

# South East Wales Resilient Uplands

**Lead organisation:**  
Torfaen County Borough Council

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**Grant Award:** £399,000

**Location:**  
Torfaen, Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent

The South East Wales Resilient Uplands (SEWRU), project covers an area of some 200sq km on land which is over 200m in altitude within Torfaen, Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent.

The upland landscape across Torfaen, Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent faces a number of challenges from landscape crime, loss of habitats and key species to poor infrastructure and fragmented communities. Building on previous wide scale community engagement the project will take forward new collaborative action to improve the uplands, support farm enterprise, improve visitor experiences and create more resilient communities.

The project's collaborative approach is led by Torfaen Council with Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent Councils, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Natural Resources Wales, Police, Fire and Rescue Services and the Brecon Beacons National Park all supporting and working with the commons associations, action groups, farming unions and the local communities.

SEWRU's focus is delivering the priority actions from the Landscape Institute award winning Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP) for South-east Wales Uplands which was produced in 2015.

- To deliver land management to improve soils, water quality and regulation, grazing, biodiversity, and carbon storage.
- Strengthen relationships between stakeholders and commoners to support upland communities.
- Build capacity through volunteering, training and community engagement.
- Increase farm competitiveness and viability through diversification and development of innovative business opportunities.
- Tackle the underlying causes of upland degradation caused by poor land management and anti-social problems such as fly-tipping, arson and illegal off-roading.
- Provide opportunities for quiet recreation and enhance the area's tourism offer.



To date the project has identified and begun peatland restoration pilots, identified tree planting opportunities, produced common land management plans, installed physical barriers to reduce landscape crime and managed important upland heathland to reduce fire risk and facilitate sustainable grazing. SEWRU is also currently working with Gwent Police and others to produce upland-focussed landscape crime management plans.

As a SEWRU project partner, Gwent Wildlife Trust have delivered a number of activities during 2020 to promote the uplands as a place to visit for tourism and recreation whilst also promoting the sustainable use of the area. Running a photography competition called *Hill Life Through a Lens* and holding a series of free guided walks and training courses throughout the project, aimed to highlight the wonderful wildlife of the uplands and practical skills needed to manage it.



**Knowledge Transfer & Innovation (KT&I):** Developed and Produced a SE Wales wildfire plan for uplands to tackle wildfires and mitigate risk.

**Building collaborations and partnerships:** 2 new networks created through producing and implementing two upland landscape crime management plans for each common with Gwent Police and other partners.

**Building collaborations and partnerships:** Developed and managed a Commons Watch Scheme to deter fly tipping and rural crime equipping ten key commoners with body cameras, dash cameras and trail cameras to tackle landscape crime.

**Training and job creation:** Provided 40 days of training; dry stone walling courses undertaken in partnership with Gwent Wildlife Trust. Training for farmers through the Hill Farming Training Scheme to deliver ecological land management advice.

**Community engagement:** A comprehensive programme of walks & activity developed and an uplands photography competition promoted.

**Training and job creation:** Project manager supported by an ecological specialist and a monitoring scientist all appointed to manage the project, carry out peat bog restoration and to capture ongoing evidence.

**Building collaborations and partnerships:** Created SE Wales Resilient Uplands Steering Group and round table group to help inform the project share best practise.

**Knowledge Transfer & Innovation (KT&I):** Feasibility study completed on barriers to IT use. SEWRU and Gwent Police are investigating how we can deliver IT training to farmers and potentially equip hill farmers with smartphones if required, to enable better communication around landscape crime.

**Community engagement:** Drone surveys and fly through videos commissioned to facilitate peatland feasibility studies and monitoring and used to create publicity and promotional videos to inform the public.

**Habitat restoration:** More than 120ha of heather and bracken managed, the project provided a flail mower for scrub management to reduce fire risk and to facilitate sustainable grazing to improve biodiversity, as well as pond and wetland restoration.

**Educational programmes:** SEWRU is working across four areas to tackle landscape crime and illegal off-roading; Enforcement, Engineering, Engagement and Enabling using this framework agencies can enforce and tackle illegal activity and engage and educate the public on how to enjoy the access to recreation in a way that doesn't have a detrimental effect on the landscape.

**Developing Green Infrastructure:** 5km of commons boundaries have been repaired and boulders, boom barriers, bunds, new gates, ditches and signage in various key locations throughout the SE Wales commons have been installed in pilot areas to tackle landscape crime.

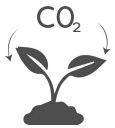
**Educational programmes:** establishing a landscape crime-focussed website to assist the public and other stakeholders, improve communication and publicise current work and a project promotional video to highlight the issues and the work being undertaken to tackle them.

**Peatland restoration:** Three peatland restoration feasibility studies completed covering four sites with 10ha restored over two sites.

**Increased Access to Outdoor Spaces:** several open days and guided walks looking at a wide range of habitats and species connecting people and nature and to showcase the uplands, raising awareness both locally and nationally of the area as a valuable and rewarding resource in which to work, play, visit and live.

**Volunteer programmes:** Volunteer opportunities through project partner Gwent Wildlife Trust.

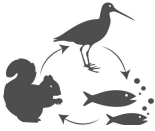
**Woodland Management & Planting:** 1,800 native trees were planted and removed circa 1,000 feral conifers trees have from peatland habitat to help with re-wetting. Woodland opportunity mapping exercise done identifying over a hundred hectares where tree planting could be possible.



**Carbon Sequestration:** Supported by habitat & peatland restoration, woodland management & planting and sustainable grazing.



**Climate Change Adaptation:** Supported by habitat & peatland restoration, woodland management & planting and sustainable grazing.



**Enhanced Biodiversity:** Supported by habitat & peatland restoration, woodland management & planting and sustainable grazing, Training & job creation and Developing Green Infrastructure.



**Ecosystem Resilience:** Supported by habitat & peatland restoration, woodland management & planting and sustainable grazing, Training & job creation and Developing Green Infrastructure.



**Reduced Flood Risk:** Supported by habitat & peatland restoration, woodland management & planting and sustainable grazing.



**Soil, Air & Water Quality:** Supported by habitat & peatland restoration, woodland management & planting and sustainable grazing, Training & job creation and Developing Green Infrastructure.



**Health & Wellbeing:** Supported by Educational programmes, Community engagement, Volunteer programmes and Increased Access to Outdoor Spaces.



**Community Cohesion:** Supported by Educational programmes, Community engagement, Volunteer programmes and Increased Access to Outdoor Spaces, Knowledge Transfer & Innovation (KT&I).



**Rural Skills & Heritage:** Supported by Educational programmes, Knowledge Transfer & Innovation (KT&I), Community engagement and Training & job creation.



**Development of Skills Capacity & Expertise:** Supported by Educational programmes, Knowledge Transfer & Innovation (KT&I), Community engagement, Building collaborations and partnerships and Training & job creation.

**Get Involved** - If you would like to learn more or get involved in the work being done by South East Wales Resilient Uplands you can find more information at:

[www.gwentwildlife.org/South-East-Wales-Resilient-Uplands-Project](http://www.gwentwildlife.org/South-East-Wales-Resilient-Uplands-Project)

 [www.youtube.com/channel/UCGjUzOTxkGgAjsnDloMwz1g](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGjUzOTxkGgAjsnDloMwz1g)

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