LANDSCAPES NI

**Landscapes for people, nature and planet**

The conference will ensure that we maintain holistic thinking about the multifunctional benefits our amazing landscapes provide as we seek progression on a new government strategy and policy for landscapes in the future.

**Programme:**

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| **09.30** | **Arrival, coffee / scones** |
| 10.00 | Welcome and introduction – Lizzy Pinkerton, Chair of Landscapes NI |
| 10.10 | DAERA presentation |
| 10.30 | A word from our sponsors<br>▪ Simon Wightman – Esme Fairbairn Foundation<br>▪ Lana Moore - Action Renewables |
| 10.40 | Music from the Sperrins |
| 10.45 | Keynote speaker 1 – Communities and landscapes – an integral connection. Ed Forrest, **Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere** |
| **11.15** | **Networking break** |
| 11.45 | Panel discussion - Nature recovery and the critical role of landscapes<br>Emma Cunningham National Trust, Professor Cathy Maguire, Office for Environmental Protection, Hugh Cushnan, NI Environment Agency |
| 12.20 | Keynote speaker 3 – The role of landscapes in tackling a climate emergency<br>Clare Downing – **National Landscapes Association** |
| **12.50** | **Lunch and networking break** |
| 14.00 | Workshops 1 |
| 15.00 | Workshops 2<br>Each workshop will be run twice so that you have the opportunity to attend two workshops. |
| 16.00 | Final plenary and further networking<br>Tea and coffee |
| 16.30 | Close |

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**Workshop 1**

Unfortunately, the Dark Skies Workshop has been cancelled due to a bereavement.

**Workshop 2**

**Nature Looms – Woven Landscapes – Annans Arch**

Take a moment to slow down, connect with the landscape and weave a little piece of the coast. Using miniature looms participants will create their own woven landscapes from a mixture of natural fibres, foraged beach materials and items gathered through beach clean-ups - from grasses and driftwood to sea-worn fragments and found textures.

Inspired by the incredible landscapes around us, this relaxed, hands-on workshop invites us to look more closely at what the shoreline holds, exploring nature, waste, texture and place through weaving. Each finished loom becomes a unique miniature portrait of the coast - a small landscape shaped by the materials the land and sea have left behind.

**Workshop 3**

**Nature friendly farming Cormac Dolan**

This participatory workshop will explore how to effectively engage and support farmers in adopting nature-friendly farming practices that deliver benefits for biodiversity, water quality, soil health, climate resilience, as well as farm business resilience. Drawing on the farmer-led approach of the Nature Friendly Farming Network, Cormac Dolan will share practical experiences from working alongside farmers across Northern Ireland.

Participants will discuss and explore what motivates farmers to engage with environmental action, consider and share effective approaches for building trust and collaboration with farming communities and aim to identify opportunities to strengthen partnerships between farmers and landscape management bodies.

**Workshop 4**

**Youth voice for landscapes – Landscapes Youth NI**

This participatory workshop will explore how meaningful youth engagement can strengthen environmental decision-making, support community action, and build the next generation of landscape leaders. It will be facilitated by young people from our UK Connect project and will draw on the experiences of Landscapes Youth NI members through programmes within both Northern Ireland and GB landscapes including AONB's Geoparks, National Landscapes

and National parks, participants will hear first-hand perspectives on what effective youth involvement looks like and how organisations can create opportunities for young people to influence change.

Participants will gain a greater understanding of the value of youth participation in landscape management and environmental governance, explore barriers to meaningful youth engagement and how these can be overcome and identify practical approaches for embedding youth voices within organisations, partnerships, and projects. The workshop will also develop ideas for creating lasting pathways for youth leadership in landscapes.

**Workshop 5**

**Trees in uplands – Reamai Mathers**

Native trees were historically a defining feature of our upland landscapes, yet now they are largely absent from most of Northern Ireland's uplands. This workshop will explore the role that trees can play in creating more resilient upland landscapes, supporting biodiversity, improving water management, enhancing farm sustainability and helping communities adapt to climate change. Drawing on his extensive experience in ecology, sustainable agriculture, and landscape-scale projects, Réamaí will examine how the right trees in the right place can deliver multiple benefits for nature, farming, and people.

Participants will gain an understanding of the ecological and cultural role of trees in upland landscapes and explore opportunities for woodland creation, agroforestry, and natural regeneration along with discussions on ways to balance tree regeneration and planting, peatland recovery, biodiversity, heritage and community interests.

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## Biographies of Speakers

### Ed Forrest

Ed has spent over 35+ years working in countryside and environmental management. Starting with 15 years working for the National Trust in Cornwall and the Lake District, before moving to Scotland in 2006 to work on a lottery funded landscape partnership project which he went on to manage. He's now Director of Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere, having been its first employee and involved with the designation since 2011, just as the region entered the final throes of being nominated to UNESCO.

The UNESCO Biosphere ethos of seeing people as an integral part of the ecosystem by incorporating a balanced approach to social, environmental and economic considerations aligns well with his own values and has been a guiding principle throughout the Biospheres development in SW Scotland. With teams focussing on communities and learning, nature recovery, climate change and business development the Biosphere is recognised locally as a key conduit able to bridge the gap between rural communities, land managers, farmers and public sector colleagues.

### Professor Cathy Maguire

Cathy is the Head of Assessments at the Office for Environmental Protection and leads on assessing and reporting on governments' progress in improving the natural environment in line with their Environmental Improvement Plans, goals and targets. Prior to joining the OEP she worked at the European Environment Agency and had responsibilities for design, coordination and lead authorship of the State and Outlook for the European Environment Reports 2015 and 2020. Cathy has over 25 years' experience in developing knowledge that supports policy and decision making and has worked in the public and private sectors, academia and civil society. She is an honorary Professor of Practice at Queens University Belfast. She was included in the ENDS Power List 2025 of the UK's most impactful environmental professionals.

### Dr Hugh Cushnan

Hugh is the Principal Scientific Officer for Landscapes within the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). Having recently taken up this role, Hugh is helping to shape NIEA's approach to landscape management and policy at a pivotal time for nature recovery, climate resilience, and sustainable land use.

With over 15 years' experience in environmental science and management, Hugh has built his career specialising in peatland hydrology, restoration planning, and landscape-scale environmental management. His work has spanned research and consultancy, delivering evidence-based solutions that support biodiversity, improve water quality, enhance climate resilience, and maximise carbon sequestration.

Hugh holds an MEng in Civil Engineering and a PhD focused on the restoration potential of Irish raised bogs. He is a Chartered Engineer (CEng), Chartered Scientist (CSci), Chartered Environmentalist (CEnv), and Chartered Water and Environmental Manager (C.WEM). He is passionate about applying robust scientific evidence to inform decision-making and deliver lasting benefits for landscapes, nature, and society.

**Emma Cunningham**

Emma is General Manager for Restore Nature NI at the National Trust, leading work across the Mournes, Lough Neagh, Strangford and the North Coast. Her career has taken her from Colombian páramo and tropical forest to high-altitude Ecuador, the Galápagos, and some of Northern Ireland's most significant landscapes.

Emma spent eight years living and working in Colombia, where she managed an ecological research centre in Bogotá and a school farm, with research focused on water quality across catchments from páramo to reservoir. She worked alongside rural farmers to explore Indigenous and locally rooted approaches to land management and contributed to jaguar tracking and monitoring with CATIE and Universidad Javeriana. During her summers she worked as a ranger in Colombia's national parks, with the highlight being her time as a dive ranger on Gorgona Island.

She subsequently moved to Ecuador, where she was a founding member of Outward Bound Ecuador and worked as an expedition leader, leading high-altitude mountaineering expeditions as well as expeditions in the Galápagos. These experiences shaped a lasting interest in how people experience, understand and care for wild and working landscapes.

After moving back home to Northern Ireland, Emma began working in the Mournes through tree nursery and volunteer programmes, fire management and prevention, landscape planning and practical conservation delivery. She later joined the National Trust as a Volunteer and Community Consultant, before moving into general management roles covering Mid Ulster and the North Coast. Throughout her career, working with and through people has been central — from farmers and volunteers to rangers, communities and partners.

She now leads Restore Nature NI, within the National Trust; working across a diverse portfolio of landscapes and communities. Much of her work is outward-facing, building relationships across conservation organisations, government, landowners, communities, researchers and other sectors to create the trust and shared purpose needed to work at landscape scale. She is particularly interested in bringing scientific knowledge, local knowledge and lived experience together, and in creating the conditions for people to shape and deliver positive change in the places they care about.

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**Clare Downing**

Clare is the Climate Change Coordinator for the National Landscapes Association where she provides advise and support to all the National Landscapes (England, Wales & Northern Ireland) to develop their climate change work, such as, risk assessments as a step towards Adaptation Plans and analysing their greenhouse gas emissions and working on ways we can reduce them. Clare joined the National Landscapes Association in 2025 and lives in the **North Wessex Downs National Landscape**. Previously she worked for NFU Mutual doing their mandatory climate disclosure reporting, and has more than 10 years' experience working at the University of Oxford on both:

- climate change mitigation - a research programme on energy efficiency and reducing energy demand (**CREDS**)
- climate change adaptation – running the Natural Environment portfolio for the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) and working for the European Environment Agency on the **Climate-ADAPT website**, as well as projects on social justice/vulnerability and climate change.

Before that she worked for over 15 years in an environmental consultancy company where she developed climate change strategies and plans for Local Authorities, worked in international development assessing the potential of electrification for lifting communities out of poverty in South Africa and commercialisation of technologies in Russia. She started her career in the scientific civil service, monitoring and modelling acid rain and rural air pollution.

**Lauren Cudden from Anann's Arch**

Lauren Cudden is a multidisciplinary artist and experienced creative facilitator whose practice is rooted in nature, wellbeing, ceremony and connection. Drawing on her knowledge of herbalism, movement and yoga, Lauren creates thoughtful, sensory experiences that encourage people to slow down, explore the natural world and connect with themselves and those around them.

Lauren has extensive experience working with a wide range of communities and brings a warm, inclusive and participant-led approach to her facilitation. Her workshops often explore plants, herbs, the elements, seasonal traditions and ritual, combining creative practice with sensory exploration, storytelling and gentle movement. Through her work with **Anann's Arch**, Lauren contributes a distinctive practice that beautifully connects art, nature, wellbeing and the everyday rituals that bring people together.

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**Cormac Dolan**

Cormac is the NI Manager for **the Nature Friendly Farming Network**, a farmer led organisation that supports farmers wanting to rediscover the balance between farming and nature. Through his role Cormac facilitates peer-to-peer learning on farms about nature-friendly and regenerative practices helping farmers save money and increase profit by lowering inputs and building more resilient farming systems. Along with the farmer steering group he advocates for policy that supports a long-term transition to farming systems that are economically sustainable while rebuilding soil health, protecting water quality and tackling biodiversity loss.

After spending his twenties in the Scottish Highlands, initially involved in adventure tourism, Cormac developed a strong passion for conserving the landscapes that outdoor pursuits rely on. Cormac has worked on conservation projects on the Isle of Rum NNR, Great Glen as well as the Mourne Mountains and other National Trust owned designated habitats closer to home, concluding that our farming systems are the fundamental make-or-break factor for our local ecological future.

**Landscapes Youth NI**

The Landscapes Youth NI group was established in November 2025 and are also part of a wider UK Connect project to deepen and expand East–West collaboration by enabling the Landscapes Youth NI cohort to engage directly with Youth Ranger and Youth Ambassador programmes across National Parks and National Landscapes in GB. Working in partnership with **EUROPARC Atlantic Isles** (who are a not-for-profit network working with all jurisdictions in the British Isles), the project will support learning exchange, problem-solving, leadership development, and the creation of lasting civic relationships across jurisdictions.

These relationships will be created and sustained through three structured in-person exchange visits, joint online workshops, co-production of a manifesto for youth and webinars led by participating young people and hosted by EUROPARC Atlantic Isles. The Manifesto will act as a long-term shared resource and reference point for continued collaboration and will feed into the new landscape strategy for Northern Ireland.

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**Réamaí Mathers**

Réamaí is an environmental consultant and ecologist who lives in the Glens of Antrim. He has more than 35 years' experience in ecology, environmental research, land management and education. Through his business, **Aspen Consultants**, he works with the construction industry, farmers, communities and charitable organisations.

He also farms cattle and sheep. His interest in farm woodland is rooted in the potential of trees on small farms: providing shelter, improving animal welfare, protecting soils and water, supporting biodiversity, and producing useful timber and firewood. He works closely with the all-Ireland tree charity Trees on the Land and, through the Glens of Antrim Flower-Fed brand, promotes farming that supports biodiversity and productive local food systems. He takes a practical view that farming should work at more than one level, with stronger local supply chains and the decentralisation of food and energy important goals. His approach combines ecological evidence and practical farming experience with dúchas: the interconnectedness of all things.