



Shropshire
Wildlife Trust



Restoring the Marches Mosses

The Marches Mosses are Fenn's, Whixall & Bettisfield Mosses and Wem Moss National Nature Reserves in North Shropshire. Collectively the mosses form the third largest lowland raised peatbog in the UK. Lowland raised peatbogs are one of the rarest habitats on earth - over 96% have been destroyed.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales plan to restore 665ha of the Marches Mosses and their 'edge' habitat (also known as 'lagg') to make them healthy functioning eco-systems again.

This will involve removing forestry and woodland, retaining more water on the centre of the mosses, recreating bog on marginal fields, controlling air and water pollution and cleaning up the scrapyards.

We also want to make the Marches Mosses more accessible to everyone by building a small visitor centre on the site of the ex-scrapyard, installing a wheel chair accessible bird hide, running a large volunteering programme, holding community events, as well as improving interpretation and access.

What are the issues?

Peatbog edge habitat drained for farmland. Regular, seasonal flooding.

Forestry plantation, trees and bushes growing on the peatbog are drying it out.

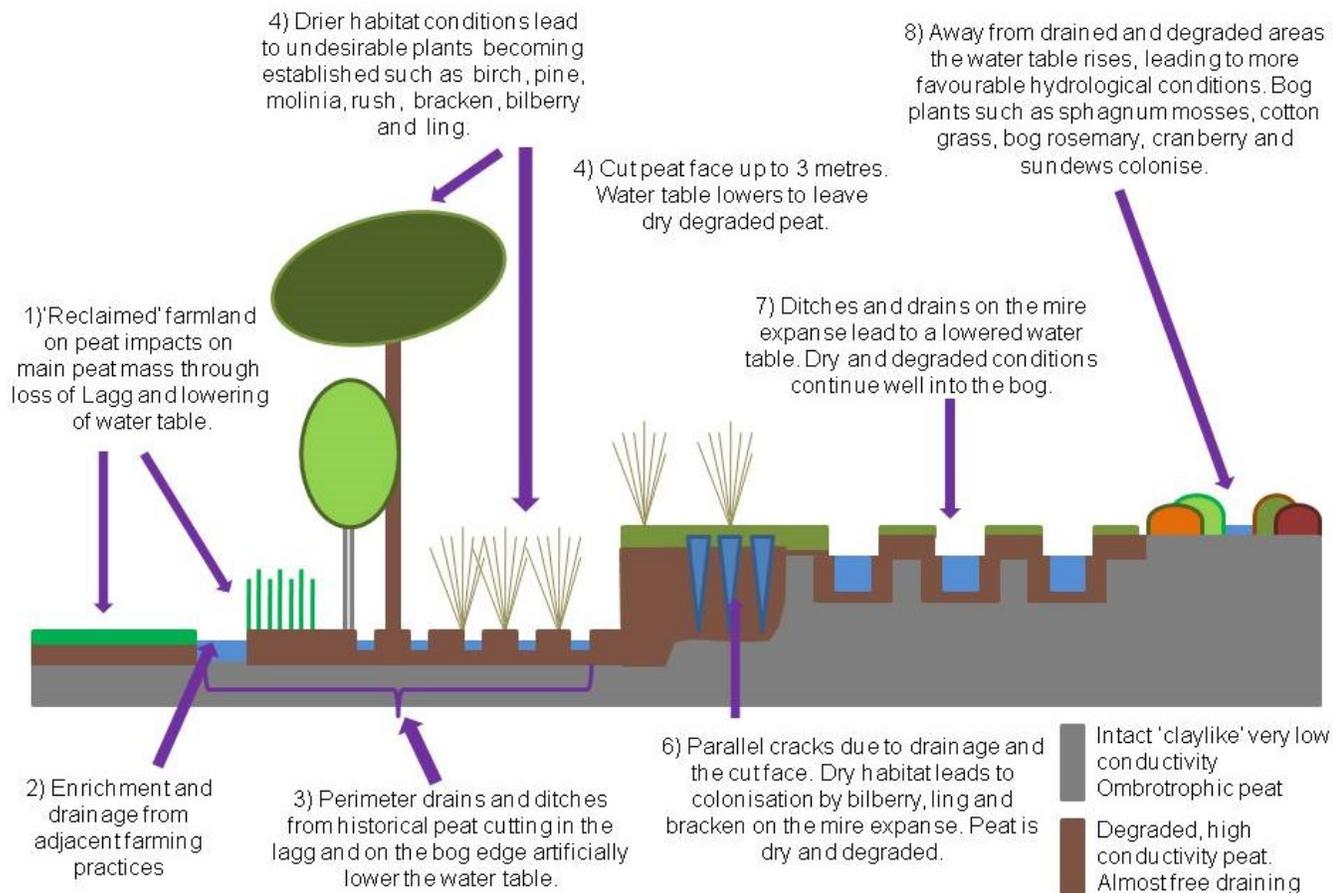
Dogs off leads disturb wildlife and leave poop on the moss, particularly on main track.

Peatbog badly damaged by commercial peat cutting in the past.

Heavily polluted scrapyards with 100,000 tyres and lots of oil, rubbish and mess.



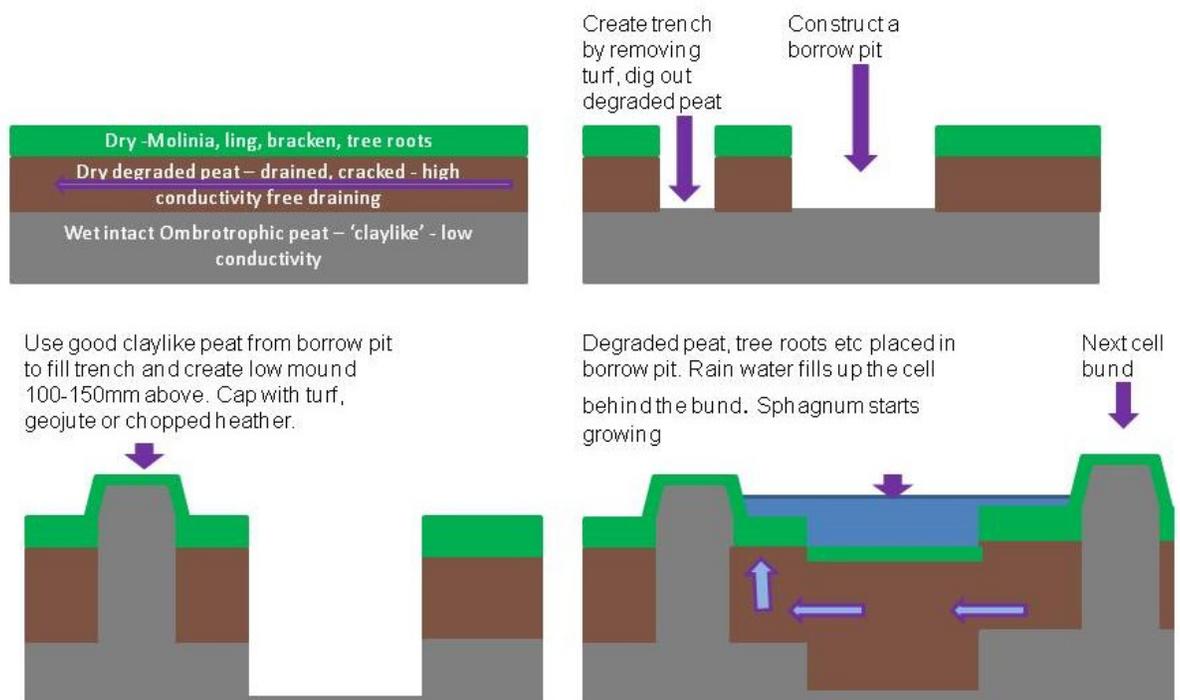
What's wrong with the peat?



The big fix

The most important element in fixing the Marches Mosses is water. Drainage over the last hundred or so years has badly damaged the bog and its ability to regenerate, as well as help store water and carbon dioxide.

To regain control of the water (or hydrology) on the site, we need to divert large drains, block up smaller drains and create independent 'cells' (think of a honey comb style peatbog) through a new technique called contour bunding, explained in the diagram below.



Stopping pollution



The whole site is affected by air, water and land based pollution. The main sources are airborne nitrogen from chicken farms, run-off from farming fertilisers and pesticides and all of the rubbish on the scrapyard.

The project will monitor pollution sources and work with local land owners and communities to try and reduce it in the first place.

The scrapyard will be cleared up and restored early on in the project.

Invasive species

Invasive species mean plants and animals that you wouldn't find on a healthy peatbog. The Marches Mosses have a big problem with a type of grass called Purple Moor grass, as well as silver birch saplings taking root and drying out the bog.

The project will work with volunteers to remove large areas of invasive species and as the bog gets wetter and more acidic again, these species won't be able to regrow.



Scrapyard challenge

The scrapyard situated on the south end of Fenn's and Whixall Mosses has been polluting the peatbogs for around 60 years. Shropshire Wildlife Trust has bought the scrapyard and will clean it up with Natural England's help.

Once the site has been cleaned, we want to put a small visitor centre with toilets, café, shop and playscape inside one of the old breaker's yard sheds, so that more people can visit the Marches Mosses. The visitor centre will be funded for two years by the project to see if it is used by the local community and visitors to the area and will work as a self sustaining business. We're keen to hear people's views on this. A wheel chair accessible birdhide and small car park will also be put in by the 'flooded fields', the other side of the canal from the scrapyard.

At the moment around 10,000 people per year visit. We hope to increase this to 20,000 visitors by 2020 by attracting people from the surrounding area and from the passing canal boats on the Llangollen canal.



People, people, people



The project will engage thousands of people each year throughout the project and after it has finished.

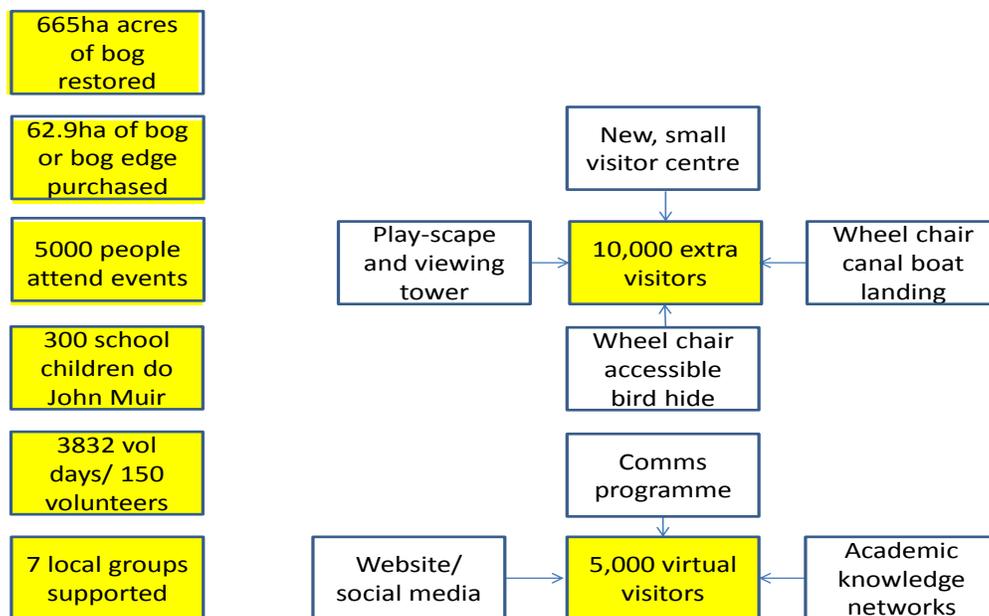
The new visitor centre will act as a gateway to the Marches Mosses for boffins and babies alike, attracting an additional 10,000 visits each year. The new facilities will be developed to make the mosses accessible to as many people as possible with a range of different needs.

During the project there will be a programme of events, training and volunteering aimed at local people, visitors and academic audiences that will help connect 5,000 people with the heritage of the peat.

Around 300 school children will be able to complete week long John Muir Award to explore and learn about the bog.

Through traditional and digital communications, the project will also reach over 5,000 people and share knowledge about how important peatbogs are.

What will happen?



Project funding

This five year multi-million pound project is being mainly funded by the EU LIFE programme and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and Shropshire Wildlife Trust's members and supporters have all contributed funding.

Hundreds of volunteers and wildlife specialists will also give their time to the project, contributing around £100,000 in labour, and skills.

For further information visit www.themeresandmosses.co.uk
Contact David Tompkins for volunteering opportunities on 07826 530767
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