

Peatlands: Investing in the Future - Forewords



Stuart Brooks

**Chair, IUCN UK National Committee
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With such a rich natural and cultural peatland heritage I am delighted that we are in Northern Ireland for what is the ninth such gathering of the IUCN UK Peatland Programme. In fact this conference marks the tenth year of our Programme which has already done so much to raise awareness and progress the issue of peatland conservation at home and abroad.

Efforts on the international front received a major boost earlier this year with global endorsement of the resolution for the “Conservation and Sustainable Management of Peatlands” at the United Nations Environmental Assembly in March. Building on the IUCN resolution put forward through this Programme and endorsed at the IUCN World Congress in 2016 this new global commitment puts emphasis on the role that peatlands play in the effort to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Our conference this year will be looking towards 2020 when world leaders will be agreeing strategies and targets to reverse the loss of biodiversity. Peatlands, the ultimate integrated nature based solution, must feature strongly. Cinderella’s time has come.

One of the objectives and pleasures of our annual gatherings is the opportunity to connect with colleagues working across all areas of peatland science, policy and practise. Enjoy your discussions over dinner, in the field, in conference discussions and at the bar. I hope they spawn new ideas to propel our community and the cause of Peatlands forward to realise our collective ambitions.



Helen Anderson

**Director of Natural Environment
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Environment Agency (NIEA),
DAERA**

On behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, I’m delighted to welcome delegates from across the UK and further afield to the 9th IUCN UK Peatland Programme Conference which is being held for the first time in Northern Ireland.

Peatlands are among the most valuable ecosystems on earth and here in Northern Ireland, we have an extensive resource of Blanket Bogs, Lowland Raised Bogs and Fens, covering approximately 12% of the land area here. Unfortunately, the majority of these habitats have been degraded by both past and current practices and this is something that we are determined to tackle, given the many benefits which can be realised through the restoration of our peatlands to active, fully functioning ecosystems.

Last year, the IUCN UK Peatland Programme published the UK’s first collaborative Peatland Strategy which identifies a common way forward for us all in safeguarding this important part of our natural environment. We, like other regions, are committed to playing our role in delivering the Strategy’s objectives.

We are currently working on our own Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy, which will guide the future direction of the Department and our partners. In recognition of the multiple benefits provided by healthy peatlands, we intend to work closely with our farmers and land managers, our NGO’s, other government bodies and the public to ensure that our peatlands are being conserved and restored and that everyone appreciates how important they are – for their unique biodiversity, for clean water, for flood alleviation, for carbon storage and sequestration to combat climate change, for recreation and as a repository of evidence of our past history.

The theme of this year’s conference is “Investing in the Future” and we are all aware that investing in our peatlands now is vitally important to secure the valuable ecosystems services they can provide for future generations. To achieve this, we must have a shared agenda, secure funding, effective partnerships, and the right knowledge and skills. This conference and the networking opportunities it affords will help us achieve that.

I hope you all enjoy the conference and your visit to Northern Ireland and that you leave more inspired than ever to safeguard our precious peatlands.