

UK National Parks Conference 2026

Wednesday 16 to Friday 18 September 2026

Macdonald Aviemore Resort, Aviemore

Our host



Megan McCubbin

Megan McCubbin is a zoologist, wildlife TV presenter, author and campaigner. Best known for co-hosting BBC Springwatch and Animal Park, Megan is so passionate about our natural world and enhancing our relationship with it.

Trained as a scientist, she has worked around the world as a bear behavioural specialist and shark researcher, before growing her career in the media as a science communicator. She has released two books, so far, and is known for lending her voice to campaigns for animal welfare, climate change and social justice.

Speaker biographies (alphabetical)



Richard Baldwin, SSEN Transmission

Richard is Head of Consents and Environment at SSEN Transmission, where he leads the teams responsible for securing the planning, environmental and marine consents needed to deliver major electricity network infrastructure across the north of Scotland.

With more than 20 years' experience in environmental management and regulation, Richard works closely with communities, government agencies, regulators and industry partners to help balance network development with environmental stewardship.



Having joined SSE in 2008 following roles with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), he has held a range of environmental leadership positions and is passionate about enabling the transition to a secure, low-carbon energy system.



Craig Bennett OBE, The Wildlife Trusts

Craig Bennett OBE is Chief Executive of The Wildlife Trusts and has been described as “one of the country’s top environmental campaigners”.

He is an Honorary Professor of Sustainability and Innovation at Alliance Manchester Business School, an Associate Fellow of Homerton College (Cambridge) and a Fellow of the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership. He is also a Commissioner on the UK Government’s Clean Power 2030 Advisory Commission.

Formerly CEO of Friends of the Earth, he led major campaigns on bees, fracking and against airport expansion. He has vast experience of designing and contributing to executive education and leadership programmes globally.

Craig received an OBE for services to the environment in the King’s New Year 2026 Honour’s List.



Jonnie Hall, NFU Scotland

Jonnie Hall is the Deputy CEO and Director of Policy with NFU Scotland, where he has led on all aspects of policy work for over 19 years. Prior to that, Jonnie spent nine years with what is now Scottish Land and Estates.

His career in agricultural and rural development policy now extends to well over 40 years, having graduated from Newcastle and Oxford universities with three degrees in agricultural economics in the 1980s. An academic and consultancy career then followed.



Jonnie has lived in Scotland since 1998, during which time he has worked with the Scottish and UK governments, as well as scores of other stakeholders, on everything and anything that impacts on farming and crofting in Scotland and the UK.

Over the years, Jonnie has also done his fair share of lambing and general farm work, but these days he tends to run over hills without a stick or dog.



Sarah-Jane Laing, Scottish Land and Estates

Sarah-Jane Laing is the Chief Executive of Scottish Land and Estates, the organisation representing land-based businesses, landowners, land managers and rural enterprises across Scotland. As the first woman to lead SLE, an organisation established 120 years ago, she oversees its work to influence policy, support sustainable land management, and champion the contribution rural Scotland makes to the nation's economy and environment.

With more than two decades of experience in public affairs, Laing is widely recognised for her expertise in rural policy, housing, planning, wildlife management, climate change and land use. Her career has been defined by her ability to navigate political complexity, build constructive relationships across government and industry, and ensure that rural perspectives are heard in national debates. Before joining SLE, she spent a decade working in local authorities and housing associations, specialising in housing research, rural housing strategy, and policy development. She lives on her family farm in the Scottish Borders, maintaining close ties to the sectors and communities she represents.



Dr Deborah Long, Scottish Environment LINK

Dr Deborah Long is Chief Executive at Scottish Environment LINK, the network for environmental NGOs in Scotland. She leads this active and growing network of eNGOs, who work together to build a sustainable Scotland, being a strong coherent voice for Scotland's environment, its people and the planet.



Deborah is an active board member of charities in Scotland, in conservation, environmental rights and community development.

In February 2023, Deborah became a Just Transition Commissioner, providing advice on working with communities to achieve a just transition to net zero and nature positive.



**Gillian Martin MSP, Cabinet Secretary
for Climate Action and Rural Affairs**

Gillian grew up in Newburgh, Aberdeenshire. Prior to her role as an MSP, she lectured in Television Production at North-East Scotland College and ran her own video production company. She also designed safety courses for the energy industry and was the manager of an emergency media response team for companies operating in the North Sea for 10 years.

Gillian was elected as a Member of the Scottish Parliament to represent Aberdeenshire East in 2016. She was appointed as Minister for Energy and the Environment in March 2023, and Minister for Energy, Just Transition and Fair Work in February 2024. In May 2024 she was appointed as Minister for Climate Action.

In July 2024, she was appointed as Acting Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy in July 2024 for the duration of Màiri McAllan's maternity leave. In June 2025, she was appointed as Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy.



Fiona Milden, Oxygen Conservation

Fiona Milden is Managing Director at Oxygen Conservation, a leading private organisation acquiring and managing land to deliver long-term, landscape-scale restoration. She provides operational leadership to Oxygen Conservation's estate teams, who collectively manage 50,000 acres across the UK, with the goal of restoring nature and providing positive environmental impact.



Her role sits at the heart of the organisation's mission to Scale Conservation: translating long-term environmental ambition into practical, measurable outcomes on the ground. The team's work restoring native woodlands, peatlands, grasslands and rivers across the portfolio generates natural capital value via premium quality carbon and biodiversity credits. The deliberate diversity of the estates also supports community homes, regenerative agriculture, ecotourism and renewables opportunities.

A geographer and chartered town planner by background, Fiona brings nearly two decades of experience at the intersection of the natural and built environment. Before joining Oxygen Conservation, Fiona served as Group Planning and Environment Director at Vistry Group, one of the UK's leading housebuilders, where she advised the PLC Board on regulatory change and led the organisation's response to major planning reforms.

Fiona has previously been recognised by The Planner magazine as one of its 'Women of Influence' and she is passionate about the role planning can play as a force for good. She brings that conviction directly to her work supporting landscape scale restoration of some of the UK's most valued landscapes.

Outside of work, Fiona's connection to the natural environment is personal as well as professional: she enjoys walking in the Shropshire hills, mountain biking and campervan adventures.



Prof David Reay, University of Edinburgh

Prof Dave Reay is Chair in Carbon Management and Education at the University of Edinburgh. He is an advisor on climate action for a range of governmental and non-governmental organisations across Scotland and the UK.

Dave has worked on climate change for over 30 years, with much of his research focusing on climate change mitigation in land use and agriculture. He is especially active in efforts to enhance the provision and accessibility of climate education.



Cairngorms
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Pàirc Nàiseanta a'
Mhonaidh Ruaidh



Dave chaired the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan steering group in Scotland, the UK Climate Change Committee's workforce and skills expert advisory group, and was part of the Green Jobs Taskforce for the UK Government. He was appointed as co-chair of the Just Transition Commission in 2023.

Previous to joining the Just Transition Commission he was executive director of the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute and policy director of Scotland's Centre of Expertise on Climate Change.

Thank you to our sponsors

We are grateful for the support of Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) and Tarmac for helping make this event happen.



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Further information

If you would like to book a place, or have any questions about the event, please contact us on enquiries@cairngorms.co.uk or call +44 (0) 1479 873 535.