



## DECEMBER REPORT

23.12.2022

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# Connecting Communities with Peatlands

## Mid-Project Report

### Introduction

Connecting Communities with Peatlands (CCWP) is a Just Transition and Carbon Tax Fund project led by Irish Rural Link (IRL) and the Community Wetlands Forum (CWF). It aims to provide community transitioning supports to community groups across Ireland's Midlands. The project remit spans eight counties: Kildare, Westmeath, Laois, Offaly, Longford, Roscommon, North Tipperary, and East Galway (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Project remit

The main aims of the project are:

- Build capacity based on local leadership & through supports provided by agencies and institutions
- Empower communities to manage their own resources
- Provide a networking platform for community-led conservation groups through sharing knowledge, ideas, research and best practice
- Support the protection, management, and wise use of peatlands and other wetland types for sustainable communities

This document is an overview of the work completed by the Connecting Communities with Peatlands project covering Qs 3 & 4 of 2022 and includes the results of a feedback survey from 21 respondents. This report highlights that the CCWP project has begun to fill an information gap for peatland communities in the Midlands and has supported communities to network with one another. This information indicates that the project is succeeding in meeting its overall aims of sharing knowledge and information, raising awareness and facilitating networking. Furthermore, the project will deliver more of the same resources, knowledge and networking opportunities in 2023.

### Targets

Table 1 displays the original project plan deliverables and target dates alongside the actual date the target was met or is due to be met (refer to [Mid Project Report](#) for details regarding delays).

Deliverables 2022	Project Plan Target Date	Actual date
<b>4 regional/ cluster or individual community workshops</b>	30 June 2022	31 December 2022
<b>4 General training/capacity-building workshops</b>	30 June 2022	31 December 2022
<b>2 New clusters of community groups</b>	30 June 2022	31 December 2022
<b>JT Project Progress Report</b>	30 June 2022	31 December 2022
<b>JT Action Plan</b>	30 June 2022	31 December 2022
<b>4 Feasibility Studies and/or Conservation Management Plans</b>		31 December 2022
<b>Pilot mentoring programme</b>	Not in original application	30 January 2023

Table 1

In Q3 the project delivered eight regional/cluster community workshops, going above the target of four. The project had developed an initiative in collaboration with the Irish Community Archive Network, the Heritage Council and the National Museum of Ireland to create the [Know Your Bog](#) initiative using the online interactive Know Your 5K map. Eight regional workshops were held to roll out this initiative.

The target of four feasibility studies and/or conservation management plans will not be met by the end of Q4. The project has however supported one community group, the Tullamore Lions Club, to begin a bog restoration project with a local landowner. The project coordinator has advised the community group on ecological assessments as well as land stewardship agreements between the community group and landowner. A feasibility study will be carried out in 2023, and the project will be advising the community group on the funding application for this.

The pilot mentoring programme will come to a close at the end of January 2023. We hope to extract learnings from the mentors and mentees who participated in the project and report on the outcomes. From there, we intend to support those community groups to carry out feasibility studies or conservation/biodiversity management plans.

Further details of the events, trainings and workshops are described in the following chapters.

## Community Engagement

The project has successfully engaged with a number of community groups inside and outside of the CWF in 2022. We continue to engage with community groups who are not members of the CWF and meet with them to give advice on their peatlands journey. We have a dedicated project mailing list to keep communities, individuals and other stakeholders up to date on our events, trainings and resources.

The number of individuals that have engaged with the project in Qs 3 & 4 is estimated from registration numbers for training and workshop events, the number of participants in the

[Know Your Bog initiative](#), the number of people on our mailing list, and the number of people who have watched the online video resources.

<b><i>Training/workshop</i></b>	<b><i>Numbers registered</i></b>
Know your Bog workshops	54
Know your Bog submissions	6
Conflict Resolution Training	3
Interpretation and conservation planning training	8
Build Your Bog Knowledge Seminars	16
Facebook for beginners training	3
Instagram for beginners training	3
Future Proof your community group session	6
Pilot Mentoring Programme Participants	5
Total views of online webinars	590
Total views of testimonial videos	78
Total views CCWP promotional video	127
Mailing List	163
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>899</b>

*Table 2*

## Capacity Building training

The project has met its targets for capacity building in Qs 3 & 4 by delivering four capacity building trainings both in person and online: interpretation and conservation planning, relationship and conflict management, social media training and a consultation on succession planning and volunteer recruitment and retention.

### **Interpretation and conservation planning training course**

The project coordinator engaged with a trainer with expertise in interpretation planning for natural heritage. Dr. Deborah Benham was hired to deliver an interpretation training course for peatland communities and one-to-one mentoring over the course of two months.

The first training session took place in early November 2022 in Mountbellew, Co. Galway and was scheduled to run over two days. The second day of training had to be postponed until the second session in January 2023 as a number of people became unavailable for the second day of training. Some participants cancelled the evening before the course citing personal reasons or illness for not attending which was unfortunate. The project coordinator and the trainer decided that there would be fewer beneficiaries of the course overall if a significant number missed the second day which focused on a crucial element of developing interpretation plans. Participants of the first day have since been receiving one-to-one online support from the trainer.

Session one of the course content included the following:

#### Day One

##### *Introduction to interpretation & interpreters*

- Benefits of interpretation in conservation & stewardship

- Interpretive principles
- Role of interpretive guides
- Personal and site goals

*Developing interpretation and guiding skills*

*Knowing your resource & telling its stories*

*Engaging with your audience*

*Programme design skills (1)*

## Day Two

*Short activity with your meaningful object*

*Programme design skills (2)*

*Programme design skills (3)*

*Carpool to local bog*

*Visit interpretation centre, short tour from local representative*

*Bog based activity*

*Back at the community centre*

- Reflect on site based activity
- Closing session

As mentioned above, day two was postponed and is scheduled to take place on the 16<sup>th</sup> January, along with the remainder of the course. The project has collaborated with the CWF to open the training to CWF members outside of the Just Transition remit.

A residential experience has been organised for the second session to ensure participants commitment to the course. This entails two nights' accommodation and three days of training. Commitment challenges arise from time to time working with community groups as they are volunteering their time and may need to put work or personal needs first. The project coordinator is taking steps to ensure commitment to training courses going forward in the new year.

## Relationship and conflict management training

Another round of conflict resolution training was delivered by Arc Mediation as course participants from the previous round gave overwhelmingly positive feedback. Arc Mediation is a mediation service that works with families, workplaces, communities and businesses. The project was delivered in collaboration with the CWF to include places for people in the wider membership however the opportunity was not availed of by any CWF members outside the Just Transition remit.



Figure 2 Ciaran and David on Knockcurr Bog Credit: Spicy Dog Media

The training took place online over four half days. Participants learned the theory of conflict resolution and put it into practice with role plays based on real scenarios. In the last session, a guest speaker, Ger Barron, was invited to tell his story of developing the Waterford Greenway. Participants could ask questions and learn from the speaker's experience and get advice on how to manage conflict while advocating for a large project such as a greenway.

Five individuals registered for the training and three participated. Participants were asked in advance of the training what days and times suited them. The dates and times were selected based on which option was most popular. After getting in touch with those who registered but did not participate, they cited personal reasons, work commitments, or other community commitments.

## Social media training

Sandra Hennessey, a consultant from Be Dynamic, was hired to deliver training to community groups on the use of Facebook and Instagram for beginners. The training took place online over two 2.5 hour sessions in early November 2022. Social media is an excellent and free tool available to community groups to engage with their community and to highlight their work and achievements locally as well as to raise awareness of their local bog.

Participants' feedback on the training was positive overall. All respondents said that they learned something new from the training.

*"Sandra is very understanding of those of us who are not up to date with all the social media speak. She explained clearly what we needed to know to engage at a basic level."*

*"Thinking about FB as a communication tool rather than just a publishing tool."*

Participants were asked how they would apply their learning from the training they said,



*“I'll be trying to improve the promotion of our organisation through social media.”*

*“It will certainly help with promoting our work page.”*

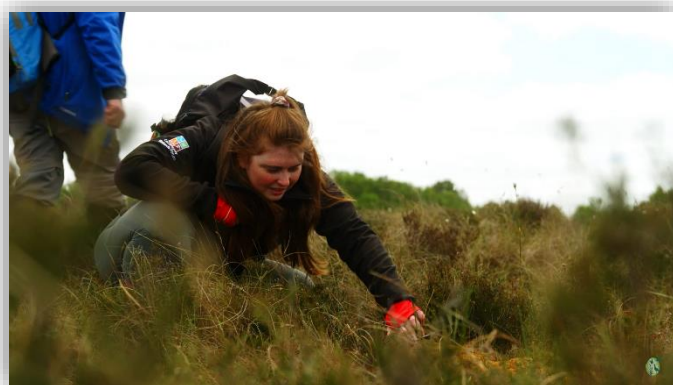
The project coordinator has arranged another training with Be Dynamic to deliver an advanced Facebook and Instagram course in February 2023. The advanced training will support those who have completed the beginners training as well as appeal to community groups who are familiar with social media platforms but are not using them to their full extent.

### **Future Proof Your Community Group**

Succession planning, volunteer recruitment and volunteer retention were listed as challenges by community groups to the project coordinator in the initial training needs assessment undertaken in 2021. Lack of human resources has hampered the capacity of community groups to develop peatland projects and engage with their own community.

The project collaborated with the Community Wetlands Forum Development Officer as this topic is of interest to the wider membership of the organisation outside the Just Transition remit, as well as inside. Derek McDonnell from Big Picture Consultancy was hired to facilitate an initial consultation with community groups to explore emerging challenges for them. Eight community representatives were registered to participate however four

attended plus the Community Wetlands Forum Development Officer and this project's coordinator. This was to allow for joined-up thinking.



*Figure 3 Aoife Kirk, project coordinator, Cloncrow Bog Credit: Spicy Dog Media*

During the workshop, the facilitator supported the group to assess the emerging challenges for community groups. The group carried out a situational analysis to inform a strategic response to the emerging challenges identified by the group, and

lastly looked at the next steps to support community groups to recruit and retain volunteers. The concept of a 'gathering' of peatland community groups to celebrate their achievements as well as the natural and cultural heritage of peatlands was suggested by the group.

### **Suggested Next Steps:**

- Circulate this report to the community reps for review and comment
- Establish a group to co-design, plan and guide the Gathering – membership to include the Community Wetlands Forum, Connecting Communities with Peatlands project and community reps



- CWF/Connecting Communities with Peatlands to commission the development of the community engagement strategy tool
- Set a date for the Gathering, agree a structure for the event and devise a checklist
- Develop an evaluation framework for the Gathering
- CWF and Connecting Communities with Peatlands project to respond to the lack of resources and support structure for community groups, including:
  - the need for leadership and capacity building training
  - access to legal advice
  - more information on environmental issues
  - providing recreational spaces that create an awareness of environment issues
  - responding to systemic issues that work to exclude community groups

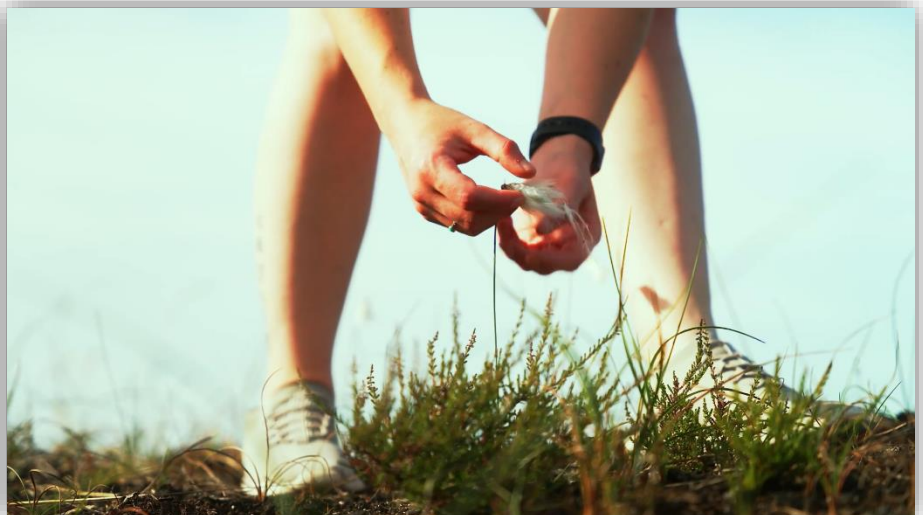
If the Gathering for engaging the local community is successful, other thematic Gatherings could be developed to respond to the lack of resources and structure.

The project coordinator and Community Wetlands Forum Development Officer met with the facilitator to discuss the next steps further on how best to co-design and plan for the Gathering of community groups. The Gathering is planned to take place before the end of Q2 2023.

## Seminars

### Build Your Bog Knowledge Seminar

Elements of Stream Two of the training framework (see Appendix One) are being delivered via a seminar series titled 'Build Your Bog Knowledge'. This is an extension of the previous online series that covered topics in Stream One of the framework. The series is also informed by feedback from participants who participated in the previous webinar series.



*Figure 4 Shauna O'Neill & Bog Cotton on Cloontuskert Bog Credit: Spicy Dog Media*

The first seminar of the series took place in November 2022, titled 'How to Restore a Bog...Part One'. This talk took place at the Clara Bog Visitor Centre with speakers from National Parks and Wildlife Service, RPS Consultancy, and Bord na Móna. A questions and answers session was facilitated after the speakers' presentations.

Audience numbers were high, with 18 people pre-registering online and 16 in attendance that evening. The seminar was also recorded for use as an online resource on the project's YouTube Channel.

Part two of the talk is scheduled for January 2023 with contributors from community projects.

## Pilot Mentoring Programme

The project's pilot mentoring programme officially began in August 2022. Five mentee community groups were matched with their mentor based on their preferences and intended outcomes at the end of the programme (see [Mid Project Report](#) for further details on the pilot mentoring programme). The programme ends in January 2023.

The project coordinator has remained in contact with mentors and mentees throughout the programme. An online meeting was held with mentors in October to get updates on their progress with their groups, as well as one to one phone calls. An in-person meeting with mentees was organised but had to be cancelled as some became unavailable to attend. The project coordinator followed up with mentees with a phone call to assess their progress.

The feedback from mentors and mentees so far has been positive however an assessment of the programme will be carried out in Q1 2023. Learnings from that assessment will determine the continuation of the mentoring programme in 2023.

## Regional Events

### **Know Your Bog**

The idea of an online interactive mapping tool arose from the 'Ideas Generation' workshops held with communities across the Just Transition region in June 2022. The project coordinator set about investigating the possibilities of either collaborating with or creating a new interactive map that could be used to map peatlands heritage, culture, biodiversity, folklore, stories, etc. by the communities engaging with them.

[Know Your 5K](#) is an online mapping initiative hosted on the Our Irish Heritage website and led by the Heritage Council of Ireland and the National Museum of Ireland. The map aims to encourage people to share local knowledge about our heritage. It was identified by the project coordinator as the most user-friendly, affordable, and secure interactive online map.

The project coordinator collaborated with the website management team at the Irish Community Archive Network to develop a specific location on the website titled 'Know Your Bog'. This has become part of the Know Your 5K mapping system, which means any submissions made to the Know Your Bog initiative appear on the Know Your 5K map.

Eight workshops took place across the eight Just Transition counties from September – October 2022. The workshops presented the mapping tool and how a group could make a

submission and were shown examples of other submissions already on the map. Groups expressed a high interest in the interactive map and how it could be used to quite literally put their bog on the map, to record local stories, and to have a safe place for communities to archive their bogs cultural and natural heritage. 54 people attended the workshops and six submissions have been made by



Figure 5 Offaly Know Your Bog Workshop Credit: Aoife Kirk

community groups since October.

Click [here](#) to view the Know Your Bog submissions.

## Resources

Spicy Dog Media were commissioned to produce four videos for the Connecting Communities with Peatlands project – one main promotional video showcasing the work of the project and three testimonial videos from project participants.



Figure 6 Shauna O'Neill, Chair Cloontuskert Tidy Towns, Credit: Spicy Dog Media

The promotional video was launched at the CWF members meeting in September and was posted across all social media platforms. The testimonial videos have been published online over the last few months to promote the project, generate interest and highlight the positive impacts the project is having on community groups in the Just Transition region.

All videos are available on the CCWP [YouTube Channel](#).

## Feedback Survey

Community groups engaging with the project were asked to complete a feedback survey of their engagement with the project in 2022. We received a total of 21 responses.

Respondents were asked a number of questions relating to how they engaged with the project, how it has benefited them, and what they would like to gain from the project in the coming year.

Respondents were asked how they heard about the project with the majority answering that they became aware of the project through either one of the project partners. Some respondents said they found the project on social media, as well as some saying through their work or via email. This indicates to the project coordinator that the project partners' presence in the project has boosted the numbers of those engaging with it.

How did you hear about the Connecting Communities with Peatlands project?



21 responses

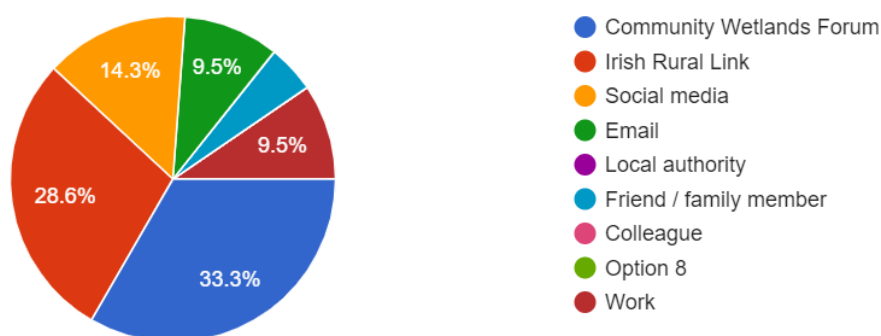


Figure 7

Respondents were given a number of options to select to indicate how they engaged with the project in 2022. The majority attended a talk/workshop/webinar and over half met with the project coordinator in person. Others engaged with the project coordinator via phone or email, read the Guidelines Communities Managing Local Wetlands and Peatlands handbook, watched the recorded webinars on YouTube, or participated in the Know Your Bog initiative or a training course.

How have you engaged with the project? Select all that apply.



21 responses

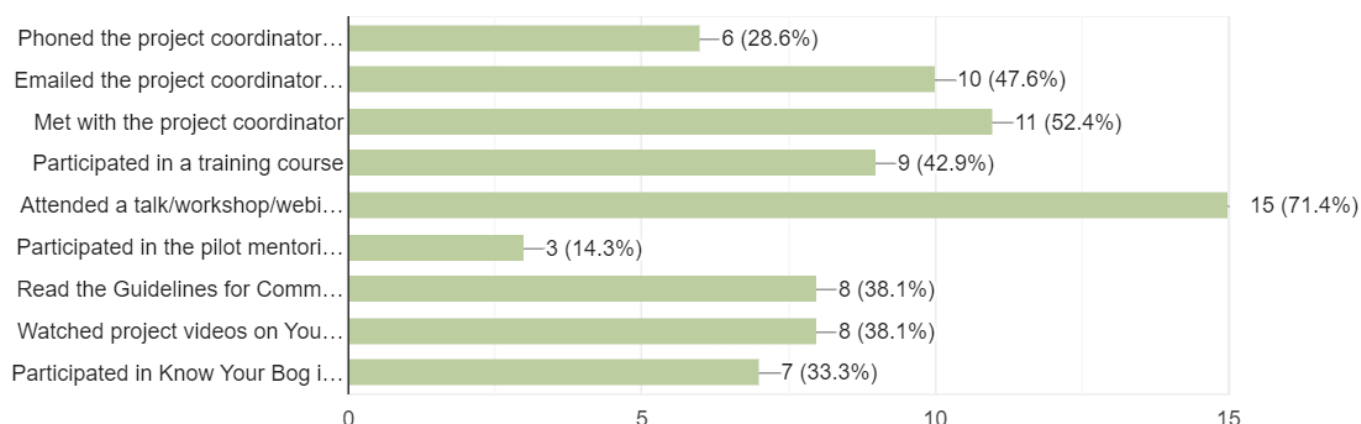


Figure 8

When asked how the project has benefitted their community group in 2022 the majority of responses focused on learning new information, awareness raising and networking as being most beneficial to them:

*“It has motivated and it continues to give us direction. It is a great support and we have made friends with like-minded people.”*

*“It has been excellent. We are at an early stage in terms of our Project and the help and guidance provided has been very welcome.”*

*“I feel that we have access to information that we would not have. This has been a huge benefit to our group.”*

*“We were delighted to take part in online Conflict Resolution Training with the CCWP in 2022, a practical and informative course which is a natural feature of everyday life for communities in all their flavours, and to engage with the project further by becoming part of this wonderful community.”*

These responses are just a flavour of the replies to this question. The words information / informative were mentioned in seven responses. From these comments, it appears that the CCWP project has begun to fill an information gap for peatland communities in the Midlands. Raising awareness of the bog in the locality was mentioned six times referring to the community group itself raising local awareness of the bog as well as the project helping those groups to draw their attention to their local bogs. The theme of networking and engaging with other communities was mentioned four times with friendship and like-mindedness referenced in relation to this. The networking of communities across the Midlands has created a broader community - a community of people connecting with their bogs in a new or different way than in the past. It is evident from these responses that the project is succeeding in meeting its overall aims of sharing knowledge and information, raising awareness and facilitating networking.

The information gap becomes more apparent in the following question as respondents were asked to indicate how the project could be of most benefit to their community group and their objectives in 2023. The most popular response shows that these communities would like more resources about bog conservation and biodiversity (61.9%). This was followed by the need for a one-stop-shop event for communities and to facilitate further networking with more peatland community groups (52.4%) and lastly talks/seminars and peer-peer mentoring (47.6%). Furthermore, these responses indicate to the project coordinator that more resources, information and networking opportunities should be delivered in 2023.

How could the project be of most benefit to your community group and its objectives in the coming year? Select all that apply. [Copy](#)

21 responses

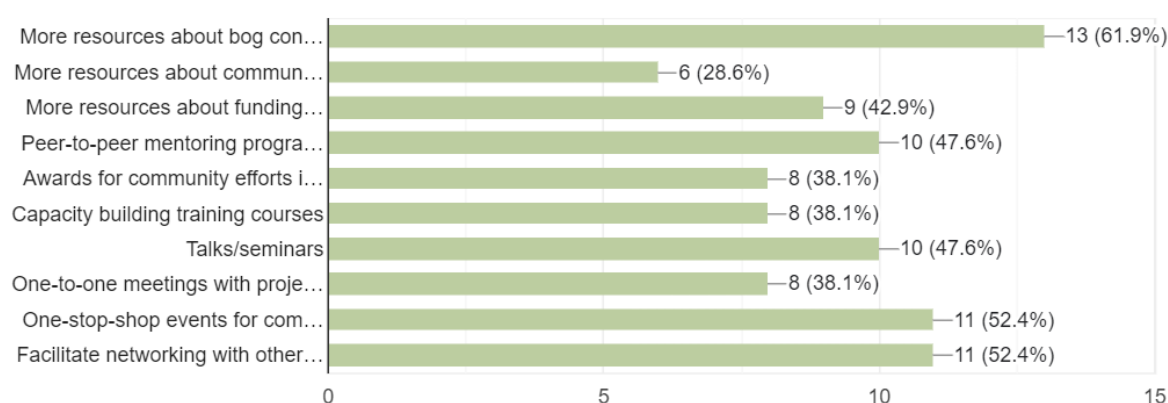


Figure 9

Respondents indicated that the area of biodiversity is where they need most support, followed by bog restoration and attracting new members / volunteers to their groups. Just under half said they need support with community engagement and funding. One third of respondents highlighted that supports in networking, heritage, bog management, recreation and archaeology are required.

In what areas does your community group need the most support? Select all that apply. [Copy](#)

21 responses

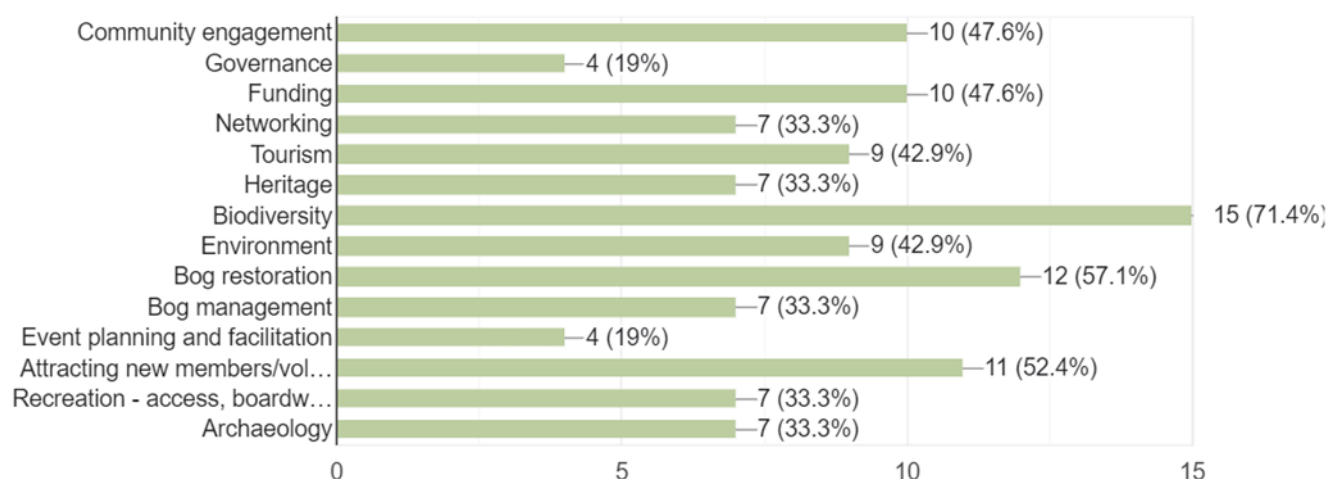


Figure 10



The project intends to build community capacity in 2023 in the areas listed as highest priority by the respondents. CCWP will continue to build on the sharing of knowledge and information and facilitate networking while supporting groups to raise awareness about their bog locally.

Finally, we asked respondents to tell us how we could improve on the project in the coming year. There was no particular theme emerging from this feedback, only that the respondents would like the work to be continued. The project coordinator will take individual comments and critiques on board while planning for 2023. Some of this feedback can be read below:

*“Maybe have workshops in each community rather than in urban centres.”*

*“More of what we have experienced - excellent support.”*

*“County council participation and responsibility.”*

*“Maybe streamline the CWF app. Sometimes there is so much information, relevant stuff can be missed. I do like hearing what others are doing, but it can get mixed up with educational information. Maybe email educational stuff.”*

*“In person meetings.”*

*“Look at events/workshop, etc. over weekends.”*

*“Community to community engagement rather than a community representee being the only point of contact.”*

Thus far, the input and feedback of community groups participating in the project has guided its content. The feedback received from this survey will advise and guide the project coordinator when planning for 2023.

## Social Media

Twitter	August- December 2022
Tweets	Tweet impressions
96	40.3K
Profile visits	Mentions
6,113	274
New followers	Total follows
73	575

Table 3

Facebook	August- December 2022
Facebook Page Reach 13,215	Page visits 175
Page New Likes 73	Paid Reach 8,878
Paid impressions 12,749	

Table 4

Instagram	August- December 2022
Instagram Reach 1,284	Profile Visits 246
New Followers 180	

Table 5

YouTube	Oct 2021- Dec 2022
Subscribers 43	Webinar Series View Total 795

Most views	
168	

Table 6

## Conclusion

The Connecting Communities with Peatlands project has delivered on the majority of its targets for Qs 3 and 4 of 2022, with the exception of four feasibility studies / conservation management plans. The project has reached its targets relating to regional workshops as well as capacity building training courses for communities and supporting communities to network with one another.

This report has highlighted the challenges in the community / voluntary sector regarding individual people's ability to commit to participation in courses or attending talks / events. This has been a recurring challenge in Qs 3&4 of 2022 for the project. Another significant challenge for the project is the delivery of feasibility studies / conservation management plans. Community groups are limited by their numbers, resources and capacity to apply for funding. The mentoring programme aims to address these barriers and support community groups in making applications for funding to implement studies or develop plans. It's the project coordinators intention to role the mentoring programme out on a wider scale in 2023.

The overall feedback and response to the project thus far have been positive. It has become clear that the CCWP project is filling a knowledge and information gap for community groups engaging with their local peatland. We will continue to deliver on this, and more in 2023.



Figure 11 Eugene and Ann on Cloncrow Bog, Tyrellspass Credit: Spicy Dog Media

## Appendix

### Appendix One

<b>Stream 1: Knowledge and understanding of wetlands (local and global context)</b>
<i>Natural sciences</i>
Wetland habitats; types of wetlands; wetlands in the context of the wider landscape
Flora – species identification in relation to the main plant groups (algae, mosses, liverworts, lichens, clubmosses, sedges, grass, rushes, herbs, etc.)
Fauna – species identification in relation to the main animal groups (invertebrates, birds, mammals, reptiles, etc.)
Other species: Fungi
Hydrology, hydrogeology
Soils, geology
Understanding the water/soil/vegetation nexus with respect to wetlands
Climate regulation and the important role of wetlands, particularly peatlands (fens and bogs)
Local to global context of wetlands; local to global conservation measures
Palaeoecology; evolution of wetlands; context in geological time
Land use/historical use context (links with management)
Ecosystem services: provisioning (food, medicine), regulating (GHG), supporting, cultural (physical and monetary values)
Natural Capital accounts and accounting: site (habitat) extent and condition; risk register, etc.
<b>Stream 2: Conservation or site management planning</b>
<i>Appreciation / Interpretation (links with natural sciences and management):</i>
Heritage – natural and built, cultural
Archaeology
Folklore, storytelling
Art – visual, spoken, written, drama, dance, photography, etc.
The role of social media
<i>Education / Interpretation</i>
Terminology (glossary) – jargon buster (how to translate science into understandable pieces)
Interaction – how to organise and deliver events, walks, talks, etc.
How to survey and monitor wetland habitats and species (links with natural sciences)
Linking with established education providers
Learning through creative interaction
Interpretation – targeting users and audiences
<i>Recreation / Interpretation</i>
Health and well-being
Access
Boardwalks, gates, stiles, fencing, etc.
Signage

<i>Restoration/ Conservation</i>
Planning for restoration: What are we trying to restore and why? Community engagement? Statutory body engagement? Timeframes?
Funding streams for restoration
Practical restoration: designing, building and maintaining dams
Water (hydrological management) management – inputs and outputs
Planting (surface stabilisation)
Fencing
Predator Control
Dealing with invasive species
Infrastructure provision
Appropriate Assessment screening and / or Natura Impact Statements (NIS)
<b>Stream 3: General management / stewardship</b>
Developing a site management plan (links with the full list below)
Ownership of the wetland area (land register, title, rights, etc.)
Pressures / threats to the site; surrounding land-use
Insurance/liability in relation to group activities and the wetland site
Leases/licences in relation to the wetland site (understanding land title)
Health and safety
Fire management plan
Flood management plan
Pest/disease management plan
Legislation/policy (Wildlife Act, Birds and Habitats Directives, Planning and Development Act, planning, signage, etc.) – global, national, regional, local
Governance – group and site governance
Funding / potential revenue streams / managing finance
Linking in with international, national, regional and local development plans and events/calendars
How to co-ordinate a technical advisory group
<b>Stream 4: Enabling community groups</b>
Leadership (social and collective)
Conflict resolution / negotiation
Mentoring
Group intelligence
Appreciative Inquiry or strength-based management
Group motivation
Training the trainer
Establishing a common vision, purpose (vision, mission, values, goals, etc.)
Developing a site management plan (links with general management above)
Succession planning
Facilitation of workshops, events, meetings, etc.