

Integrated Land Use Conference 2025



‘The role of Land Management in tackling the Biodiversity Crisis’

Final report

May 2025

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Background

The Integrated Land Use Conference began in 2012 with the aim to bring together our land use-based students from across the Highlands and Islands to both meet and learn from one another. This was initiated in response to concerns from industry about the breadth of focus of land managers.

Three types of activity operate together to provide students with a comprehensive experience including field talks with interactive and practical elements, conference style talks, and student-led group tasks that run throughout the event, addressing specific integrated land use issues. This event also provides a forum for students to talk to industry professionals and learn about potential career opportunities.

This year's conference took place on 25th, 26th and 27th March at the Carrbridge Hotel and in Dalnahaitnach area. It was the 12th conference, and the theme was '*The role of Land Management in tackling the Biodiversity Crisis*'. The event was a real success. The students gave us a lot of positive feedback and one or two minor areas of improvement. They were all really engaged with all sessions and all speakers. There was a lot of discussion between the students from different disciplines. There was a real buzz in the room!



Attendance

A total of 107 people attended the event over the course of the three days. This included 63 students of which 43 were from UHI, and 20 from other universities. The courses represented were:

- National 5 Environmental Science
- HNC Wildlife Conservation Management
- HND Forestry
- BSc (Hons) Forestry and Treescapes Management
- BSc (Hons) Geography
- BSc (Hons) Environmental Science
- BA (Hons) Adventure Tourism Management
- BA (Hons) Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning
- MSc sustainable mountain development
- MSc Sustainability and Rural Regeneration
- MBA Sustainable Renewable Technologies
- MLitt Scottish Heritage
- MLitt Archaeological Studies
- MA Sociology
- PhDs (Geo-Archaeology, Ecology, Rural Land Use, Peatlands)

An extra 34 non-students/professional delegates were present.

We had 4 field sessions led by:

- Rewilding: past reintroduction evaluation, recent reintroduction and future reintroduction including invertebrates. The butterfly effect! – NatureScot and Butterfly Conservation Scotland
- Progress on natural regeneration, work to protect capercaillie, deer management, also riparian planting and river restoration – Seafield and Strathspey Estates, Cairngorm National Park Authority, SEPA and Zulu Ecosystems
- Biodiversity linking peatland/catchment management/wild fisheries – UHI Environmental Research Institute and Atlantic Salmon Trust
- “Wild Tree” concept and survey to highlight the presence of biodiversity hotspot in the landscape and how these can be used as a resource to encourage natural regeneration – Rewilding Affric Highlands

We had 4 talks at the hotel:

- UHI Environmental Research Institute
- Community Land Scotland
- Cairngorms National Park Authority
- Hill and Haar

We had 2 student debate/discussion sessions:

- Biodiversity credits and green finance
- Effect of social media on tourism and the outdoor

We also had the opportunity to view the ‘*Why not Scotland*’ movie from Scotland the Big Picture.

Location / facilities

The event took place at the Carrbridge Hotel in Carrbridge and the field sessions in Dalnahaitnach at Seafield and Strathspey Estates.

➤ Feedback

- ✓ *Excellent location, accommodation and food.*
- ✓ *Carrbridge was a nice location! The venue food and accommodation were nice.*



Event itself

All 4 planned field sessions and 4 planned talks took place. Only 1 planned talk had been replaced by the viewing of a movie at the last minute due to misunderstanding between the speaker and the conference steering committee. We were lucky enough to have a dry weather when we were in the field. The 2 student's debate/discussion sessions were really successful with a strong engagement from the students and all non-student delegates.



➤ Feedback

How would you rate the preparation and administration of the conference?

69% excellent
28% good
3% fair

How would you judge the duration of the conference?

87% adequate
10% too short
3% too long

How would you rate the cost vs. value of the event?

54% inexpensive
46% adequate

How would you rate the effectiveness of the student activities?

56% excellent
41% good
3% fair

- ✓ *The selection of talks, activities and debate/discussions was interesting and engaging. It was particularly useful to hear from different stakeholders/speakers from different backgrounds.*
- ✓ *Enjoyed hearing about the history of the Seafield estate and the struggles of working on biodiversity and protection from a landowner's perspective. The trees for life section on the second day was really interesting, it would be great to have them back next year.*
- ✓ *Open Debate - it was inspirational to see different bodies and stakeholders together expressing their opinions.*
- ✓ *All of the talks and workshops were excellent. A full and well planned programme, not too long, just right.*
- ✓ *The selection of themes covered was fantastic - lots of different land uses discussed.*
- ✓ *It was great to be outside and see what the speakers were talking about in person!*
- ✓ *I enjoyed the mix of research and practice presentations.*
- ✓ *It was good to meet people with different experience, background and opinions from myself*
- ✓ *I liked how student focused it was; it was great to network with other early career researchers who want to keep going in academic or government research. Everyone came from such diverse backgrounds, military, Japanese studies, engineering physics, archaeology, sociology, hospitality, really great group of people.*



What skills have been used/developed by the students?

82%	Communication skills
79%	Teamwork
72%	Networking and social skills
67%	Problem solving
59%	Decision making
51%	Sector knowledge
49%	Flexibility
46%	Empathy
36%	Passion
33%	Negotiating
31%	Assertiveness and diplomacy
28%	Leadership

- ✓ *It has made me think more sympathetically towards people who have different priorities from myself.*
- ✓ *I have a fuller appreciation that we are all in this together, regardless of background and future trajectory, there are people who care all over the place.*
- ✓ *The importance of cooperation from land owners is much more important than I thought before.*
- ✓ *This has opened up many options and given me lots to think about as I'm still early in my degree I'm still considering as many options as possible.*
- ✓ *The conference solidified my conviction that I am excited to transition my research and work more towards northern systems and focus on the socio-political dynamics of human-environmental relations!*
- ✓ *It definitely opened up how more job opportunities and so many different kinds of jobs in this sort of industry.*

Asked to describe in one word how each participant felt at the end of the conference.....



What is next?

This year's conference costed a total of £7,870.70 for 3 days and 2 nights.
The conference's bank balance is in credit of £2,439.49.



Suggested timeline for next year's event if going ahead:

- Early September 2025: venue and theme must be confirmed.
- September/October/November 2025: scheduling and inviting speakers.
- w/c 3rd November 2025: marketing 'keep the date' campaign and open 'early bird' registration
- w/c 19th January 2026: extra marketing campaign and open full registration
- February 2026: marketing activities and reminders
- w/c 16th February 2026: registration close
- w/c 23rd March 2026: ILUC25 event

➤ Feedback

- ✓ *Everything is running really well, don't change!*
- ✓ *I think it would be invaluable to have an SRUC representative or speaker at the conference.*
- ✓ *I think it would be beneficial to discuss funding and costs in land management.*
- ✓ *More representation of women and minority groups.*



Thank you to all our generous sponsors.

