

Energy project for nature reserve

A nature reserve near Tregaron is the base of a £250,000 project to bring benefits to wildlife and find new ways to generate green energy.

Experts will explore if waste vegetation at Cors Caron National Nature Reserve can be used as bio-fuel.

The reserve is one of six test sites in Wales that represent different vegetation communities.

The initiative is part of a £2.5m research programme in Wales, Estonia and Germany.

As Wales has an abundance of different habitats it is the ideal place for testing the technology

Mariecia Fraser

The project is being developed by the University of Kassel in Germany in collaboration with Aberystwyth University's Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS) to produce bio-energy using waste material from mature grasslands.

Cors Caron reserve is managed by the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW).

Its senior reserve manager, Paul Culyer, said: "With less cattle and ponies grazing the reserve's grasslands, they have become overgrown and need to be cleared so that wildlife - from barn owls to butterfly orchids - can thrive here once again.

"This project will clear the rank vegetation from the grasslands while using the waste material to produce clean energy.

"It's really exciting to be part of this trial and I'm proud that Cors Caron has been selected.

'Cutting edge'

"We are always looking for innovative ways to manage the reserve and this is a great idea to explore."

Dr Mariecia Fraser of IBERS said: "This project is at the cutting edge of exploring the potential for an alternative management strategy to generate bio-energy using waste from protected sites in Europe.

"As Wales has an abundance of different habitats it is the ideal place for testing the technology."

Work testing herbage that was harvested last autumn from Cors Caron in the pilot processing plant started this month.

"The grass is collected into big bales before being put into one end of the processing plant," said Dr Fraser.

"It is then pulped with the dry material being pelleted as solid fuel and the liquid being fermented into a bio-gas.

"This gas is then used to power the plant with any excess gas being collected and sold."

The reserve is one of six experimental sites across Wales that represent different vegetation communities typical of the region.

They include Rhos Lawr Cwrt and Claerwen which are part of the Elan Valley Trust Estate.

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