Coordination Networks

Matthew Shepherd*, Patricia Bruneau†, Sally Johnson†, Peter Jones‡, Richard Weyl§, Alex Higgins§

*Natural England, †Scottish Natural Heritage, ‡Countryside Council for Wales, § Department of the Environment – Northern Ireland, ¶ Agri-food and Biosciences Institute.
UK Peatlands
Peatlands in Scotland

- Has largest area of peatlands
- Extensive mapping of peat soil and peat depth – some eroded
- Less extensive data on management, vegetation cover or peat condition.
- Muirburn and drainage are locally significant.
Peatlands in England

• England’s Peatlands - Natural England

• Blanket peatlands semi-natural, but affected by burning, gripping and peat erosion.

• Shallow peat used for forestry and improved grassland

• Lowland peat drained for agricultural improvement / cultivation
Peatlands in Wales

- Phase 1 survey data – indicates land cover but not management
- Shows large semi-natural areas, and some active bog
- Also large areas dominated by Purple Moor-grass and forestry

Peat Mapping adapted from ECOSSE programme, and Phase 1 Habitat Survey of Wales
Peatlands in Northern Ireland

- Information from NI Peatland Survey and LCM 2000
- Much S-N and some large active peatlands
- Peat cutting, drainage and erosion extensive.

Peat Mapping from Northern Ireland Soils Map, Northern Ireland Peatland Survey and Landcover Map 2000, provided by AFBNI
Issues

• What does “peatland” mean?
• Peat mapping is based on different definitions of peat (depth/%OM) – no match at borders
• Lack of common framework to describe peatland land cover, management and condition of peat mass.
• Better peat depth map – for location and C storage etc.
• More land use/cover data needs collating in some UK countries.
Conclusions

• Peatlands should be viewed on basis of peat soils, regardless of vegetation – understanding of ecosystem services and restoration potential

• Surface layer depth and %OM are unifying features – use in future peat surveys - explore remote sensing

• State of UK peatlands – mapped areas show burning, drainage, erosion, peat cutting, cultivation, forestry – most semi-natural.

• More map data needed to understand land cover and management for some UK countries

• State of our peatlands impacts on their functions – underpins the case improved peatland management and restoration.
Thank you

Questions?