

Case Study

Cambrian Mountains – landscape and ecosystems

A public dialogue on Payment for Ecosystem Services

Vital statistics

Commissioning body:

Countryside Council for Wales
(Natural Resources Wales since April 2013), on behalf of the Cambrian Mountains Initiative

Duration of process:

5 months: November - March 2013

Number of people involved:

45 people at seven different events
(30 from communities and 15 farmers).

Number of stakeholders involved:

19 at Expert Stakeholder Workshop

Cost of project:

£45,600 total, Sciencewise funding
= £21,000

In the UK, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has adopted an ecosystems approach to guide policy development, with a particular focus on ensuring that the value of ecosystem services is fully reflected in policy and decision-making. Within the Welsh Government, ecosystem services have been a feature of the 2012 Natural Environment Framework Green Paper.

This dialogue project built on an earlier project also supported by Sciencewise and considered the views and perceptions of farmers, other stakeholders and the general public on payment for ecosystem services. This is important as some of these services may be considered 'intangible' or taken for granted.

The project design, delivery and evaluation were completed very quickly and on a relatively small budget. Nevertheless, the project managed to reach and work with a wide range of public and stakeholder participants and to provide valuable information to feed into policy development. The project also worked with members of the public within specific geographical communities, specific groups within communities (e.g. farmers), and numerous relevant stakeholders, all of whom were likely to be affected by policy developments in different ways, creating a robust evidence base.

Policy maker view

“The project has provided clarity in terms of the vision of what we want to do going forward – and given us the direction we needed in order to trial the delivery of Payment for Ecosystem Services on the ground.”

Natural Resources Wales.

Influence on policy and policy makers

The Welsh Government acknowledges that the project informed thinking on the Environment (Wales) Bill, which is expected to be introduced in 2015. The White Paper on the Bill identifies innovative approaches that could be used as opportunities to deliver integrated natural resource management. These include trials of new approaches to water catchment trading schemes, which was identified in the dialogue as a potential way forward.

In addition, Natural Resources Wales has continued to work with one group of farmers that came together through the project to scope what they can do to gain ecosystem benefits. This group has gone on to take the work forward themselves, including bidding for funds – to manage the water catchment differently – from a new

Welsh Government funding scheme on ecosystem services.

“One of the principal benefits to the organisation arising from the dialogue was that it provided kindling for the fire – in the sense that we are in a much greater dialogue with stakeholders now.”

Natural Resources Wales.

Natural Resources Wales has also developed a different way of doing things as a result of the project, working much more closely with stakeholders and people on the ground, and going beyond working in 'silos'. The project provided a direction for what was needed to deliver the policy in terms of what was needed on the ground.



Background

Landscapes are dynamic systems that have always changed in response to physical processes and human intervention. The competing pressures on the landscape point to the need to carefully plan and manage landscape change to deliver a range of environmental and social outcomes.

The ecosystems approach was originally introduced by the international Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at the Earth Summit in 1992. The ecosystems approach is seen as a way in which the overall health or integrity of ecosystems can be assessed and the multiple benefits derived from them (goods and services) better described and managed. EGS are the resources and processes that ecosystems provide for human wellbeing.

This dialogue project was designed to build on the earlier Ecosystems and Landscapes dialogue project, also co-funded by Sciencewise. That first dialogue project sought to engage a range of community and land management stakeholders around ecosystem futures in the East of the England, Scotland and the Cambrian Mountains in Wales. One of the key findings from this dialogue was the need to accommodate 'societal' values in discussions about trading off competing land uses.

The Cambrian Mountains Initiative (CMI) was set up in 2007 as a sustainable development pilot in the Cambrian Mountains. It is a partnership of local authorities, the Welsh Government, other public bodies, charities and private and voluntary organisations. In 2010, the CMI created a discussion tool to map locations where climate change mitigation measures, such as tree planting, could be effectively undertaken after taking into account existing (and possibly competing) land uses. CMI also looked at the potential additional value that could be gained from enhanced land use and management in the Cambrian Mountains, concluding that the potential value of this work was around £8.3 million per year. Investigations of potential PES schemes concluded that further work was needed to understand the nature of the constraints on the development of a PES approach – the physical constraints, regulatory constraints and, specifically for a future dialogue project, the conceptual constraints affecting take up of an EGS approach. This required consideration of farmer/landowner perceptions, corporate caution and the perceptions of the general public to pay for 'intangible' services they tend to take for granted.

Key messages from the participants

The project generated simple quantitative measures and more in-depth qualitative assessments to describe the perceptions of different groups, including the public, of the four ecosystem goods and services (EGS) included in the study – food from farming, drinking water, flood control and climate regulation – and the potential for Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) systems.

There was agreement, in principle, by all sectors participating in this project that PES should be developed. More technical work was needed to inform and add context to further dialogue aimed at developing favoured PES mechanisms. There was significant interest and buy-in from the public and farming communities for identifying ways of covering the costs of protecting natural

systems so that they can continue to provide the conditions for life to flourish. Any future dialogue should also include other key stakeholders who did not take part in this study such as the water, utilities and insurance industries, and planners.

“EGS will be about the future of farming and land management; this will become more apparent as markets develop and I can guarantee that farmers will be the first ones knocking on the door to say, I want a bit of that.”

Young Farmers' Club representative.

All participants were keen to see the results of the project being widely disseminated. There was also a strong desire across all sectors to use and build on the findings of this dialogue process to deliberate, develop and agree practical next steps to provide better outcomes for EGS and to devise equitable PES systems. All stakeholder groups support further dialogue over the issues raised by this project. People were also keen to explore what an ecosystems approach would look like in practice, initially through pilot projects. These could build on the relationships developed through this project.

One participant in the Shrewsbury workshop said that involving members of the public in this kind of dialogue is “as important a use of citizens’ time as jury service”.

The most unexpected insight gained from the project was the degree to which all stakeholders felt they had little influence over the development of EGS approaches and PES. Potential keys to unlocking PES related to trust and efficiency. Members of the public generally required proof that any monies they might contribute towards PES systems are used effectively and transparently for environmental resilience and enhancement.

Water quality, closely followed by the related issue of flood control, was the EGS seen to have the greatest potential to stimulate productive and innovative debate between consumers, land managers and policy makers/regulators, and most likely to lead to proposals for a new PES. This could be based on one or more of the river catchments originating in the Cambrian Mountains.

The dialogue activities

The aim of the dialogue project was to undertake a wide ranging discussion that would seek to understand the obstacles in the way of the development of Payment for Ecosystem Service (PES) schemes or similar market instruments in the Cambrians, and through understanding the nature of those constraints, suggest ways to overcome them and change to a more balanced and sustainable rural economy. The key objectives were to deliver a public dialogue project that:

- Informed and secured understanding and buy-in to the suggested ecosystems approach of the Natural Environment Framework/Living Wales, through the development of a number of Ecosystems Goods and Service (EGS) proposals for the Cambrian Mountains
- Gained an understanding of the public perception to the EGS proposals, both within and without the study area, and how the challenges and opportunities of the ecosystems approach are linked to external social and economic factors
- Developed a visual representation of the interconnectivity of stakeholder perception in regard to EGS opportunities that can inform/influence the development of policy designed to deliver the ecosystems approach
- Created discussion around the potential incentives/market mechanisms required to deliver an EGS approach to land management in the Cambrian Mountains.

The focus for the work was to explore the attitudes and perceptions among upland farmers, members of the local community embedded in their landscape, downstream consumers of ecosystems services and experts who influence the policies around farming and habitat management.

The project activities included on-street surveys, and small workshops with communities, farmers and graziers, and land management experts, involving a total of 64 public and stakeholder participants. In more detail, the activities were:

• Surveys

On street surveys of 179 people both in distant / downstream communities (in Monmouth and Shrewsbury) and in local Cambrian Mountain communities). The surveys were designed to gather data on general attitudes towards the value people ascribe to nature’s contribution to our lives, to raise awareness of the study and the CMI and, primarily, to recruit a wide cross section of participants to subsequent workshops. Focussing some of the survey questions on the locally relevant theme of flooding was intended to capture people’s interest

• Workshops with communities and farmers

- Two, evening, deliberative workshops of 2.25 hours were held with the distant/downstream communities – Monmouth (attended by six people) and Shrewsbury (five people)
- Three, evening, deliberative workshops of 2.25 hours were held with the local Cambrian Mountain communities – Rhayader (six people), Llanyddyfri (six people) and Talybont (seven people)
- Two, small-group workshops with farmers and graziers of the Cambrian Mountains – Llanyddyfri (seven National Trust tenants and graziers) and Talybont (eight CMI Future Farmers Group).
- At each workshop, participants looked at four topic areas relevant to ecosystem services: food from farming, drinking water, flood control and climate regulation. These were considered in relation to three alternative scenarios: business as usual, positive – planned and negative – unexpected.

• Workshop with expert stakeholders and policy makers

On 14 March 2013, 19 expert stakeholders and policy makers (including from the Welsh Government) convened at a full-day workshop in Aberystwyth. Participants were invited to reflect on apparent differences and similarities between the results of the earlier workshops, and explore opportunities to co-deliver positive futures that the data suggested to them.

“Listening to what others have to say is equally valuable and that was an important part of the day for me.”

Expert workshop participants.

• Dissemination of results

The project report was launched in July 2013 at the Royal Welsh Show by the Minister for Natural Resources in Wales. Also, a stakeholder day for the CMI on 7 November 2013 was attended by the Minister who made reference to the project.

What worked especially well

Small groups and an informal atmosphere, coupled with good props and clear information, were important elements in enabling the public/lay participants to discuss complex, technical issues and provide valuable insights into their perspectives. The information included simple scenarios and photo montages that helped people visualise the scenarios. Of the focus group participants, 90% understood more about the issues related to Wales' Natural Wealth as a result of taking part in the dialogue process.

“Just bringing people together was energising.”

Expert workshop participants.

The expert stakeholder workshop provided the experts with a valuable and focused opportunity to discuss issues in depth, hear the perspectives of a range of different disciplines and have broad-based conversations on ecosystems goods and services topics, in a way that is rarely otherwise possible.

The evaluation report was produced very quickly and to a high standard, with clear lessons from the process. The report also provided clear ways forward from dialogue to action, including the willingness of public and stakeholder participants to be involved in pilot initiatives as well as summarising suggestions made during the process of specific policy initiatives that results could be fed into.

The launch of the dialogue report at the Royal Welsh Show by the Minister for Natural Resources in Wales worked very well. The Show is a key event in the rural Welsh calendar.

“It was good to work in a focused way with colleagues.”

Expert workshop participants.

What worked less well

The project was produced in a very short space of time (not least because the Countryside Commission for Wales was due to become part of a new body on 1 April 2013). If there had been more time, more could have been achieved.

In particular, more time was needed to fully engage expert stakeholders including from Government, and to involve other key stakeholders who did not take part (e.g. Welsh Water and utility companies). A longer time scale would also have resulted in more focused reflection and learning from the evidence captured, and more capacity building. The short timescale also meant that there was no scope for focus group participants to influence how their evidence was presented to the expert workshop participants. In addition, lack of internal resources meant that staff time was limited.

The dialogue generated more information than was used, and it was felt there was a need to consider how to filter, analyse, collate and reflect on all the evidence that was generated by the dialogue process.

In addition, the project would have benefited from clear messages for participants about what happened next and how the findings of the dialogue process would be used and by whom.

“It helped us think more laterally about what the future might hold.”

Expert workshop participants.

Contact details

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Reports

Full project and evaluation reports are available from Sciencewise on www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/cambrian-mountains-natural-wealth-landscape-and-ecosystems-futures-and-perceptions-across-a-transitional-landscape-in-the-cambrian-mountains/