

# Integrated Land Use Conference 2026



***‘Wellbeing, wildlife and technology: where is the balance?’***

Final report

*May 2026*

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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 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> March at the Carrbridge Hotel, Auchernack Farm and Badaguish Outdoor Centre. It was the 13<sup>th</sup> conference, and the theme was '*Wellbeing, wildlife & technology: where is the balance?*'. The event was a 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 94 people attended the event over the course of the three days. This included 42 students of which 29 were from UHI, and 13 from other universities. The courses represented were:

- National 5 Environmental Science
- HNC Wildlife Conservation Management
- BSc (Hons) Forestry and Treescapes Management
- BSc (Hons) Environmental Science
- BA (Hons) Sustainable Development
- MSc sustainable mountain development
- MSc Sustainability and Rural Regeneration
- MSc Sustainable Energy Solutions
- MLitt Scottish Heritage
- MLitt Archaeological Studies
- MRes Sustainability
- PhDs (Health)

We had 6 field sessions led by:

- How are you doing? Multi sectors' wellbeing support led by Farm Strong, RSABI and Gamekeeper's Welfare Trust.
- High-performance Electronic Identification (EID) and other tagging technologies led by Hamish Smith and RZSS.
- Grassland regeneration and AI sprayer led by Watsons Seeds, Richard Young and Direct Drill.
- Using the outdoor for wellbeing and dementia led by Alzheimer Scotland and Scottish Forestry Branching Out project.
- Managing wildlife protection/preservation and increased health related outdoor activities led by Mike Daniels and Cairngorms National Park Authority.
- Wildfires management and prevention led by David Olds, Aviemore Fire Services and the gamekeeper from Balavil Estate.

We had 4 talks at the hotel:

- UHI (x2)
- Carrbridge Community Orchard
- ROAVR

We had 1 student 'role play' session:

- Use of technologies to collect data and data usage if you were:
  - Farmers
  - Peatland conservationists
  - Gamekeepers
  - Foresters
  - Ecologists
  - Land Managers

## Location / facilities

The event took place at the Carrbridge Hotel in Carrbridge and the field sessions in Auchernack Farm on the first day and Badaguish Outdoor Centre on the second day. The third day's session was run at the hotel.



## Event itself

All 6 planned field sessions and 4 planned talks took place despite the windy wintery weather. The student's role play session was 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?

68% Excellent  
32% Good

How would you judge the duration of the conference?

92% Adequate  
4% Too short  
4% Too long

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

33% Adequate  
63% Inexpensive  
4% Too expensive

How would you rate the effectiveness of the student activities?

60% Good  
20% Excellent  
16% Fair  
4% Unsatisfactory



- ✓ *The experience has certainly opened my eyes to some of the many complexities of managing natural spaces. I do feel prompted to be a bit more assertive about minimising disturbance around sensitive breeding areas and am re-evaluating my approach to dog walkers.*
- ✓ *I really enjoyed all the conversations about relating mental health to nature.*
- ✓ *(I enjoyed) meeting my classmates in person.*
- ✓ *(I enjoyed) the opportunity to mix with other people with differing points of view and learn about aspects I wouldn't normally come across in the activities too.*
- ✓ *(I enjoyed) the opportunities to chat with others throughout the three days, learning about each other's courses, students and lecturers together on activities, variety of topics making you think about different points of view.*
- ✓ *I learnt a lot about different professions, land management and technologies.*
- ✓ *Good to have learned more about the use of tech and wellbeing as they are not normally part of my sphere.*
- ✓ *The wildfire management was really helpful to think about access and fire management for the site I volunteer on.*
- ✓ *Gained greater appreciation for responsible shooting estates (especially in respect to wildfires).*
- ✗ *Would have appreciated more interactive sessions and movement- lots of standing still and listening- although enjoyed lots of time to ask questions lots.*
- ✗ *Love having the sessions outdoors. Could move round more within the presentations to keep blood moving.*

The Steering Committee takes all feedback seriously thus we have started working on delivering more interactive sessions also including more movement as we fully appreciate that March weather is unpredictable.

## What skills have been used/developed by the students?

96%	Communication skills
88%	Networking and social skills
64%	Teamwork
64%	Empathy
56%	Sector knowledge
44%	Problem solving
44%	Passion
40%	Flexibility
40%	Decision making
40%	Negotiating
32%	Assertiveness and diplomacy
8%	Leadership

- ✓ *It's opened my mind up to the possibilities and what I feel more connected and engaged with.*
- ✓ *I am more inspired by drones use than I was before.*
- ✓ *It has made me consider if I would prefer a career in land management rather than renewable energy specifically and given me more information about different roles within that.*
- ✓ *Will try to incorporate green health ideas into professional practice.*
- ✓ *It has opened my eyes to many possible new careers i could start in even outside the conservation sector.*
- ✓ *I tried to keep an open mind and enjoyed having difficult conversations and hearing differing opinions.*
- ✓ *My views and knowledge have been empowered more to develop more skills through my land management course, be better suited and qualified for jobs around this sector.*

**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 £9,759 for 3 days and 2 nights.  
The conference's bank balance is in credit of £3,143.



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

- Early September 2026: venue and theme must be confirmed.
- September/October/November 2026: scheduling and inviting speakers.
- w/c 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2026: marketing 'keep the date' campaign and open 'early bird' registration
- w/c 25<sup>th</sup> January 2027: extra marketing campaign and open full registration
- February 2027: marketing activities and reminders
- w/c 15<sup>th</sup> February 2027: registration close
- w/c 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2027: ILUC27 event

#### ➤ Feedback

- ✓ *I think it's important to keep it relatively general, but maybe the second day could do a deeper dive into something, with a fieldtrip. Rivers, for instance, or woodlands, peatlands, farming etc.*
- ✓ *Would love to see more on renewable energy especially on shore wind and grid expansion. Would also like to have a big discussion concluding everything to answer the question posed in this conference 'where is the balance?'*
- ✓ *More focus on big impact land usage (forestry and farming) in cooperation with the others.*
- ✓ *More field-based skills monitoring and surveying hands-on activities.*



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