

What does the land do for you?

"We live on the land and have been trying, over the years to manage it in such a way that it provides us with some produce at the same time as encouraging a wide biodiversity. It provides great pleasure from the work we are doing, so helps our mental wellbeing."

Why a Natural Capital Survey? What is a Natural Capital Based Approach?

NW2045 Vision 3:

"A place where our communities can determine their own prospects"

www.northwest2045.scot

Putting research and data into community hands.

We asked What Does the Land Do for You? in an online event for the Highland Climate Festival July 2022

The discussion aimed to provide an introduction to the Natural Capital research work currently underway by SLR Consultants for the NW2045 Regional Land use Partnership (RLUP). This aimed to outline what this work entails and how the information gathered might be used going forward. This event also served as an invitation to community members to join the conversation on land use in our area, and be part of the discussion going forward.

During the event we also ran an interactive forum, via Padlet, encouraging participants to delve deeper into the question of land use and to provide live feedback on how the information was being delivered and received. Following the session, the Padlet forum was kept open to encourage further thoughts and reflection.

The responses both from the live discussion and the Padlet have been extremely valuable in informing how the research is communicated, and this is something we will be working with closely, as we develop and expand our approach. We acknowledge the limitations of online discussion; how this affects the demographic we are able to reach, and how this may be limited to those working in related sectors, who typically already participate in land use discussions. Therefore, local in-person events will also be a key way for us to have a multi-generational and inclusive approach to collaborating as part of the community.

From this session, it's clear that we need to find more accessible language and ways to help everyone understand why we are doing this work, to make sure it is relevant to those of us who live here, using the land. This document is a summary of the event through a range of voices.

"All wonderfully conceptual, but terribly distant from the lived experiences and relationships with land that people here actually have."

"Lots of big words which will immediately put people off!"

"Would like this whole natural capital thing to be more understandable to ordinary people."

The Scottish Government has tasked the Regional Land Use Partnerships with taking a Natural Capital Approach to creating their Regional Land Use Frameworks. Put simply, a Natural Capital Approach values the environment as a set of assets which provide benefits to society, ie - through Ecosystem Services such as, carbon sequestration, pollination, clean air, flood risk reduction, and human mental and physical well-being.

The Natural Capital of an area is ultimately the combined asset base, derived from natural sources and supply, that support our way of life here. Understanding more about this should help us consider possibilities and the change needed so the land benefits all of our communities as we move towards the net zero 2045 horizon.

This NW2045 led research aims to contribute to our initial (and the Scottish Government's) understanding of how land use and our natural capital supports our communities now and into the future.

This work seeks to ensure communities are integral to a current Scottish Government Regional Land Use pilot project. We wish the views and knowledge of people who live on the land to be heard as part of this initial research to help inform further conversations and research into what taking a 'Natural Capital Approach' could mean on the ground.

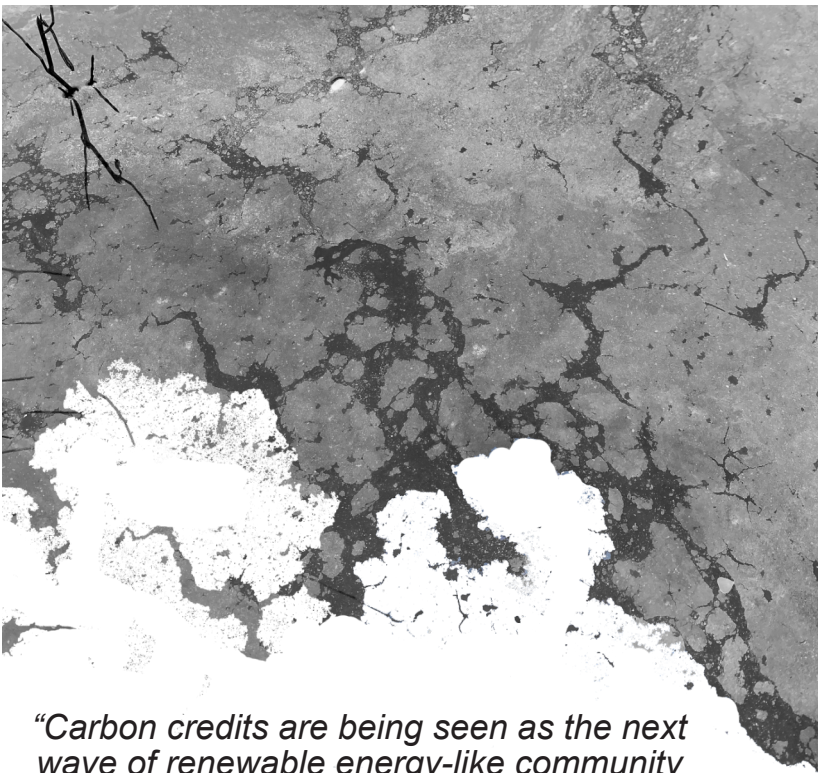
"The survey work is about empowerment, what is within your ability to change? What could the land do for you by 2045?"
Paul Watkinson, SLR Consultants

Case Study: What is Natural Capital and why is it relevant to me?
Lindsay Dunbar, Culture Croft



For many years, I was aware of how much time and effort my father spent on the lower croft. Slowly, he was transforming rough croft, with remains of previous lazy beds, into a nursery for saplings. At the time, I thought this was balancing our carbon impact; to plant more trees in an area where very few existed. Slowly, those saplings grew into a micro woodland, and now 40 years later, I realise the benefit of a woodland croft as a natural asset. Yes, there are incredible environmental benefits for the land, the animals sheltering in the trees, not to mention the privacy it provides.

During a recent visit, we took a stomp around the croft, which is considerably changed from the croft I played in as a child, and now I could see the real potential of the woodland. A mixture of woods used in crofting, crafting and heritage work. Environmentally sustainable materials for fencing, weaving and building frames for plants. We used to see the asset as the land, and when used properly and with the right care, land can produce assets from which others can use and benefit - whether it is food, animals to sell, or even materials for production. Change isn't fast. There is no quick return on investment. It took 40 years to develop this natural asset. Perhaps you could view it as compound interest? Recognising this asset as natural capital suddenly changes the way we imagine land use - the potential to protect, share, and develop it, so that all communities benefit and support each other.



“Carbon credits are being seen as the next wave of renewable energy-like community benefits. How do we ensure that local communities don't miss out?”

Ecosystem Service Potentials - Biodiversity and Carbon Storage

SLR have indicated carbon markets as being of importance for future prospects, therefore the monetary valuation is mainly focused on carbon, and its implications for NW2045.

Scottish Land Commission recommend that carbon credits are for offsetting unavoidable emissions only but implementing that will be a challenge. There are certainly efforts being made to address the concerns raised during the discussion and we hope we can contribute to supporting those efforts.

Priority Ecosystem Services - Education and Food Mapping

Education links to tourism but this looks more broadly at the connection between the two, and the potentials, as opposed to focusing on tourism specifically. In the research context, education can also include volunteering, adult learning and nature-related tourism with educational elements.

Looking at land capability for agriculture and food production. How the land can support us to produce more food. In line with NW2045 vision to scope a local food strategy:

“We have potential to produce more high quality, sustainable – and even regenerative – food and drink in this area, and to stimulate local markets for local products. This would have wide-ranging benefits, including reduction of local and global environmental impact; support of local businesses, and the health and well-being of our residents.”
NW2045 Vision Action 4. Scope a local food strategy

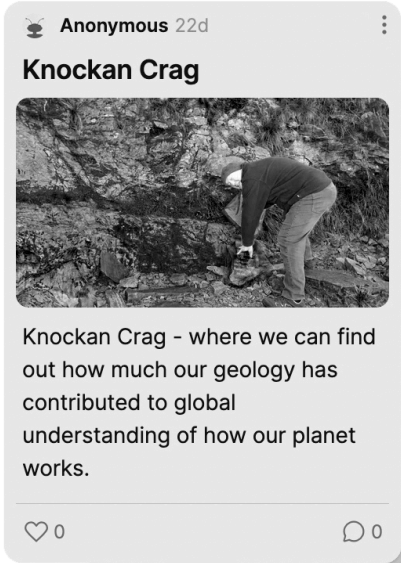


“Carbon credits and carbon sequestration is just kicking a can down the road. It is just giving us the excuse to carry on producing carbon. Is this land restoration or is this carbon credits? Are we trying to salve some sort of conscience or are we really interested in land restoration?”



Padlet; It's A Land Thing!

“How does climate/carbon finance actually work? What opportunities are there for local communities to benefit?”



During the event we also launched our interactive map, which we invite everyone to contribute to. We hope this will create a diverse tapestry of stories and images detailing how the land is used, across the NW2045 area. We want to highlight how land is used and what it means to each of us living here.

“The thing that perhaps concerns me in how we go about working with natural capital and putting these concepts into some sort of practical reality, is we have to be very careful about avoiding, effectively reinforcing some of the inequitable structures and distributions of power that we have here on the NW”

“Gives us the opportunity to become self sufficient in terms of food. It would be great to have maybe community garden/chickens for people that don't have a croft to use.”

Housing - Townships of the future?

How land is used for housing and how might looking at land use inform solutions to housing shortages in the area?

“ Smart townships - looking at those places that we have forgotten about or moved on from when we are thinking about building more houses”

“There are a lot of skilled people within our communities but they can't always volunteer their time. If we can create opportunities, we could have a year around program for kids and adults learning valuable skills”

“The problem is the release of land on these townships. Who owns that land and won't they release some land for housing development”

“We agree that these are really hard ecosystem services to assess but they felt like the most relevant to people here.” Lizzie NW2045 RLUP

“We aim to support the conversations that help us to all better understand what land use is, and what land use means in our futures”
Rachel, NW2045 RLUP

All the ideas shared are really important to us to help us in collaborating with you and for us all to shape this project as a community: to underline how important these forums are for us to speak our minds, to share our perspectives and experiences; and so to exchange knowledge. Together we can work to maximise all of this and to reach for the questions as much as the answers.

For us, the important thing is to make time and space to have those conversations. Courageous conversations, accepting that it's not easy, and being open about that. And being patient; empathetic; respectful and having them anyway. Trying to understand each other's perspectives and finding common ground.

For more project information, please go to www.northwest2045.scot