

Press Release

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A further step towards international recognition for Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Reserve.

The proposed 3000 square kilometre Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Reserve moves a step closer to achieving international recognition with the appointment of two new officers, Nic Coombey and Ed Forrest who are tasked with "Building Opportunities in the Biosphere".

The positions are part of a joint initiative, managed by Southern Uplands Partnership on behalf of a new community and stakeholder Biosphere Partnership, which has been funded jointly by Ayrshire and Dumfries & Galloway LEADER programs. The project also has the backing of the local authorities and public agencies East Ayrshire, South Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway Councils, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and SEPA, who, over the last 5 years, have been instrumental in exploring and making the case for UNESCO Biosphere status for the area. If successful, this would be one of three in the UK and would join the international list of Biosphere Reserves.

Galloway and Southern Ayrshire is a candidate for a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve because of its unique combination of special landscapes and wildlife areas, rich cultural heritage and communities that care about their environment and culture and want to develop it sustainably. Its geographic spread is significant, stretching from Ayr and Cumnock in the north to Isle of Whithorn and Kirkcudbright in the south.

There are some 45,000 dwellings and 95,000 people in the proposed Biosphere Reserve area and over the next two years the two new officers will be working with communities, landowners, businesses, and educational establishments within the Biosphere Reserve to provide lasting benefits to the area.

They will facilitate the development and implementation of projects that demonstrate how nature conservation and sustainable development benefit local communities and other stakeholders. Both officers have a wealth of experience in community and project development and engagement combined with a comprehensive local knowledge.

Ed Forrest has just completed delivery of the successful £3.9million Sulwath Connections Landscape Partnership project in Dumfries and Galloway. Sulwath involved working in partnership with communities, agencies and charitable bodies to implement and interpret a range of environmental and cultural heritage projects across the region benefiting wildlife, tourism and communities themselves. Prior to moving to Dumfries and Galloway Ed spent fourteen years with the National Trust working in the Lake District where he was involved in developing and implementing a wide range of conservation, recreation and interpretation projects.

Nic Coombey has been working for 14 years with Solway Heritage where he was responsible for developing and implementing natural, built and cultural heritage projects. Most of his projects included conservation, learning and participation of local people. Nic hopes that the new status Biosphere Reserve will provide new opportunities to develop community projects which make good use of our local resources.

Nic and Ed explained: "We are keen to hear from local groups who would like to get involved and are looking forward to working with local people to make the most of this international recognition and provide lasting benefits to the area by working together."

Biosphere Reserve status is currently being considered by UNESCO with an announcement due next spring. If awarded, this new status should see the area achieve an international accolade as Scotland's first Biosphere Reserve and one of only 564 in the world. This will bring with it new tourism and sustainable business opportunities and encourage developments which demonstrate a balanced relationship between people and nature.

Both Ed and Nic are keen to hear from groups that would like to get involved in helping to shape this next exciting stage of the Biosphere, they can be contacted on ed@sup.org.uk or nic@sup.org.uk

More information can be found on the proposed Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Reserve can be found at; [http:// www.gallowayandsouthernayrshirebiosphere.org.uk/](http://www.gallowayandsouthernayrshirebiosphere.org.uk/)

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Editors Note

Image

Project Officer Nic Coombey introduces the Biosphere Reserve idea to participants of the Newton Steward Walking Festival.

1. UNESCO

The Biosphere Reserve is designated under UNESCO's (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Man and Biosphere Programme and aims to fulfil three complementary functions: -



- To contribute to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems & species;
- to foster economic & human development; and
- to provide support for research, monitoring, education & information exchange.

2. Southern Uplands Partnership

In 1999, after widespread public consultation, the people of the Southern Uplands gave overwhelming support for the creation of the Southern Upland Partnership (SUP).

The Southern Upland Partnership is a company registered by guarantee with charitable status. It is active across the rural south of Scotland with projects undertaken in South and East Ayrshire, Dumfries & Galloway, South Lanarkshire and the Scottish Borders. We use the term Southern Uplands to describe rural south Scotland - coast to coast, from the border to edge of the central belt.

SUP addresses practical land use issues faced by those working and living in the rural south of Scotland. SUP works to inform policy makers and to initiate sustainable social, economic and environmental projects.

SUP has commissioned and produced several reports since its establishment that have gone in to have real impacts at many levels. One of our most recent, 'Local Food – Local Plates', has been instrumental in driving the debate about local abattoirs and may well see significant success in Dumfries and Galloway soon.

