





The Hummock's and Hollows  
of Communication  
The Forsinard Flows Experience  
Norrie Russell



**Black and brown ducks in a peat bog.  
Cinderella (well maybe Cinders) in a Cinderella Habitat?**



**Or rare common scoter ducks threatened by climate change floating in shimmering lochans, pearls of water rolling off their black velvet backs?**

*Sphagnum fuscum* hummock doing well after 15 years of being patted by hundreds of hands a year. Don't be too precious about getting people out there?





## What's in a name?

Changing attitudes and perceptions (and people).

15 years ago: councillors-  
“You can call it the Flow's but not the Flow Country, the media called it that in the 80's”  
RSPB/SNH - “OK we'll call it the Peatland's”


5 years ago councillors-  
“Why do you call it the peatlands. Why don't you call it the Flow Country, the world knows it that?”



## Understanding the history.

Well maybe not as strange a history as some!

- Planting of forestry in the Flows. Often cited as one of the great conservation debates in the UK and still used as a case study at universities.
- Highland (and rural) communities generally are generous and welcoming
- People are judged not so much on what they say as how they behave and what they do
- But get something wrong and people have very long memories and an impressive communication network

An aerial photograph of a vast, arid landscape. The terrain is a mix of brown and tan hues, with numerous small, irregular water bodies and larger, more defined lakes scattered across the surface. A prominent, winding river or channel cuts through the lower portion of the image. The overall impression is one of a remote, windswept, and potentially hostile environment.

Remote, windswept and hostile environment  
So why did 70,000 RSPB members support the  
most successful RSPB purchase appeal even  
when they would probably never even visit it?

For the same reason they would support the saving of  
wild places such as the rainforests of Sumatra, deserts or  
the Antarctic. Where knowing that they still exist, are  
healthy and supporting wildlife enhancing all our lives.



## Early Challenges in the Flows

- In the 1980's RSPB and NCC campaigned to prevent further planting of forestry in the core of the Flow Country
- RSPB had over 100 reserves in the UK but none in Caithness & Sutherland
- Headquarters was in Bedfordshire. Perceived as remote and probably from another planet.
- Forest lobby promised hundreds of jobs and a wood processing industry
- Therefore RSPB were perceived as anti jobs and development
- Forestry was eventually halted by convincing the exchequer of the lack of economic case, as much as the conservation argument that a globally rare habitat
- But in a fragile economy with the lowest population density in Western Europe even one job is seen as valuable. 'No money in birds or bogs'



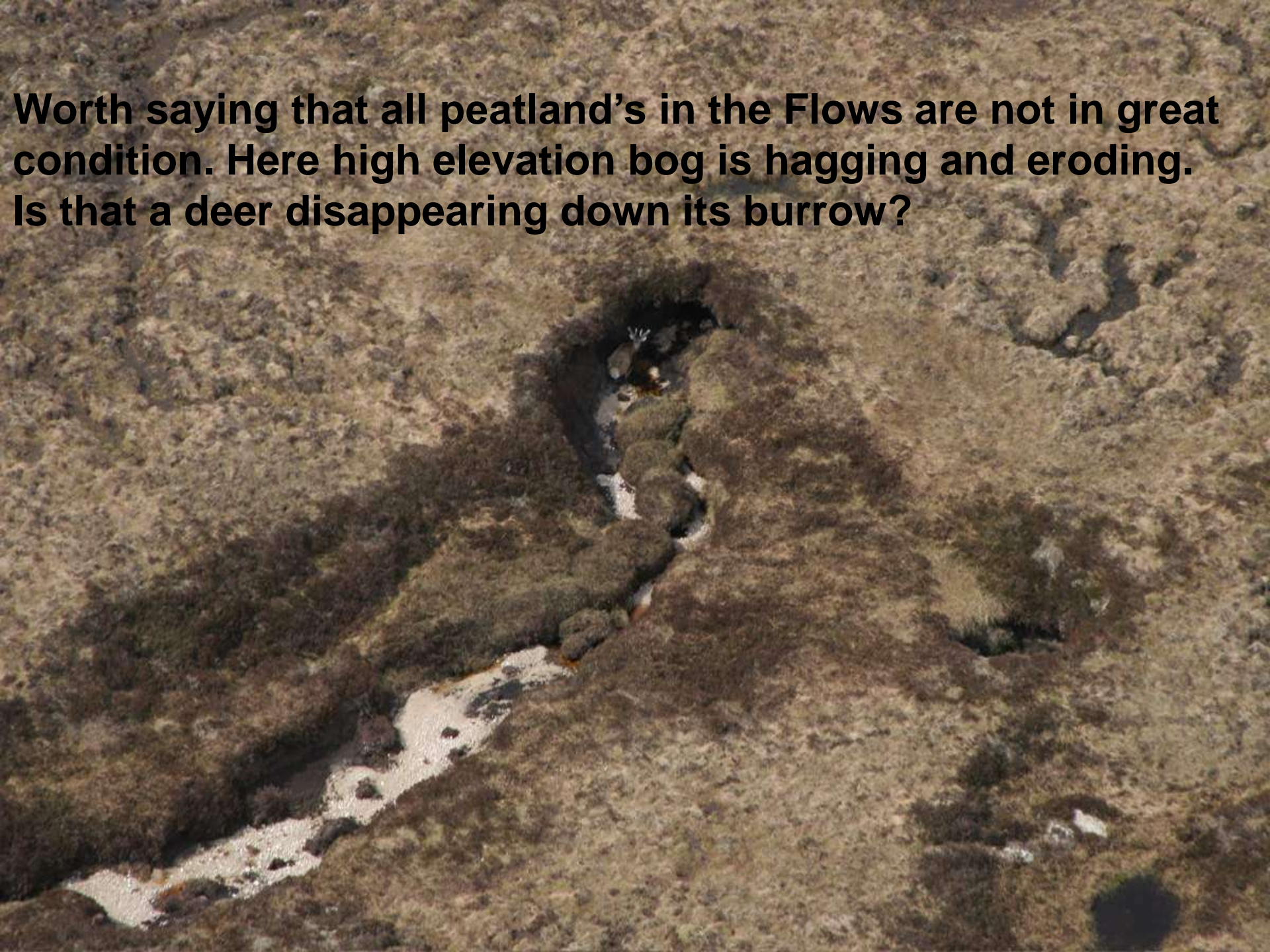
## Two Life Nature Projects based around Forsinard :

- Original Purchase of Forsinard in 1995 supported by EU Life Nature Fund as part of a 3 year project
- Main aims of Life I: to trial bog restoration across the Flows on private land as well as development of Forsinard. Partners – RSPB, SNH, FCS, Enterprise Company
- Managed by Pat Thompson, Neil Wilkie, Norrie Russell, Meg Telfer
- Second Life Project 2002 to 2006 an implementation phase for restoration. Partners – RSPB, SNH, FCS, Plantlife. Managed Neil Wilkie



**Pristine?**

**Worth saying that all peatland's in the Flows are not in great condition. Here high elevation bog is haggling and eroding. Is that a deer disappearing down its burrow?**









**Red deer – potential threat  
or essential part of a natural  
functioning peatland?**





Healthy otter population and salmon river running from reserve have had increased catches over last 5 years. This year 4x their average salmon catch So all our drain blocking and forest felling isn't doing any harm at the very least.



Community Involvement:  
Community council, hall committee,  
running events, even getting married!



Like the deer and eagles we  
are there all year round. Not  
summer vagrants or 'blow ins'



- New faces in the community
- Their enthusiasm shows clear value from outside world
- Mustn't be seen as replacing local jobs



Some of the transitional stages of restoring forestry to bog may not be intrinsically attractive to the eye. But to a neighbouring estate keeper their attraction and benefit to red deer are plain to see.



# Welcome to Forsinard Flows



The Flows National Nature Reserve



THE DUBH LOCHAN  
TRAIL

Hen harrier cctv nest from 2010. In one of heavy brash areas felled 4 years ago. Average of 12 pairs on Forsinard Flows.





Fun Days and schools,  
naming golden eagle  
chicks fitted with satellite  
transmitters with Roy  
Dennis



Working with local schools  
Here planting Dwarf Birch on a bog.  
A great opportunity to explain why  
some trees good, some bad for bogs.





**International visitors make clear the importance of the bogs which local communities have grown up with and often take for granted**

Celebrity never Hurts!



Serious research discussions  
about Carbon dynamics





**Local Contractors**

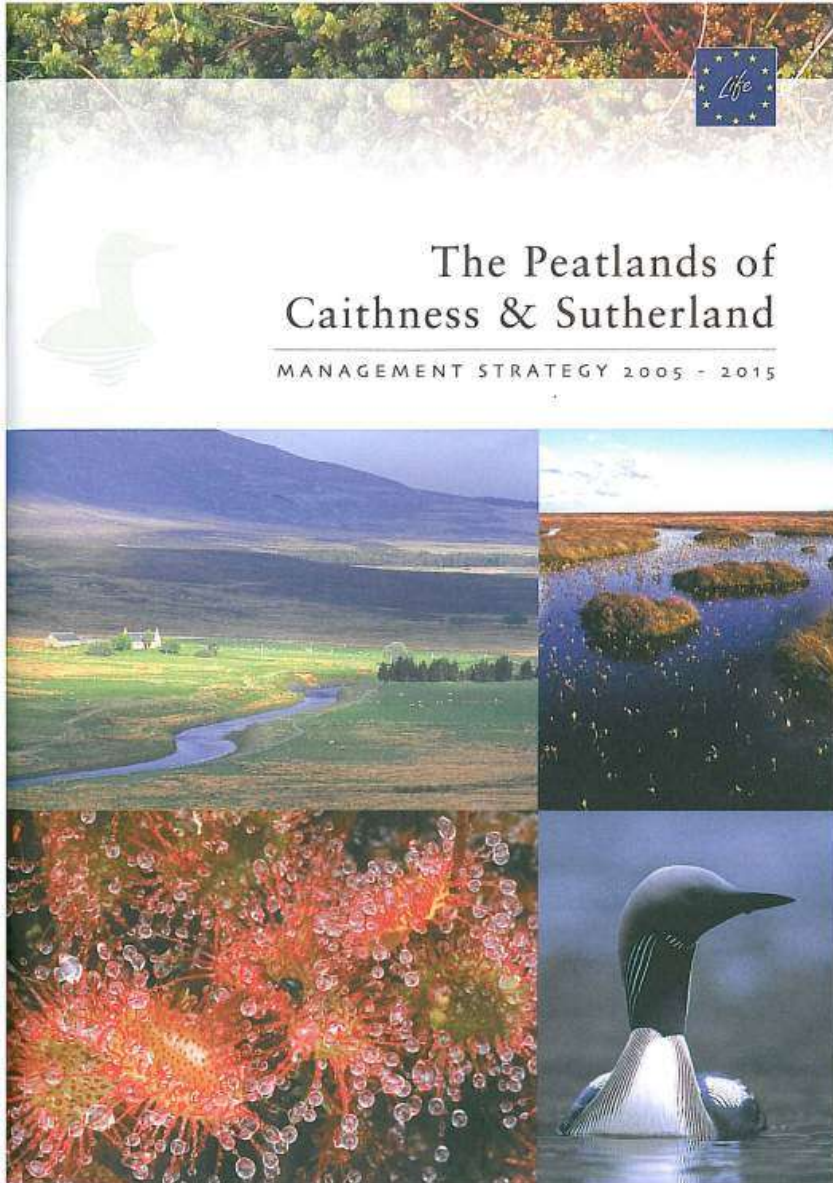




## **Key Awareness & Attitude actions 1995 to 2010:**

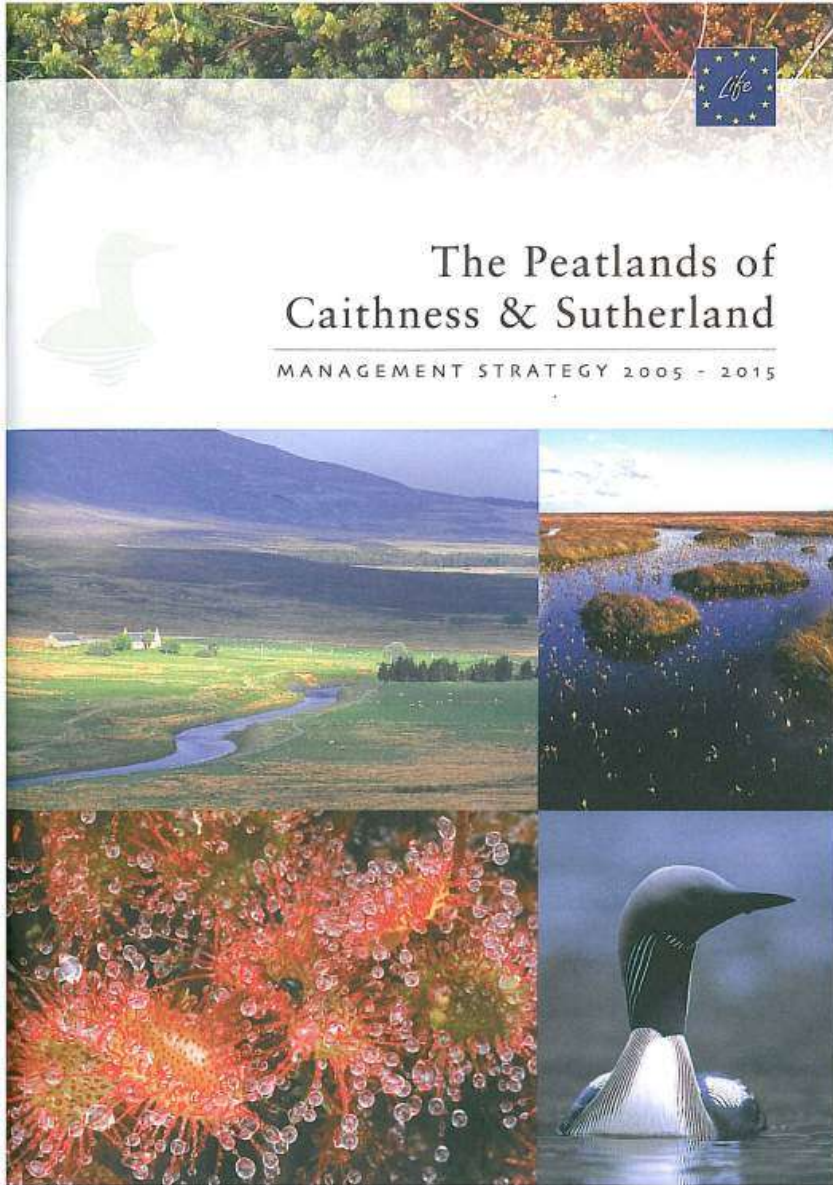
- Events like Burn's night in Melvich
- Increasing direct employment of staff and local contractors across the three estates from 5 to 16 FT job equivalents
- Creating additional 5FT job equivalents in local tourism sector plus maintaining local hotel and fishing, stalking employment
- Forsinard became a National Nature Reserve in 2007 and visitor facilities upgraded
- Outdoor classroom created on Dubh Lochan Trail in 2008
- 4 mile Forsinain Trail created jointly with FCS under Peatland Partnership





## Life Projects – Main Awareness Outputs:

- Awareness & Attitudes Survey, Janet Bromham – All key stakeholders from MP's to neighbouring crofters and estates consulted. Repeated in second project. Demonstrated improvement between the two projects
- Visitors to Forsinard Survey 1997 - £187k into local economy p.a. Important information which convinced local politicians of the value of the reserve.
- Peatlands Chest – Schools educational materials
- Field teaching set up at Forsinard including free train travel to reserve, 600 kids in first year. Small scale but most of schools in two counties!
- Touring guide to peatlands for visitors
- Forsinard Visitor Centre
- Building of the Dubh Lochan Trail 1997 – still best bit of visitor experience at Forsinard 13 years on virtually maintenance free
- Hen harrier live nest cctv 1997



## Life Projects – Main Awareness Outputs:

- Consultation over and production of the Management Strategy for the Peatlands of Caithness & Sutherland 2005-2015
- Postcard pack to every home in both counties.
- Public consultation over the setting up of the Peatland Partnership in 2006 Meeting with over 100 local people and agencies

# **The Peatlands -A Brighter Future**

## **Local Conference Thurso 2006**

- Opening address and conference overview - Rhona Brankin MSP, then Deputy Environment Minister
- The World Class Peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland (Susan Davies, Scottish Natural Heritage)
- The Peatlands: an international perspective - Richard Lindsay (Univ East London)
- Peatlands Management Strategy – Caroline Eccles (SNH)
- Tourism in the Peatlands - Professor John Lennon, (The Moffat Centre)
- The Flows: the case for World Heritage -Michael Scott (Plantlife International)
- Communities and Partnerships (Chair: Cllr David Flear, The Highland Council)
- North Sutherland Community Forest Trust (Sandy Murray), and Sunart Oakwood Initiative

An aerial photograph showing a vast, flat landscape. A large, irregularly shaped pool of bright blue water is the central focus, surrounded by a wide expanse of brown, muddy ground. In the background and foreground, there are dense, dark green forested areas. The scene appears to be a flooded forest or a wetland area, possibly after a heavy rain or a controlled flood. The text is overlaid on the lower part of the image.

The value of images. Some become Iconic and their value can never be underestimated.



# Bog Habitat Condition— eg Sphagnum Frequency Baseline 2002-05, repeated 2008



Percentage of sphagnum species

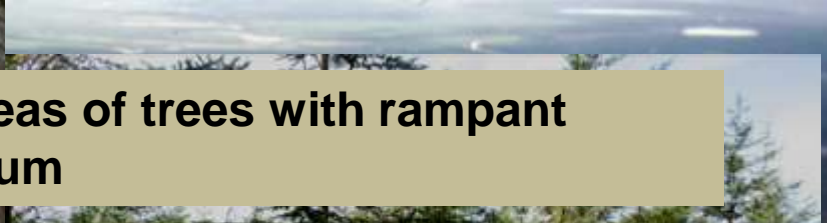
- 80 to 100
- 60 to 80
- 40 to 60
- 20 to 40
- 0 to 20

□ RSPB reserve boundary

**Better gown areas  
with little ground flora  
left**



**Poor areas of trees with rampant  
sphagnum**



**Second rotation forestry on  
deep peat**

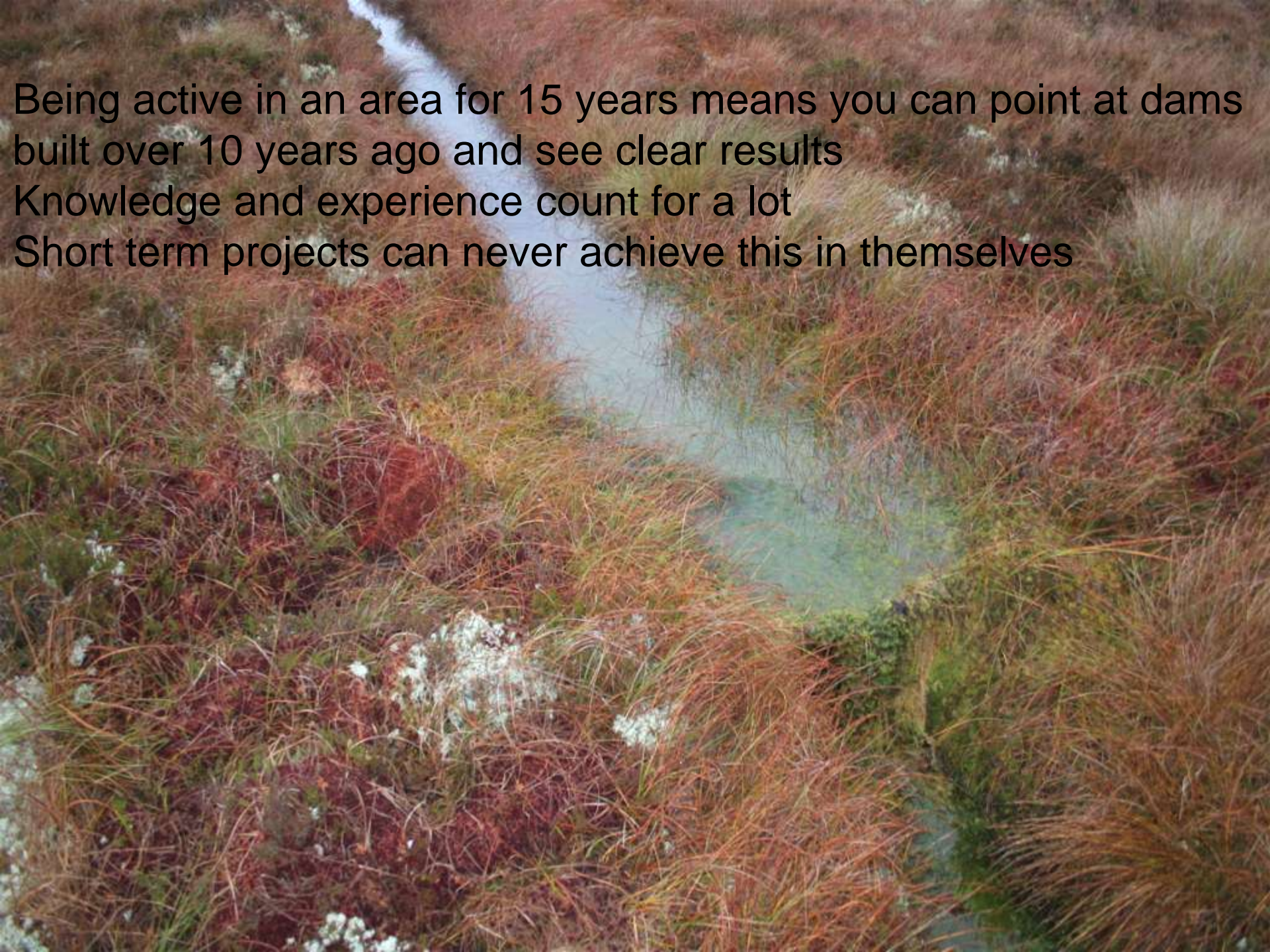


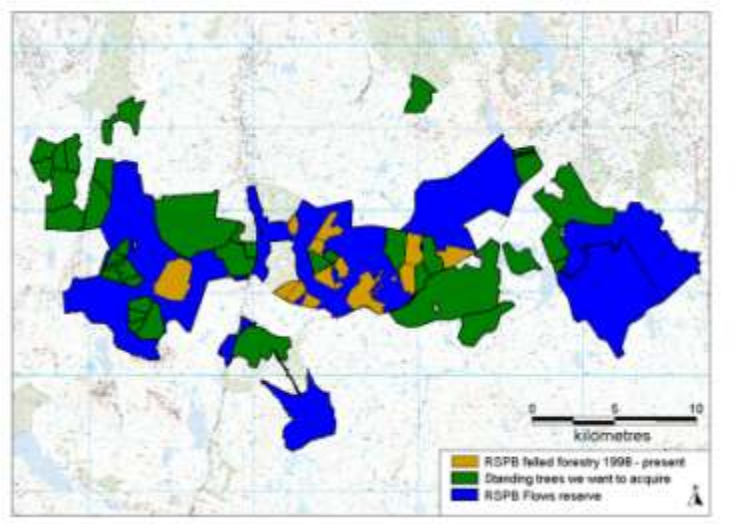
**10 year older trees in area winblown**





Being active in an area for 15 years means you can point at dams  
built over 10 years ago and see clear results  
Knowledge and experience count for a lot  
Short term projects can never achieve this in themselves





Train >



**Remember – The Ball is where you should be!**