

RIVERWOODS

Part 1 - about you

Lead organisation
Galloway Fisheries Trust (GFT) & River Annan District Salmon Fishery Board (ADSFB)
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Other partners (optional)
SEPA Restoring Annan's Water (RAW) ADS Climate Action Town Initiative Wild Trout Trust

Part 2 - about your project

Project name
Annan Riparian Restoration Network

Project description in a nutshell (this is the same as what you have entered into Consul) [1000 characters max]
<p>The Annan Riparian Restoration Network aims to expand and restore a network of broadleaf woodlands across the River Annan and its tributaries. By planting a mixture of native species at key locations we aim to enhance biodiversity whilst crucially building climate resilience into the landscape.</p> <p>This ambitious project will bring together multiple landowners, with combined landholdings of over 35,000 ha throughout the catchment. The project throughout will consult, engage and involve local stakeholders, community groups and communities and schools to improve their local surroundings.</p> <p>The project will use data and local knowledge to identify areas where riparian tree planting will provide multiple benefits, enhancing water quality and biodiversity, keeping waters cool from increasing summer temperatures, providing natural flood management and connecting places for nature throughout the landscape. Through better management, sharing knowledge and protection of these important areas around watercourses there will be increased opportunities for communities to enjoy, understand and engage with their natural environment. This will have benefits for both physical health and mental wellbeing as well as the health of the river.</p>

1. Technical feasibility

What is your overall approach going to be for getting the skills and expertise you need, and deploying these towards the restoration of river woodlands?

[200 words max]

As an environmental NGO with a primary focus on restoring aquatic biodiversity and habitats, Galloway Fisheries Trust (GFT) have considerable experience of developing and delivering habitat restoration works and community engagement. We have a portfolio of large projects completed on time and to budget which have delivered significant environmental benefits throughout SW Scotland. When designing and delivering projects we have a diverse range of relevant skills and experience provided by our staff and board of trustees. GFT have a range of specialised staff who have experience of project design and management, engaging with stakeholders, biological monitoring, finance, administration and practical works. The GFT 'Habitat and Climate Resilience Officer' will play a key role in delivering this project. An additional project officer would be employed to help deliver the community engagement, dissemination, and educational aspects of the project.

By linking with other community groups, such as RAW and the Climate Action Town initiative in Annan, we will work collaboratively to secure success at landscape and catchment scale – building all important links between higher catchment, rural action, and downstream, urban impacts.

With the help of Riverwoods funding we would look to outsource skills in natural capital assessments and verification of certain benefits e.g., carbon units and flood mitigation. We would also look to seek business consultancy to help with attracting private investment and to develop our skills in this field. Certain practical works will be put out to tender to local contractors such as erecting livestock fences, providing tree stock, large scale planting, bio-degradable tree guards etc.

2. Commercial potential

Have you started thinking about the benefits your project will deliver and who the potential beneficiaries would be? We would be interested to hear about any early thinking you've done about the benefits (such as natural flood management) and which of these could have a monetary value to any of the beneficiaries. This is the starting point for building a business model.

[200 words max]

Dumfries and Galloway is the main dairy producing region in Scotland and also supports a significant dairy processing industry, including businesses within the Annan catchment. Carefully designed riparian woodlands and hedges can reduce the risk of water pollution from dairy farming, improve biodiversity, protect sensitive banks from erosion, provide shade and shelter to livestock and enhance agricultural soils. These works would increase the environmental sustainability of local dairy farming.

The region also supports a thriving timber industry and some of the larger wood processing companies in Scotland are located in and near the Annan catchment. These organisations may share interest in the security and sustainability of wood and timber production whilst working towards any environmental commitments they might have made. Various haulage companies support the timber and other local industries and are located around the M74. These companies could be interested in the proposed planting schemes to help offset their carbon use.

Other natural assets such as landscape value and natural flood mitigation would be worth exploring with the tourism industry and Dumfries & Galloway Council respectively.

Scot Gov recently awarded Annan Climate Action Town status – financing support from Architecture Design Scotland – who will lead climate emergency discussions with Annan townspeople. This Riverwoods funding would dovetail completely into the Annan CAT initiative by allowing us to use the data and networks we have built to identify where best to plant trees to aid mitigate surface water runoff throughout in the catchment. This, combined with our wide network of contacts means we are confident we can generate short to long term investment interest from relevant companies with local to global reach, but we recognise we are only at an early stage of this project.

3. Engagement with community

What kind of engagement or plans to engage do you have with communities that will benefit or be affected by your project?

[200 words max]

We have significant experience of working with local communities and the public and will collaborate effectively with other local groups like the Annan CAT initiative and RAW. Using public face-to-face meetings, online events and local press we plan to involve the local communities, councils and other stake holders when designing, planning and implementing the works. We strongly believe that taking into account community wishes and considerations, as well as those of an ecological nature are paramount to effective conservation and local buy-in.

Together, we will engage with those that live, work and utilise these areas. We know from experience that important opportunities and constraints can only be identified through proper engagement with those affected; for example, not obscuring a view of livestock from the farmhouse, or avoiding the use of oak trees where stable-owners are concerned about their horses' consuming acorns. We have already identified 14 landowners who are supportive of the aims of the project and are potentially interested to be involved.

Through our partnership with the Annan DSFB, we can work closely with local angling clubs and angling interests, ensuring access and issues relating to the recreational use of these spaces are maintained alongside work to increase riparian tree cover.

There will be scope for educational work alongside this project and we will explore the prospect of running community volunteer and education days where appropriate to share knowledge and skills with interested individuals. RAW have a small facility to grow trees in the longer term and can link this to schools across the catchment. These opportunities can also provide work experience in green skills for those looking to pursue a career in the environmental sector.

4. Partnership potential

What kind of organisations are you planning to team up with to get your project underway?

[200 words max]

We have an excellent working partnership with the River Annan District Salmon Fishery Board, with whom we have worked for many years and will be working closely with to develop and deliver this project. ADSFB have a significant network of contacts and knowledge of riparian ownership throughout the catchment. Forestry and Land Scotland and Crown Estates also manage major holdings of riparian land in the catchment and we have worked with them both on various other projects. We will collaborate with RAW- Restoring Annan Water as they have already delivered small scale planting in the upper catchment and work to link this initiative with Annan CAT.

There are various other education centres (including SRUC Barony Campus), wildlife groups and community groups that we have identified as potentially suitable to be involved in the project delivery. We have held discussions with Crichton Carbon Centre (CCC), who specialise in carbon capture through habitat restoration. We will be seeking to explore and collaborate on areas of the project that are in line with their expertise, namely peatland restoration, which could in time expand the overall project. This work can provide attractive investment opportunities to the private sector, in turn providing financing for restoration work, whilst furthering our aims of enhancing the health of the river catchment.

5. Level of public and environmental benefit

To what extent is your project going to be about creating wider public or environmental benefit?

[200 words max]

Unlike a project that might be solely focused on generating carbon credits for example, the purpose of this is to enhance the health and resilience of the overall river catchment. Through appropriate planning and following ecological best practice, we intend to enhance the ability of the river to function naturally and as such, provide a number of direct and indirect benefits. These will be diverse, ranging from reduced water temperatures for example, benefitting aquatic biodiversity, to preventing loss of agricultural soils through bank stabilisation and buffering of surface run-off which will benefit farmers. We design our projects with a wide range of biodiversity in mind, with our work designed to benefit fish, birds, invertebrate, mammal species and the rest.

The wider community will benefit from this work through the improved biodiversity, climate resilience and ecosystem services that it will provide. Cleaner and healthier rivers will benefit people that use these places for business, recreation, health and mental wellbeing including anglers, walkers, wildlife watchers and canoeists for example. There will be increased opportunities for communities to enjoy, understand and engage with their natural environment.

6. Right intervention in the right place

What steps are you planning to take to make sure your intervention is ecologically suitable for the location?

[200 words max]

GFT has been carrying out riparian tree planting and river restoration techniques for a number of years and has considerable experience in this field, as have RAW. GFT follow an evidence-based management approach, utilising data from monitoring, research findings and best practice guidance to identify and implement management actions. The progress of our previous tree-planting and river restoration projects continues to be monitored, the findings from which feed back into future management decisions. We will utilise new SEPA databases on river power and look at wider restoration objectives as well as woodland opportunities too.

We recognise the importance of planting the right trees in the right place and will draw upon ecological surveys and expertise to inform what trees are to be planted where. We will consider the use of native tree species currently present as well as those that might be suitable but are likely to be absent, for example aspen. Ecological factors including likelihood of waterlogging or drought, possible flood damage, prevalence of grazing and shading will all be used to determine the most suitable trees species to plant. We also recognise that in some circumstances it may not be appropriate to plant trees and these areas will be identified early in the project e.g., to protect important wader breeding areas. We would plan to consult with NatureScot regarding areas to plant trees especially in protected areas and engage with other environmental bodies for expert advice such as The Borders Forest Trust.

Where possible we will aim to source trees from local seedstock to ensure trees are genetically suited to the area – making links to RAW and their tree nursery. A broad range of suitable species will be used, from large species such as oak and wych elm, to smaller, scrub species such as hawthorn and willow, providing both structural and species diversity.

7. Additionality to statutory responsibilities

To what extent is this initiative going to deliver beyond what you would be expected to be delivering anyway?
(For public agencies)?

[200 words max]

Whilst we are not a public agency, it is still of note that this project would provide additionality to our current programmes of habitat restoration. The planned work programme will not include any statutory or legally required works.

Working towards investment readiness and the acquisition of new skills in this field will open novel opportunities for us to fund habitat restoration works, beyond those conventional revenue streams such as government grants etc. that we are currently accustomed to using. This approach will allow us to achieve a greater scale of restoration work, which is critical if environmental work in the area is to reach a critical mass where results can start to be seen.

This initiative also diversifies the range of landowners interested in hosting or implementing environmental improvements on their land, with private investment and payments for ecosystem services seen as a more appealing model than short term grant funded work.