

Participatory governance for nature recovery: participant information sheet

Research programme: Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery

Ethics Approval Reference: SOGE1A2021-247_Amendment_01

1. What is the purpose of this research?

Nature recovery and Nature-based Solutions (NbS) initiatives – like rewilding, marine and wetland restoration, and natural resource management - have gained significant global attention for their potential to address multiple sustainability objectives¹ by working with nature. These solutions often aim to benefit both society and the environment by promoting more participatory governance structures that seek to involve various stakeholders in their implementation. However, challenges remain, including the risk of exacerbating inequalities and exclusion, side-lining local knowledge and socio-cultural values of landscapes. Efforts to address these issues stress the importance of rethinking and redesigning participatory processes empowering local communities in decision-making processes and management practices.

Participatory governance is considered crucial for delivering direct, tangible community benefits through nature recovery, while strengthening local democracy and integrating local knowledge to inform decision-making. However, it is important to remember that participation does not always guarantee positive outcomes. Research and practical experience have shown that participation can sometimes reinforce existing power dynamics and interests, rather than identify and dismantle them. There are risks not only of “greenwashing” and “land grabbing”, but of “democracy washing” too. Key questions revolve around who decides, whose voice is heard, what knowledge counts, who benefits, how benefits are distributed, and so on.

This research project aims to explore how participatory governance structures can be improved to deliver multiple benefits for both people, nature, and climate for more genuinely transformative outcomes through nature recovery projects. Central to this are approaches that give agency to communities of place, and the power to determine and manage issues and landscapes that impact their daily lives. Organisations seeking to ‘rewild’ the landscape must also ‘repeople’, which must involve strengthening mechanisms for local democracy and shared decision-making, prioritising community benefits and joint ventures such as housing and renewable energy, and overall helping to build the capacity – through the control and sharing of assets – for diverse groups to reverse and halt not just the biodiversity and climate crisis, but a range of socio-economic and human well-being issues too.

¹ Sustainable development goals include poverty alleviation, food security, clean water, quality education, affordable and clean energy, improved work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, sustainable communities, climate action, responsible consumption, and so forth: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

2. What is the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery?

This research project is part of a larger project called the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery (LCNR). The LCNR is a large, interdisciplinary 10-year research project based at the School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford. It aims to tackle the challenge of halting and reversing this loss of biodiversity by addressing the ecological, social, cultural and economic dimensions of nature recovery in a single framework, harnessing state-of-the-art technologies and thereby developing and testing an innovative model to deliver nature recovery at scale. Find out more here: <https://www.naturerecovery.ox.ac.uk/>.

Specifically, this project is part of the 'Society' research theme of the LCNR which encompasses the governance and socio-cultural dimensions of nature recovery. This theme examines how 'nature recovery' is defined and governed at multiple scales across diverse landscapes, how its costs and benefits are distributed, and what lessons this holds for promoting equitable and restorative human-nature relations. One part of this work focuses on [advancing participatory governance for nature recovery](#), which aims to advance participatory approaches for delivering multiple social and ecological benefits through nature recovery, particularly in ways that are equitable and empower people to shape the decisions that affect themselves, nature, and landscapes.

To address the objectives of this research, we will be working with a wide range of partners involved in the nature restoration agenda including policy-makers and UK government departments, non-departmental public bodies, non-governmental organisations, charities and not-for-profits, community groups and organisations, land-owners and farmers. Our research works with these partners to assess the social and cultural dimensions of delivering nature recovery and nature-based solutions in the UK. These issues are explored through inter- and transdisciplinary approaches, conducting theoretically-informed research with real-world impact. Outputs will include academic papers, practitioner guidance, reports, and policy briefs.

3. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited because you are likely to be interested in, impacted by, and/or have the potential to influence land use and management decision-making in the UK, particularly regarding nature-based solutions and nature recovery projects.

4. Do I have to take part?

No. You can ask questions about the research before deciding whether or not to participate. If you do agree to participate, you may withdraw yourself from the study at any time, without giving a reason, by advising the researchers of this decision.

5. What will happen if I take part in the research?

If you are happy to take part in the research, you will be asked to take part in a survey questionnaire, participant observation, an interview, and/or a workshop. In some situations, you may be asked to participate via a digital engagement platform called Commonplace Ltd. (www.commonplace.is). The LCNR research team is collaborating with Commonplace to explore how we can use innovative digital and hybrid approaches to better understand human-nature connections, and then integrate this knowledge into nature recovery decision-making processes. This survey may be conducted online (remotely) or in-person (hybrid), for example, in an interview or facilitated workshop setting. Please note that engaging via the Commonplace platform is not a requirement for participating in the research, and alternative ways to contribute can be discussed by contacting the lead researcher.

At a later stage, you may be invited to participate in a follow-up focus group and/or interview. Research interviews and focus group discussions will be semi-structured – i.e., mainly conversational in style and led by participants. The key questions will revolve around:

- Your views on the socio-economic, cultural and heritage values of relevant landscapes and ecosystems.
- Your views on the challenges and opportunities for integrating local situated, historic, and place-based knowledges alongside other information traditionally used in nature recovery and nature-based solutions decision-making.
- Your views on the challenges and opportunities for the participatory governance of land use and management decisions, including how these initiatives can best be delivered in collaboration with local community groups and organisations to deliver genuine, tangible community benefits and strengthen local democracy.

Interviews should take approximately 45-60 minutes. If you are invited to take part in a workshop at a later stage in the research, then the duration of these may be longer.

If you are still happy to take part, you will then be asked to sign a consent form or provide verbal confirmation of your consent. There may be opportunities for follow-up discussions/interviews, but these are not currently scheduled. Interviews will be recorded by an audio recorder and manual note-taking, and transcribed using a professional and GDPR-compliant transcription service.

6. Are there any potential risks in taking part?

There are no potential risks to you associated with this research.

7. Are there any benefits in taking part?

There will be no direct benefit to you from taking part in this research, although we hope that this research will enrich the debate on the future of UK land management - including contributing to existing knowledge, improving current practice and policy decision-making - and ultimately contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future.

8. What happens to the data provided? ²

The information you provide as part of the study is the **research data**. Any research data from which you can be identified (e.g., your name, date of birth, audio recording), known as **personal data**. It does not include data where the identity has been removed (anonymous data).

We will minimise our use of personal data in the study as much as possible. The **research data** will be stored confidentially using encrypted electronic devices. Your responses will be anonymised.

Personal / sensitive data will be stored confidentially using encrypted electronic devices.

Only the researcher will have access to personal/sensitive data/research data.

Only in situations where you have given explicit informed consent to your data being stored and analysed using the Commonplace platform, then specific members of staff from the following organisations will have access to the **research data**:

- Commonplace Ltd (Commonplace Ltd's privacy policy can be viewed here: <https://www.commonplace.is/privacy-policy>). Members of staff with access to the research data would include the project's Customer Success Manager and Accounts Manager. You can request further details by contacting the researcher.
- Highlands Rewilding Ltd (Highlands Rewilding Ltd's privacy policy can be viewed here: <https://www.highlandsrewilding.co.uk/privacy-policy>). Members of staff with access to the research data would include the Community Engagement Coordinators and the Co-Chief Scientist. You can request further details by contacting the researcher.

You have the right to opt-out of the use of the Commonplace platform at any time, without giving a reason, by contacting the researchers. Specific privacy details that you should be aware of include:

- Conducting good engagement via Commonplace involved collecting some level of personal data. Signing up and logging in to the platform requires a valid email address. Other personal data that may be collected includes your name, postcode, gender, and general information about your connection to the area, however this personal data will only be collected with your specific approval and will not be publicly accessible.
- Any contributions made to the Commonplace platform can be kept anonymous if preferred (your name and email address will not be made public, unless you specifically agree to this).
- Commonplace Ltd does not share personal data with third parties.
- If you sign up and contribute data to the Commonplace platform (e.g., if you add comments about a project or your local area), but later decide to opt-out, you can do so within 30 days of contributing and your data will be deleted.

² Please refer to [CUREC's Best Practice Guidance on Data Collection and Management](#) (BPG 09)

- If you have any general questions, including in relation to how Commonplace may use data submitted via their platform, you can email: privacy@commonplace.is.

All research data and records will be stored for at least 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research. We may retain and store your personal data for an additional period of time as necessary for the purposes of the study, and for further research.

9. Will the research be published?

The research may be published in academic papers, publicly available policy briefs, reports, and blog posts.

10. Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is organised by Dr. Caitlin Hafferty of the Environmental Change Institute, School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford. It is being financially supported by the Leverhulme Trust through the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery.

11. Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. The ethics approval reference number is: **SOGE1A2021-247_Amendment_01**.

12. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the study or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please speak to the researcher, details below, who will do their best to answer your query. The researcher should acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how they intend to deal with it. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the relevant chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter in a reasonably expeditious manner:

Chair, **Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee**; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD

13. Data protection

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the study.

The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest.

Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/compliance/gdpr/individualrights/>.

In specific instances where you have been asked to provide data via the Commonplace Ltd community engagement platform, further information about their privacy policy can be found here: <https://www.commonplace.is/privacy-policy>.

14. Further information and contact details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

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