



| HLF Programme Objectives | | | |
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| Objective | Outcomes | Main Objective (tick <u>one</u> box only) | Links to other areas |
| 1 | The heritage will be better managed | ✓ | |
| 2 | The heritage will be in better condition | | ✓ |
| 3 | The heritage will be identified/recorded | | |
| 4 | People will have developed skills | | ✓ |
| 5 | People will have learnt about heritage | | ✓ |
| 6 | People will have volunteered time | | ✓ |
| 7 | Negative environmental impacts will have been reduced | | |
| 8 | More people and a wider range of people will have engaged with heritage | | ✓ |
| 9 | The local area/community will be a better place to live, work or visit | | ✓ |

Objective 3: Improve the sustainability of high nature value traditional farming systems

3b:Elan Rhos Hay



Summary

Rhos (or 'moor') hay production is a traditional practice to the Elan Links area of Mid-Wales. In times gone by rhos hay has been cut in August / September on the open hill, and used as feed and / or bedding for cattle and sheep during the winter months. Only one or two farmers still continue this tradition. However, the practice is beneficial for nature by ensuring greater diversity of management on the open hill and can also have economic benefits for the farmer where there is a suitable use for the cut hay. This project will encourage rhos hay production by farmers and deliver farm-scale investigations into the best ways of making and

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| | <p>using the hay in order to generate a more economic and sustainable product. In so doing, we will reinvigorate this practice which is so important to our cultural and natural heritage.</p> |
| <p>Project Details</p> | <p>Rhos hay is a strongly localised, culturally significant, agricultural activity, traditional to some hill areas of Mid-Wales. The practice involves cutting excess and less palatable (largely overgrown molinia) forage on suitable areas of open hill and using this forage to make hay for feed or bedding. Cutting traditionally takes place in late summer after the in-bye hay meadows have been harvested. Cut areas are typically not re-harvested for three to five years to allow the sward to recover. The areas are often initially favoured by grazing livestock because of the 'sweeter' regrowth with benefits for agricultural productivity. By reducing the need for bought-in feed and bedding the practice can also improve the sustainability of Elan Links farms and meshes neatly into the needs of cattle-based farming systems (see Project 3d). While the benefits for nature are largely unquantified because of the localised nature of the activity it is understood that the increased diversity of management on the open hill is of value. For example, it is likely that in the past the cut areas would have provided feeding areas for birds such as curlew, ring ouzel and golden plover.</p> <p>In recent years, the practice of making rhos hay has all-but died out in Mid-Wales apart from one or two farmers still using the system in the Elan Links area. This project aims to rejuvenate this distinctive management system through a three-pronged approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🌱 financial support for better management of existing rhos hay areas along with the creation of additional areas; 🌱 farm-scale trials to establish best-practicesystems for cutting and harvesting as well as for using the product as feed and bedding (and potentially other uses) to embed the process back into 'normal' farm activity; and 🌱 capital support for purchasing temporary trackway to reduce soil compaction and damage by machinery in boggy areas thereby removing a major barrier to uptake. <p>Furthermore, an annual 'stocktake' meeting with farmers will be used to provide an opportunity for sharing results from on-farm trials and adaptive learning for the project.</p> <p>The selection of areas for rhos hay production through this project will follow discussion between participating farmers and the Natural Heritage Officer and sign-off by the Natural Heritage Sub-committee. Areas likely to have been cut for rhos hay in the past will be prioritised in the first instance, as will areas that are more likely to produce benefits for key species.</p> <p>Contracts will be awarded through the Natural Heritage Scheme (see Implementation of the Natural Heritage Projects, appendix PP3)</p> |
| <p>Need and Opportunity</p> | <p>This project has been developed to mitigate the threats identified in chapter four of the LCAP, namely:</p> |

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| | <p>4.2.2 The threat from changing land management practices.</p> <p>4.3.1.1 Reinvigorating farming practices.</p> <p>The need is to improve the sustainability of Elan Links farming practices while generating benefits for nature and reducing the negative impacts of <i>Molinia</i> overgrowth (fire risk; reduced recreational access; poor palatability for livestock). The opportunity is to rebuild the popularity of rhos hay in farming practice by overcoming barriers to uptake and establishing best practice - giving farmers the confidence to once again use this distinctive and culturally important traditional management technique.</p> <p>Options to undertake rhos hay production are not available under Glastir – presumably because of the highly localised nature of this traditional Elan Valley activity.</p> | |
| Project Management | Natural Heritage Officer reporting to the natural Heritage Sub-committee and the Partnership Board. | |
| Project Partners | Lead Partner: EVT Other Partners: Elan Valley Tenants Association; Cwmdauddwr Commoners Association; NRW. | |
| Project Development | Development of this project has been supported by an Agrigop animateur (funded through the Wales RDP) who brought together interested parties – farmers/commoners/EVT/NRW and facilitated discussion. A well-attended site visit to one of the Elan Links farms that still makes rhos hay provided additional insight and an opportunity to share ideas and consider links with other projects. Subsequent project development has been undertaken electronically and face-to-face with discussion between NRW officers, EVT and a number of farmers. The initial project outline envisaged that the principal actions would involve cutting and harvesting rhos hay twice on the same piece of ground during the five year delivery phase. Following discussion this plan has been modified to incorporate suggestions from Elan Links farmers and others: Firstly, that the first year of cutting would need to be a preparatory cut without harvesting on many farms due to the highly tussocky nature of the vegetation. This cutting would carry a lower intervention rate than cutting plus harvesting. Secondly, there was agreement that support for on-farm trials (eg comparing harvesting techniques, feeding and bedding systems; feed analysis) would be valuable in both establishing best practice and giving farmers the confidence to try out the system. Thirdly, because of the nature of the terrain, capital support for purchasing temporary trackway to reduce soil compaction and damage by machinery in boggy areas would remove a major barrier to uptake. An annual ‘stakeholder’ meeting with farmers and others will be used to provide an opportunity for sharing results from on-farm trials and adaptive learning for the project. | |
| Key Audiences (Please see Audience Development Plan, appendix LCAP3, for more details about | Audiences that will be primarily targeted through this project: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🏡 Land managers including landowners, tenants and commoners. | Secondary audiences who will also benefit as a result of the project: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🏡 Volunteers; 🏡 Residents of Elan and |

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| Elan Links audiences.) | | Rhayader; 🏡 Visitors who are within 1 hour's drive away; 🏡 Visitors coming for a specific activity. |
| Activities and Timescale | 🏡 Year 1. Spring 2018 – Contract criteria approved by NH sub-committee 🏡 Years 1 to 3. July / Aug - preparatory cutting / first rhos hay harvest. 🏡 Years 4 to 5. Second rhos hay harvest. 🏡 Years 1 to 5. On-farm trials. 3 stock-taking days. | |
| Outputs | 🏡 20 hectares of rhos hay habitat restored; 🏡 3 on-farm trials; 🏡 10 people trained in rhos hay skills; 🏡 3 stakeholder days with 15 people attending; 🏡 All Elan Links farmers informed about project; 🏡 End-of-project report with recommendations for future management of Elan's rhos hay habitat and uses for rhos hay; 🏡 Interpretation to a wider audience delivered through Objective 7. | |
| Output indicators and targets | 🏡 20 hectares rhos hay habitat in management; 🏡 Preparatory cutting or first rhos hay harvest by September 2019; 🏡 Second rhos hay harvest by September 2021; 🏡 Annual project reports incorporating information from farm trials and stocktake days. | |
| Outcomes | <p>Heritage Outcomes:</p> 🏡 Natural heritage is in better condition and better managed for the future; 🏡 The physical work undertaken will have improved rhos hay habitat and reduced the negative impacts of molinia overgrowth (fire risk; reduced recreational access; poor palatability for livestock); 🏡 Cultural heritage and local distinctiveness sustained and more resilient; 🏡 Increased knowledge and coordinated action will ensure that farmers, land managers and decision makers make informed decisions that will strengthen the Elan Valley as a stronghold for nature; 🏡 The resilience of the Elan Valley is strengthened for the future. | |
| | <p>People Outcomes:</p> 🏡 Farmers will have been supported with practical help and advice and financially through the natural heritage scheme and through the development of sustainable farming systems; 🏡 Farmers have learned effective techniques to manage rhos hay habitat; 🏡 Farmers, land managers, policy makers and visitors will have a greater awareness of the natural heritage of Elan and the complex issues surrounding its effective management ; 🏡 Links through Project 7a 'Interpreting Elan' will ensure that the current project will feed in to developing greater awareness of the distinctive farming systems of Elan and the importance of implementing specific land management to safeguard natural and cultural heritage. | |

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| | <p>Community Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🌿 Links through Project 7a 'Interpreting Elan' will ensure that the current project will feed in to developing greater community awareness and respect for the natural heritage of Elan and the importance of safeguarding it to ensure water quality into the future and this will in turn reduce the risks for future harm through irresponsible access behaviour, farming activities or neglect Elan will become more widely known as an area with a distinctive local farming culture and this will help to build the reputation of Elan as a tourism destination. |
| Monitoring and Evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🌿 Progress with project implementation will be reported to the Natural Heritage sub-committee annually; 🌿 Ecological change will be recorded photographically; 🌿 Project completion reports with evidence; 🌿 Specific Key indicators measured for each target habitat; 🌿 Biodiversity monitoring using a mix of expert input / advice and trained volunteers will be implemented through Project 2b and supported by Project 8b; 🌿 Stakeholder days will be used to understand the benefits of the project from the point of view of farmers and other stakeholders. |
| Evidence | <p>Hayes, M. (2012) <i>Elan Valley Rhos Hay Projects</i> (appendix PP9)</p> <p>The Welsh Government Nature Fund report: <i>Elenydd Purple Moorgrass Project</i> (2015). (appendix PP1)</p> <p>Lewis, S & Vincett, J. (2015). <i>Purple Moor Grass Baseline Survey</i>. (appendix PP2)</p> <p>Notes from meeting to discuss: Hay Meadows; Dry Heath; Rhos Hay Henfron Farm, Elan Valley. 18/8/2016 (appendix PP5)</p> <p>Evidence from local farms confirms that the use of rhos hay as a feed and bedding product can be acceptable for cattle and sheep.</p> |
| Wider Context | <p>As a strongly localised agricultural activity, rhos hay production is important for local cultural identity as well as for the benefits for nature. Importantly, recent on-farm increases and volatility in feed and bedding prices have highlighted the increasing importance of closed-loop farming systems for the economic sustainability of hill farms where transport costs add substantially to prices of bought-in inputs.</p> |
| Legacy and maintenance of benefits | <p>This project is designed to overcome the barriers to re-establishment and widening of the practice of rhos hay production in the Elan Links area. Discussions with farmers have highlighted that although there is a strong and positive 'folk memory' of the practice the barriers to increased uptake stem from lack of confidence in the value of the end product; uncertainty how best to make rhos hay; uncertainty as to how to use rhos hay; capital costs for starting up the practice; the need for site preparation in the first year; and risks associated with damaging soil in high traffic areas. In addition, on farms without housed cattle, ponies or sheep the need for the product is more limited. The interventions in the project are therefore designed to tackle the barriers by:</p> |

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| | <p>1. providing support payments for the first two cuttings;</p> <p>2. Enabling farmers to carry out on-farm trials and then disseminate their learning;</p> <p>3. Purchase a short section of temporary, reusable trackway to protect high-traffic areas. Furthermore, the project is complimented by actions from other projects – particularly those associated with supporting cattle / pony grazing – livestock with higher winter requirements for feed and bedding than sheep. As noted above, the recent trend for increased and more volatile input prices provides a longer-term economically strategic reason for farmers to turn to increasingly closed-loop farming systems. This trend is likely to strongly favour the continued use of rhos hay production once the initial barriers have been broken down.</p> |
| <p>Risks and risk mitigation</p> | <p><u>Risk 1:</u> Insufficient farmers are willing to undertake the actions in the scheme. <u>Mitigation:</u> the project has been widely discussed with farmers and developed in response to their suggestions reducing the risk of this happening.</p> <p><u>Risk 2:</u> farmers commit to the project but because of bad weather or other reasons are unable to undertake the actions. <u>Mitigation:</u> payments withheld where work not done.</p> <p><u>Other risk mitigation:</u>The annual stocktake and on-farm trials will enable farmers to benefit from sharing ideas and will promote co-operative activity (for example machinery sharing or sales of rhos hay between farmers). Increasing numbers of cattle in the area will create a greater need for feed / bedding.</p> |
| <p>Links to other Elan Links projects</p> | <p>Objective 1a: Rhos hay is the collection of molinia hay and as such some areas of production will be on or near bog habitats. These projects will work together to ensure no mismanagement or doubling of actions.</p> <p>Objective 3d: Cattle grazing is a beneficial element to the control of molinia and mechanical actions will have a greater effect when combined with cattle grazing.</p> <p>Objective 6: Monitoring of this project is important and as noted above, photographic recording of the project will happen. This will be implemented through project 6.</p> <p>Objective 7a:This project will be interpreted through objective 7a in various ways dependant on the project requirements.</p> <p>Objective 7b:Information about this project will appear on the app as well as on the Elan Valley website and Elan Links' social media platforms. All of the events that are organised will be promoted on all of these platforms and they will be updated regularly to show the work that is carried out through the whole Scheme. Any content that is being recorded, either through photograph or film, will be shared and place on all of the platforms to ensure that the profile of Elan is raised and that all followers that have been gathered during the development phase are</p> |

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| | <p>kept up to date and interested in the project throughout the delivery.</p> <p>Objective 7c: Artists will take inspiration from some of the themes in these objectives. As well as inspiration, it is possible that some of the artists may wish to interpret the different themes in their own way.</p> <p>Objective 7d: All events that will happen through this project will be organised through the work carried out in objective 7d.</p> <p>Objective 8: The volunteers that are required for this project can be selected from the database of volunteers that is collected through objective 8. Volunteers who participate in activities that aren't already part of Friends of Elan can be referred over and from there they will be offered a wider range of volunteering opportunities.</p> <p>Objective 10a: There is a possibility that the participants and trainees, who are taking part in the training courses at Elan, will undertake some of the work that is required in this project.</p> <p>Objective 11: Working to expand the knowledge and the connection between the habitat and water management to the people who benefit from the water. Engaging in this elements supports the principles of payments for ecosystem services and raise the public profile of this concept between Elan and Birmingham. Thus developing a longevity to the actions.</p> |
| <p>Background information</p> | <p>Elan is located in the Cambrian Mountains, Mid Wales, 5 miles to the east of the Market town or Rhyader. Elan's 20,000 hectares comprises 1% of Wales and is a unique landscape combining remote hill land, isolated farmsteads, steep-sided wooded valleys and the extraordinary feat of Victorian engineering that brought clean water to Birmingham.</p> <p>The community of farmers, tenants, the town of Rhyader and the village of Elan are the backbone of this vast area, with farming and tourism activities being the most significant economic activity in the area.</p> <p>Elan Links: People, Nature & Water Landscape Partnership has an ambitious vision: to generate a step-change increase in beneficial outcomes for people, communities and heritage.</p> <p>Elan Links is a £3.5 million project with a significant £1.8 million secured from the Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Scheme.</p> <p>The Elan Links: People, Nature & Water Landscape Partnership is currently made up of 17 different organisations who aim to deliver 26 projects under 12 strategic objectives over 5 years.</p> |