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New approaches to securing peatland ecosystem services

Peatlands have long been recognised as a priority for conservation under international agreements particularly for their biodiversity importance. More recently their significance in relation to climate change and water has been highlighted at international and national policy levels.

This presentation will look from a UK and EU perspective at the priorities for peatland conservation and how new strategic approaches seek to secure the ecosystem service benefits of peatlands. Site protection measures relying on conservation designations alone have proven insufficient to address both the legacy of past damage to peatlands and new pressures from landuse and development.

Research work is providing greater understanding of the implications of peatland damage on a range of ecosystem services. Assessing the cost benefits peatlands as part of our natural capital reveals just how important it is that we take urgent action to both protect and restore peatlands.

Global efforts are underway to enable action for peatlands with different stakeholder efforts coordinated through national strategies. New approaches seek to build consensus with land managers and developers to secure peatlands. Key to this is addressing economic factors to provide financial incentives for sustainable management of peatlands, remove perverse incentives that lead to peatland damage and ensure that the full costs of peatland damage are taken into account in decision making. Innovative policies and funding mechanisms for peatlands have been developed in a number of countries as well as new products and markets for materials that can be truly sustainably harvested.

Alongside this, efforts are underway to raise awareness of the benefits of peatlands and the cost implications of peatland damage, to bring public support for investment by governments and business in protecting and restoring peatlands.

This is an important time for the IPS to be aligned towards these goals and to work with industry to embrace the host of new opportunities around sustainably sourced materials