

Glastir - the way forward?

AROUND 100 people from statutory agencies, farming unions and conservation organisations attended a recent conference at Lake Vyrnwy Hotel, near Llanfyllin, organised by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG Cymru) on behalf of the LIFE Active Blanket Bog in Wales project.

FWAG agricultural education and training committee chairman and FWAG Cymru chairman Alun Edwards chaired the proceedings and introduced himself as a farmer as opposed to a land manager - a term, fast becoming a favourite of the bureaucrats.

Montgomeryshire AM Mick Bates, in the opening address, congratulated the conference organisers on bringing together people of disparate opinions for constructive debate. He said Wales had led on establishing agri-environment schemes to create a balance between food production and nature conservation and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

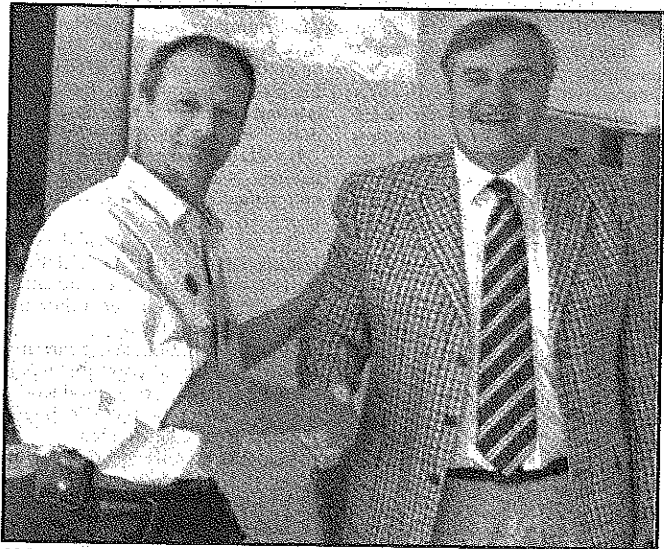
He emphasised that farmers were crucial in maintaining the landscape and were well placed to play a pivotal role in helping combat climate change.

LIFE project manager Jared Wilson explained the heather moorland management project in detail. The practicalities were further outlined during the afternoon mountain visit when blocked ditches were viewed and the impacts discussed.

Gwyn Evans, farm manager at the Severn Trent Water Ltd farm managed by RSPB Cymru revealed that less sheep are now lost on the mountain. Mr Wilson and Mike Walker of RSPB Cymru explained the potential benefits of upland drain blocking slowing down water flow in terms of reducing flood risk lower down the valley and improved water quality.

During the morning session David Jenkins, of Coed Cymru, outlined the Pontbren project. Again, this project leads in its field - 10 family farms have been co-operating and concentrating on ensuring the viability of their farms with a focus on what their land can provide and minimising the requirement to buy products in.

For example, the total straw bill for the farms had risen to £50,000



NOT LAND MANAGERS: FWAG Cymru chairman Alun Edwards and Mick Bates AM at the recent FWAG Cymru conference at the Lake Vyrnwy Hotel.

per year but the use of woodchip has been developed to reduce this cost. The farmers involved have undertaken tree planting schemes at carefully sited locations and research has shown that the planted areas absorb much more water than the grassland around them - again important in terms of flood management.

Projects with a number of farmers co-operating on schemes over larger areas is likely to feature prominently in the new agri-environment scheme Glastir, said keynote speaker Jon Westlake from the Welsh Assembly Government. Glastir replaces all current agri-environment schemes and will have two elements.

Glastir Mk1 one will be available to all farmers in Wales but a farm must attain the necessary points to be offered an agreement, although details of the scheme have yet to be finalised. There are no capital works grants available to assist in attaining the points.

Payment rates were quoted as £28 per hectare in non-LFA areas, £33.60 in LFSA areas although, as it stands now, it seems that most if not all of this money would have to be spent in attaining the points required to participate.

Glastir Mk 2, the higher tier scheme, would be available only in some areas. Few details of the

scheme have been finalised but a payment rate of £150 per hectare may be available.

There will be an emphasis on climate change issues with water and carbon management, such as illustrated by the LIFE project, playing a significant role. Mr Westlake explained that the scheme is long term (20 years), should reduce red tape and have a simplified application process.

Farmers interested in joining the scheme will need to tick a box within their 2010 Single Farm Payment forms which will be taken as an expression of interest. They will be sent an application pack with information on how to complete it and then asked to attend an appointment at a Welsh Assembly office to progress their agreement.

A lively question and answer session ensued followed by visits to view the machinery used for heather moorland management on the farm, led by LIFE's Mike Morris, and to the mountain.

For more information on the implications and possibilities of undertaking similar work on any area of heather moorland contact the LIFE project on 01691 870939. FWAG Cymru can assist in preparing farmers for Glastir - telephone 01341 421456 or e-mail cymru@fwag.org.uk