



RIVERWOODS

Riverwoods Handbook



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1. About Riverwoods

1.1. History

Riverwoods was established in 2019 in response to growing interest from environmentally focused organisations wanting to work together to scale up efforts aimed at creating and restoring river woodlands and river systems across Scotland.

United under the vision of “creating a network of river woodland and healthy, resilient river systems throughout Scotland to deliver a range of environmental, socio-economic and financial benefits”, Riverwoods has since overseen a number of key pieces of work and has grown to include a range of diverse bodies including government agencies, research institutes and more.

1.2. Ecological need & challenge faced

River woodlands are defined as the trees and wooded areas along rivers, lochs, and burns. They play a pivotal role in establishing and sustaining rich river ecosystems, serving as biologically diverse zones that bridge the interface between land and water. Five types of river woodland have been identified by the Riverwoods Science Group and are described in Table 1.

Diverse in structure and composition, river woodlands take various forms dictated by their mix of trees species and maturity in addition to the specific characteristics of the river system. These woodlands offer a multitude of benefits to both the ecosystem and society at large. These include the safeguarding of river health through erosion prevention along the banks, the creation and protection of aquatic habitats through shading and the introduction of woody debris, nutrient capture and recycling, biodiversity enhancement, and the filtration of pollutants.

Table 1: Type of river woodland, as defined in the “Riverwoods for Scotland Report on Scientific Evidence” (2022).

Riparian Woodland	A woodland area on the bank of a river or loch, with the width being defined by the biogeochemical site conditions.
Floodplain Woodland	All woodland lying within the fluvial floodplain that is subject to a regular or natural flooding regime.
Gorge Woodland	Native trees in gorges where the influence of the riparian zone extends beyond the floodplain due to high humidity levels.
Man-Made Riparian Woodland Buffers	Riparian woodland buffer zones occur on farms as areas between natural and artificial water courses, such as streams or ditches, and agricultural land.
Large Woody Material	Naturally occurring or man-made large wood structures found within the stream or river, also referred to as large woody debris.

For society on a broader scale, river woodlands act as invaluable natural infrastructure. They mitigate flood risk by intercepting rainfall and slowing down floodwater, purify the air by filtering out pollutants, reduce the risk of pollution in our drinking water, sequester carbon, and contribute recreational, educational, and amenity value for local residents.

In the face of the imminent climate and biodiversity crises, the importance of these benefits has become increasingly evident. The looming threats of overheating river ecosystems, increased flood risk, and jeopardised drinking water supplies underscore the critical role of river woodland restoration. This restoration is a key to fortifying the resilience of Scotland’s rivers and their ecosystems in the face of an uncertain future. The multiple benefits of river woodlands were identified, and their strength of

evidence evaluated in the [Riverwoods for Scotland Report on Scientific Evidence \(2022\)](#) produced by the Riverwoods Science Group.

1.4. Purpose of the Handbook

The Riverwoods Handbook has been drafted to help bring clarity on what Riverwoods is, how it works and how to get involved. The Handbook was developed during the Development Phase of the [Riverwoods Blueprint Project](#) (the “Blueprint Project”), led by the Riverwoods Partnership Support Officer (“RPSO”) in collaboration with the Riverwoods Advisory Group Chairs (see section 6).

The Handbook will be reviewed annually.

2. Vision and Objectives

Riverwoods is a wide range of organisations that operate under a common brand, united by the shared vision of;

“Creating a network of river woodlands and healthy, resilient river systems throughout Scotland delivering a range of environmental, socio-economic and financial benefits.”

To achieve this vision, we aim to work towards objectives¹ set under our four core branches of activity – Delivery, Science, Finance and Advocacy.

3. The Riverwoods Charter

To be a part of Riverwoods, organisations are required to agree to the following principles. These principles were drafted by Riverwoods partners² in a collaborative workshop in September 2023 using the principles of polycentric governance³ to structure and inform discussions. Important themes were identified about how partners want Riverwoods to operate and where and how we can collectively achieve the most impact. The main output from the workshop was the Riverwoods Charter which outlines the terms of engagement for Riverwoods.

¹ To be set by the Advisory Groups in 2025

² Scottish Wildlife Trust; SEPA; Tweed Forum; Forth Climate Forest; Forth Rivers Trust; Fisheries Management Scotland; James Hutton Institute; Green Action Trust; NatureScot; Buglife; Scottish Land and Estates; Woodland Trust

³ Polycentric governance is defined as “a complex form of governance where multiple, semi-autonomous decision-making centres choosing to act in a way that take account of others through processes of cooperation, competition, conflict and conflict resolution (Carlise and Gruby, 2019)



The Riverwoods Charter

Our Vision

A network of river woodlands and healthy, resilient river systems throughout Scotland delivering a range of environmental, socio-economic, and financial benefits.

Our Values

Together we are:

1. Impactful
2. Collaborative
3. Connected
4. Transparent
5. Adaptable
6. Resourceful

Our Principles

To achieve the aims of Riverwoods we will:

1. Work together towards the Riverwoods vision, recognising that no single organisation can achieve this on their own
2. Recognise that partners have different capacity and resources - and can take different roles and responsibilities when needed
3. Promote distributed leadership and decision-making, with decisions made by the partners closest to an issue, recognising that Riverwoods will not be centralised, nor will everything need to be achieved by consensus, but that the vision will be the unifying factor
4. Make it easy for partners, communities, citizens and broader stakeholders to make a meaningful contribution to Riverwoods, by allowing a range of roles to emerge
5. Respect the autonomy, responsibilities, accountability and statutory duties of individual organisations and projects, while recognising the impact of each stakeholder's actions on others
6. Trust that partners will represent and advocate for Riverwoods in different forums
7. Commit to resolving conflict through agreed processes, recognising that solutions often require discussion, flexibility and compromise
8. Test and learn together as we implement this new approach, noting that ownership and governance are not fixed and immovable

These values and principles will be reviewed and amended by the Strategic Advisory Group on an annual basis, in consultation with the wider partnership.

4. Membership Structure

We understand that not all organisations can commit to active involvement in Riverwoods, but they identify with the vision and want to stay informed and contribute when opportunities arise. To accommodate this, there are two ways for organisations to play a part in Riverwoods:

- **Riverwoods Network Member**
- **Riverwoods Partners**

4.1 Riverwoods Network Members

Riverwoods Network Members are those who want to hear about work undertaken through Riverwoods, such as the [Riverwoods Blueprint Project](#) (2024-2028), and receive updates from other Network Members and Riverwoods Partners, but do not have capacity/resource to be engaged more actively. Any organisation can become a Riverwoods network member.

Riverwoods Network Members agree to:

- Nominating a lead organisational contact to receive quarterly newsletters and other correspondence.
- Agree to operate under the terms of the Riverwoods Charter.

Note: Riverwoods Network Members are not permitted to call themselves a “Riverwoods Partner” or use the logo or branding. This term is for Riverwoods Partners only.

4.2 Riverwoods Partners

Riverwoods Partners are organisations that support our vision and play an active role in shaping the nationwide movement to restore river woodlands by contributing to Riverwoods objectives, raising awareness of the vital importance of Scotland’s river systems, and delivering Riverwoods projects. Joining as a Partner will help you connect and learn with others and maximise the reach, impact, and scalability of the work you are delivering.

In becoming a Riverwoods Partner, organisations will:

- **Benefit** from added value to projects through use of the Riverwoods logo and brand, cross promotion across the partnership and inclusion in Riverwoods showcases
- **Gain** access to partnership resources, including a Partnership Directory and Skills Register which will enhance communications and strengthen relationships across Scotland.
- **Connect** with industry experts, share insights and collaborate on emerging opportunities that align with Riverwoods goals
- **Participate** in advisory groups that will steer the nationwide Riverwoods movement, including site visits and networking events
- **Support** community groups, local initiatives and emerging projects of various scale by sharing your organisations knowledge and expertise
- **Help** inform and deliver a national blueprint for river woodland and river system recovery.

To enable this, Riverwoods Partners agree to:

- **Contribute** to relevant tasks, meetings and activities where possible and appropriate to support Riverwoods in achieving its objectives.

- **Act** in an open and transparent manner with fellow partners, share knowledge and information where possible to ensure that partners are supporting one another, avoiding duplication and maximising impact in line with the Riverwoods Charter
- **Nominate** at least one individual to be the lead contact for Riverwoods communications. This contact will share updates within your organisation and be listed on our Directory, available in the Riverwoods SharePoint site (hosted and managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust). This will allow connections across Riverwoods and aid organisations in locating potential collaborators or those seeking specific expertise. Only Riverwoods partners will have access to the site and logos of Riverwoods partners are available on the website.
- **Adhere** to a Partnership Data Sharing Agreement (Appendix 2) and Communications Protocol and Branding Guidelines (Appendix 3).

4.2.1. Criteria for becoming a Riverwoods Partner

Riverwoods is open to new partners at any time, subject to meeting the following criteria:

- Agree to the Riverwoods Charter
- Agree to the Data Sharing Agreement (Appendix 2)
- Agree to the Communications Protocol and Branding Guidelines (Appendix 3)
- Completing the [Riverwoods Partner Registration Form](#)

There are no restrictions on type of organisations joining Riverwoods. The ethos of Riverwoods is that it is inclusive and built on trust. There is no requirement for river woodlands to be an organisational priority and can join for any reason from being a strong supporter of what Riverwoods is trying to achieve, to being heavily involved in activity and driving forward work. As stated in our Charter, we want to make it easy for all stakeholders to make a meaningful contribution to the Riverwoods vision and want to be inclusive of all those who are seeking healthy and resilient rivers and river woodland in Scotland.

5. How to Join Riverwoods

5.1 Riverwoods Network Members

1. Complete the [Riverwoods Network Member Registration Form](#), also available on the Riverwoods website. You will receive an automatic email confirming your registration.

5.2 Riverwoods Partners

1. Complete the [Riverwoods Partner Registration Form](#), also available on the Riverwoods website.
2. The Riverwoods Partnership Support Officer will ensure the applicant (you) meet the required criteria and pass along to the Strategic Advisory Group.
3. The Strategic Advisory Group will then decide whether the organisation is successful in its registration.
4. Following approval, the organisation agrees in writing to adhere to the Riverwoods Charter, Communications Protocol and Branding Guidelines (Appendix 3) via a provided Declaration form and signing the Data Sharing Agreement (Appendix 2). This will be provided over email by the Riverwoods Partnership Support Officer

6. Riverwoods Governance

Riverwoods receives administrative support from the Riverwoods Partnership Support Officer, as part of the Blueprint Project. This will continue during the Delivery Phase of the Blueprint Project (October 2024 – July 2028). During this time, the Advisory Groups (detailed below) will work towards a model that is sustainable past this point.

The Groups work within agreed Terms of Reference, available in Appendix 4, and a summary of their function is provided below. For a list of partners involved in each group please see [this page](#) on the Riverwoods website⁴

6.1 Strategic Advisory Group

Riverwoods is overseen by the Strategic Advisory Group. This Group provides strategic oversight and guidance for activities within Riverwoods, establishing and monitoring against agreed objectives⁵, reviewing Group membership and monitoring overall partnership membership and progress.

Members of the Strategic Advisory Group consist of the Chairs of the Advisory Groups. Agendas will be shared with Riverwoods Partners ahead of time, who can then ask to attend the meeting if there is something pertinent to their work or area of interest or if they have requested an item on the agenda. The Chair of the Strategic Advisory Group will also invite partner organisations to attend as and when required. This structure has been set up to ensure that meetings are efficient and action focused and do not draw unnecessarily on the time of partners. Notes from the meeting will be circulated with and any key points will be included in the following newsletter.



Meetings are held twice a year (summer & winter) and will last approximately 2 hours.

- Chair of the Strategic Advisory Group: TBC

6.2 Advisory Groups

Driving activity within Riverwoods are four core groups; Delivery; Science; Finance; Advocacy. Each of these Groups are made up of partner organisations with specialist insight and knowledge into these key areas. Membership is kept small to ensure that the meetings are action focused (with exception to the Finance Group which is an open forum on the Basecamp platform). Group membership will be reviewed annually and partners will be approached to join as and when required. Partners who do not sit in a Group are welcome to ask to attend a meeting when there is a specific request for guidance/appeal for collaborators on an activity via the Riverwoods Partnership Support Officer and Group Chair.

Each Group is varied in the work they carry out. Meetings typically include; sharing information about new research; updates on upcoming events; updates on change in policy; reviewing and collaborating on pieces of work such as policy briefings; requesting collaborators on new projects; arranging site visits; addressing challenges being faced and providing advice and support to the Blueprint Project team. Meetings take place twice a year (spring & summer) and then ad-hoc meetings and site visits as and when requested. Standing meetings will last approximately 2 hours.

- Chair of the Delivery Group: Luke Comins – Tweed Forum
- Chair of the Science Group: Marc Stutter – James Hutton Institute
- Chair of the Finance Group: Ruchir Shah – Scottish Wildlife Trust
- Chair of the Advocacy Group: Alan Wells – Fisheries Management Scotland

⁴ Lists of partners will be updated on our website following the launch of the Handbook and initial registration period.

⁵ To be drafted in autumn/winter 2024

6.3 Informal Working Groups

From time to time, the Advisory Groups will agree on time-limited pieces of work to be undertaken collaboratively with partners. Leads on any work will seek out specific individuals/organisations or can make a general appeal via email for contributors.

Working Groups can be used to further activity within the Blueprint Project, or work of any partner organisation that fits within the scope of the Riverwoods. If mutually beneficial, assistance/support can be requested by the Blueprint Project Team (at the discretion of the Riverwoods Project Manager). Equally, partner organisations who do not sit on an Advisory Group are encouraged to start working groups with other partner organisations, as long as it contributes towards achieving the Riverwoods vision. Individuals from organisations who are not Riverwoods Partners may be co-opted onto Riverwoods Working Groups if they are able to make a specific contribution, and the Working Group members are in agreement.

7. How it Works

All Riverwoods Partners are actively encouraged to initiate pieces of work, begin new projects or seek new collaborators under the Riverwoods umbrella, as long as it is within the terms of the Riverwoods Charter and contributes to achieving the Riverwoods vision.

Riverwoods follows a dispersed decision-making approach, meaning no one organisation is responsible for approving and managing activity. Those closest to the activity or issue are empowered to make decisions and collaborate with other organisations as and when appropriate and are not required to seek approval from any one organisation.

Oversight will be provided by the Strategic Advisory Group to ensure work is carried out in line with the Vision, Objectives and Charter and coordinated across the partnership. Working Groups carrying out Riverwoods activities should identify a responsible lead to facilitate regular feedback to and from the relevant Advisory Groups. It is ultimately for Riverwoods Partners to propose and action work as and when required. This could be spurred on by discussions and actions in or out with Advisory Group meetings,

The dispersed decision-making approach will take time to develop and make sure it runs smoothly, so this work will be supported by the Riverwoods Partnership Support Officer for the duration of the Blueprint Project (2023 – 2028)⁶.

There is no centralised funding for Riverwoods. Limited funding for Riverwoods partnership support is currently available through the Blueprint Project (2024 – 2028) and is used at the discretion of the Riverwoods Blueprint Project Manager and the Riverwoods Coordinating Group (the Project Board for the Blueprint Project). Riverwoods Partners should inform the Strategic Advisory Group if funding for Riverwoods work is being sought and where possible, funded projects and activities delivered through Riverwoods should seek to support the initiative.

For further information on work carried out by Riverwoods, such as the Blueprint Project, please visit the [website](#).

8. Conflict Resolution Process

An agreed process for dealing with potentially divisive issues, including considering the removal of partners if their activities bring Riverwoods into disrepute will be drafted by the Strategic Advisory Group in 2025.

⁶ Post 2028 support will be agreed prior to the end of the Blueprint Project by the Strategic Advisory Group

9. Communication within Riverwoods

Communication between organisations within Riverwoods is key. Ensuring that partners are connected will mean we have one strong Riverwoods voice when talking to stakeholders and therefore help solidify the brand, attract new investment as well as encouraging more people and organisations to get involved. The following mechanisms will be put in place and will be reviewed frequently.

- A quarterly newsletter with updates from Riverwoods and the Blueprint Project, consultation briefs, new resources and event invites. Partners are encouraged to submit items for the inclusion in the newsletter.
- Ad-hoc emails will be sent around the partnership in between newsletters with relevant information, opportunities and updates.
- Following Advisory Group meetings, notes will be made available in Sharepoint for all partners to view. Highlights and key points will be included in the following newsletter.
- Partners are encouraged to use the network and Sharepoint resources in order to seek new contacts⁷
- In person-meetings and site visits will be held each year. These can be initiated by the Blueprint Project Team, the Advisory Groups (see above) or any partners or external organisations who would like to host. Administrative support can be requested from the Riverwoods Partnership Support Officer.
- Partners are encouraged to utilise the network and send communications round themselves, or ask the Riverwoods Partnership Support Officer to send these on their behalf.

10. External Communications

Riverwoods Partners are required to follow the Riverwoods Communications Protocol and Branding Guidelines available in Appendix 3. This document is updated and maintained by the Riverwoods Communications and Advocacy Officer (as part of the Blueprint Project). For further information email riverwoods@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk.

11. Community Engagement

Riverwoods will aim to ensure that local people and community organisations are able to participate in a meaningful way, building on the wide range of community engagement and consultation activity happening in the conservation sector at this time.

Riverwoods itself is a community that involves those who care about and/or have a stake or interest in the creation and restoration of river woodland and river systems in Scotland. With over 125km of rivers in Scotland, we all have a link to these habitats and as such involving communities is key to the realising the vision in a sustainable way.

In the coming years, we will actively work towards making Riverwoods relevant and accessible to those at a local level. Some of this work will be carried out under the Blueprint Project, but opportunities outside of that will also be explored. This will be done by;

- Approaching community organisations to become Riverwoods Partners and enabling them to take action where they see potential for benefits to be delivered.

⁷ To be developed 2024/2025

- Making Riverwoods more visible in social media, in established communications channels and through Riverwoods Partners and Network Members advocating for and sharing information about Riverwoods in their own forums.

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Glossary and Key Terms

Riverwoods

Riverwoods as an initiative is a wide partnership of organisations united behind the Riverwoods Vision

Riverwoods Advisory Groups

This is the collective term for the five groups that make up Riverwoods, each with a different focus and play a key role in achieving the Riverwoods vision. These are; Strategic, Delivery, Science, Finance, Advocacy

Riverwoods Blueprint Project or the Blueprint Project

Refers to the time restricted, 5-year programme of work being led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust between 2023 – 2028 funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The full name off the project, as listed in the funding application is “Riverwoods: A Blueprint for River Woodland Recovery”. This is shortened to the “Blueprint Project” in all documents, emails and communications.

Riverwoods Charter

The values and principles that all those wanting to play a part in Riverwoods operate under.

Riverwoods Network Members

Organisations who agree to following the Riverwoods Charter and receive updates on Riverwoods work through the newsletter and other communications.

Riverwoods Partners

Organisations who agree to following the Riverwoods Charter and enter into a data sharing agreement with the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

River woodlands

River woodlands include trees and woods in, next to and near rivers to the extent to which they influence and are influenced by river processes such as recycling nutrients, storing carbon, and regulating water flow. This includes instream, riparian, gorge, and floodplain woodlands and associated large wood material. A new and encompassing definition of river woodlands and associated large wood material. A new and encompassing definition of river woodlands has been adopted to take into consideration that functional processes within the waters of stream-river networks are closely interlinked to land and such influences can extend beyond the local riverbank to wider scales. This definition embraces a landscape approach for rivers. (As defined by the Riverwoods Science Group)

Riverwoods Vision

“A network of river woodland and healthy, resilient river systems throughout Scotland delivering a range of environmental, socio-economic and financial benefits”.

For further definitions including of river woodlands as a habitat please refer to the Communications Protocol.

Appendix 2 – [Data Sharing Agreement](#)

Appendix 3 – [Riverwoods Communications Protocol](#) and [Branding Guidelines](#)

Appendix 4 - Group Terms of Reference (to be added once updated)