SNH Consultation on the scope of a Strategic Vision for the Uplands

James Hutton Institute response

Note: The aim of this response is to consider what a Strategic Vision for the Uplands would need to address, how it could be developed and who should be involved. Our response does not represent what we think the Vision should be.

Background

A *Strategic Vision for the Uplands* should set the context to help land management be more effective in delivering multiple objectives and to safeguard natural capital for future generations. Therefore, it should help enable change 'on-the-ground' by providing a direction agreed upon by most stakeholders. A *Vision for the Uplands* needs to be consistent with other relevant public policies, notably the principles of the Land Use Strategy 2016-21 (LUS2), and therefore needs to consider the other initiatives emerging from that Strategy such as:

- Spatial planning and how LUS2 can help to complement Strategic Environmental Assessment guidance. The scope should consider how the Vision will interact with alignment of objectives of public planning and the private sector.
- The *Land Rights and Responsibility Statement* which may require land owners to describe their land use and management in terms of how it complies with the Land Use Strategy.
- Development of spatial planning tools that can help develop a shared knowledge base to provide the evidence for more *informed decision making.*
- *The Regional Land Use Partnerships (RLUPs)* that are being proposed to provide a mechanism for decision-making that engages with the relevant stakeholders in an inclusive way.

The Vision for the Uplands needs to refer to such initiatives to ensure that there is consistency and integration in the way the LUS2 principles are being implemented, and how the Vision aligns with other pertinent legislation and topics, such as the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and its Road Map; Climate Friendly Farming; and the targeting of SRDP to better support environment friendly businesses.

The Vision, and what it should aim to influence, should also consider other contemporary consultations of relevance (e.g. the Cairngorms National Park Authority consultation on Main Issues), and ensure consistency of messages from different sources.

The way related legislation and initiatives are implemented will affect how the Vision is realised. So the interaction between these needs to be part of the scoping exercise.

Overview

The scope of the Vision could usefully have, as an overriding structure, sections on:

- Identification of the **issues** that affect the uplands: drivers of change, pressures, policies;
- **Targets** for what the Vision wants to achieve and/or the direction of travel (i.e. what is the desired state of the uplands, and by when?);
- **Mechanisms** for delivering the targets (e.g. regulations, incentives, collaborative working, conflict resolution, adaptive management).

The scope should consider a timeframe for achieving the targets.

Responses to the questions posed in the consultation document are outlined below.

Where are the uplands?

1. What broad characteristics should we use to define the uplands?

- There is no clear definition of the uplands that is wholly satisfactory. Basing a definition on altitude or latitude is too rigid and simplistic. Moorland is often conflated with uplands, and upland-type habitats can also be found in lowland and coastal situations (e.g. the flow country; Western Isles), but areas of Machair may be considered differently.

The scope should review different ways of defining uplands. When considering the definition, reflections on the output should include what it would omit, and what is not appropriate to include?

Defining uplands on the basis of political classifications (e.g. LFAs) are undesirable because these can change, whereas biophysical properties underpin the function and natural capital provided by the uplands, which are less likely to change. The following are some pointers for consideration as inputs to definitions:

- The uplands are predominantly land cover that is semi-natural vegetation without arable or urban aspects.

- The uplands are the areas which are not prime land, enclosed/improved grassland and urban areas. However, such a definition would need to be adjusted to account for the different characters of coastal areas adjacent to lowland and upland, and other areas which are difficult to categorise.

- The uplands are predominantly those areas outside enclosed land, with certain (low) land capability for agriculture.

- The uplands are defined by a combination of climatic factors which then constrain the types of vegetation and land uses, and thus are also sensitive to climate change.

- The mapping of landscape character can be used to categorise areas as being upland in character. Using this approach to defining boundaries of the uplands is limited by questions of consistency of mapping across Scotland. However, the approach does reflect a broader interpretation of what is in the uplands based on biophysical, land use, cultural and experiential factors.

- A definition could be informed by surveying the opinions of different groups of stakeholders to capture the variety of definitions and analyse these for common understanding.

Overall, the scope for the Vision should explore whether a geographical area based on land cover, vegetation type, habitat or terrain is sufficiently inclusive. A fixed definition may be too rigid and not allow for potential land use change, and the role of the definition to support wider public understanding of the uplands should be taken into account.

What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?

The scoping needs to identify: i) what benefits are provided and where they are delivered; ii) the main issues relating to safeguarding the provision of natural assets for future generations; iii) the threats or constraints on improved provision; iv) the beneficiaries - direct (e.g. communities of place such as residents, employees, users of upland areas), and indirect (e.g. international and national communities in relation to carbon management, valued habitats and landscapes); and: v) the targets to be set, or the preferred 'direction of travel' (e.g. towards viable populations of raptors), and the identify potential mechanisms for delivery.

2. What are the key social, economic and environmental benefits that the uplands provide for Scotland?

The scope should consider what the uplands provide now, from: i) a sectoral perspective, ii) an Ecosystem service perspective). Overall questions are:

i) What sectors benefit from the services uplands provide, and how? How do 'the uplands' fit in the supply chains of different business sectors?

These questions are to focus on understanding the links between the uplands and society in general:
- Agriculture: e.g. the agricultural structure of hill sheep provides lowland farmers with stock, provides jobs, traditions and cultural characteristics of local communities, and the landscapes to which it contributes;
- Forestry: e.g. forest products, recreation and landscapes;
- Tourism and recreation: e.g. iconic species and landscapes;
- Communities: e.g. specific characteristics and needs of communities living in the uplands;
- Energy: e.g. windfarms, hydroelectricity, biofuel and, potentially, photovoltaic;
- Nature conservation: e.g. iconic or rare species; an area for engaging stakeholders with biodiversity.

ii) What ecosystem services do the uplands provide to communities of place (i.e. people who live there), and communities of interest (i.e. wider Scottish UK and international community)?

This question is to focus on understanding the uplands through the lens of ecosystem services:
- Provisioning services: biodiversity, meat (wild and domestic), energy (wind, hydro, biomass, peat, coal), etc.;
- Regulating: flood management, water quality, carbon sequestration, etc.;
- Cultural: landscape character, sense of place, jobs, tradition, experiencing biodiversity, etc.;
- Supporting: Soil formation, nutrient cycling, primary production (although predominantly linked to regulating/carbon sequestration), etc.

Both i) and ii) above are underpinned by biodiversity. So, the Vision should identify the services and benefits provided by different habitats and species in the uplands. Furthermore, it should identify how the threats to these benefits (and the habitat and species they depend on) can be reduced.

3. How can upland land use help to prevent or reduce the impacts of climate change?

The Vision should identify how to help land use change decision-making and so Scotland's contribution to countering the impacts of climate change (CC). The scope should address how CC can be mitigated by: a) reducing emissions by, for example, not ploughing up grasslands, providing biomass energy, and peatland restoration; and b) increasing sequestration of carbon by, for example, trees in the 'right place' (not on peat) and the restoration of peatlands.

The scope should consider how the uplands can contribute to CC adaptation. For example, by adapting to the increased probability of extreme rainfall events by maintaining and enhancing vegetation that slows water drainage.

The scope should also consider what tools are available to help with managing emissions. For example, the latest emission factors could be used to guide and define likely condition for peatland to be able to sequester carbon.

What should an upland Vision include?

4. A strategic Vision could inform decisions about the balance between different land uses in different parts of the uplands. What are the key choices that an upland Vision should address, and why?

The scope for the Vision should consider the uplands at a landscape scale, and how the Vision can be structured around the 12 Malawi principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity's Ecosystem Approach.

The Vision should recognise that there may be trade-offs between some benefits provided by the uplands in a transition from the current situation to what is envisioned. For example, what would uplands managed for CC mitigation/adaptation and/or natural processes look like? Who or what would be the losers? How could this Vision create new livelihood opportunities?

Choices that may need consideration in the scope include trade-offs between:
- CC initiatives, such as woodland expansion and renewable energy and consequences for housing/infrastructure; landscape character and land management for grouse shooting;
- Increasing connectivity of woodlands and consequences for other habitat connectivity;
- Maintenance of prime areas of moorland and associated biodiversity in face of other land use change, such as woodland expansion;
- Managing land for natural processes (e.g. rewilding) and consequences for private sector land management objectives and derived public benefit;
- Achieving goals for habitat condition in relation to viable livestock stocking rates and wild herbivores.

As well as trade-offs, the scope of the Vision should consider identifying win-win situations, e.g. riparian woodland planting , contributing to water quality, flood risk, carbon and connectivity.

The scope should consider connectivity within the landscape, and the roles of the uplands in relation to connectivity of different types of species or habitat, and at different scales. Increasing connectivity of one habitat may lead to reductions in connectivity of other habitats. Habitat fragmentation can lead to lower diversity than larger contiguous areas. Thus, fragmentation could threaten ecosystem function resilience because there are fewer species, which risk being increasingly disconnected.

5. Are there any other topics or issues that should be included in an upland Vision, and if so why?

The scope should consider how to maintain and enhance livelihoods and well-being, both in the uplands and for those downstream or outside the uplands, as many processes and impacts are closely interrelated. For example, local ecosystem services (ES) that support local communities and jobs should be scoped, plus regional/catchment level ES and those ES that have potential for creating jobs and improving livelihoods (e.g. ecotourism, wildlife safaris, etc.).

The scope should consider:
- how upland natural capital could be *managed to reduce the costs* to local communities and wider society (e.g. reduced costs of water treatment - a major benefit of peatland restoration), reducing flood risk, (i.e. CC mitigation and adaptation), and increased public health benefits from contact with nature;
- How upland natural capital could be managed *to generate alternative income and livelihoods*, for example eco-tourism, carbon trading (and the infrastructure such as housing, broadband health services etc.);
- The range of legitimate management objectives of current private and environmental NGO managers, interests in emerging agendas (e.g. *rewilding*, which advocates management for

natural processes and how this can be reconciled with management for production or recreation to ensure livelihoods are maintained).

Delivery Mechanisms. The scope of the Vision should identify how to address the issues above (i.e. delivery mechanisms), such as improved targeting of SRDP payments, payments for ecosystem services, funding cooperation at a landscape scale.

Success. The scope should consider the question: 'how we will know when the Vision is being achieved?'.

Achieving the Vision will depend upon evidence of: a) the benefits derived from the uplands; and b) the mechanisms or actions established are working. It will require an adaptive management approach where actions are monitored to provide evidence of whether and how they are working, creating a cycle of iterative learning.

Resources. The scope of the Vision should consider the resources required. This includes whether existing resources (e.g. through incentives such as agri-environment schemes) are influenced or targeted by tools and planning, or that resources are accessed by land owners and stakeholders through when Land Rights and Responsibility statements are compliant.

The Vision should consider the potential utilisation of the future SRDP. Thus, the scope should include an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of current governance arrangements, and how they could be revised to achieve better partnership working. There is an opportunity to consider how any successor to CAP Pillar 2 can support the Vision, such as cooperation at a catchment scale.

Sustainability. The Scope should encompass sustainability (i.e. it is a Vision for the future generations, not encouraging irreversible actions) and consider the uplands in terms of Natural Capital. The Vision could include statements on aspirations for the state of natural capital and how it can be safeguarded and sustainably used.

Decision-making. The Vision should scope out a section on decision-making and how it is done (e.g. centrally, regionally, locally, by an individual). Questions for consideration are whether current governance can support functional RLUPs? What is the most relevant scale for decision-making?

6. Are there any topics or issues that should be excluded from an upland Vision, and if so why?

At the outset, the approach to developing the Vision should not be exclude considering all issues, so as not to risk it being undermined by a gap in its remit.

How should the Vision be developed?

7. Which stakeholders do you think it would be particularly important to involve, and how?

A central theme in the LUS is partnership working. For the *Vision for the Uplands* to be useful, and therefore for it to help steer upland land management, its development should be inclusive. An underpinning requirement is that key organisations and individuals should share its aspirations, and that this contributes towards the strength and authority of the Vision.

The scope should consider using existing multi-stakeholder bodies but ensure that they are inclusive and represent the breadth of public and private interests. Sectors that should be represented on a steering panel include crofting, farming and forestry, local business groups, community groups, district fisheries boards, outdoor user groups, renewable energy sector and Deer Management Groups.

Would particular approaches be needed, for example, to reach particular groups?

8. What are your views on the process that might be needed to bring together the key interests and develop a shared Vision?

The process will require an appropriate level of funding and widespread buy-in across the stakeholder communities to support a successful development of a shared Vision.

The scope should link to the ideas emerging for the Regional Land Use Partnerships which will be important for informing decision-making in relation to the Vision.

The scope should consider different models of stakeholder engagement, tailored to local contexts. For example, the National Parks already have structures and lines of communication. Other areas such north-west Scotland may require structures to be initiated, possibly supported by the local authorities or LEADER groups as locally relevant suitable alternatives.

9. Who would be best placed to lead this process?

Three options for consideration:

1. The Moorland Forum. The scoping could be carried out by a team under the supervision of a steering group derived from the Moorland Forum with broad membership.

- 2. CAMERAS partners. CAMERAS as an overarching grouping, drawing on private, public sectors and civic society interests, delivering on one of its objectives of 'provide a more coordinated response to relevant wider UK and global issues e.g. climate change, food security'. Or, Scottish Natural Heritage, as the statutory body in collaboration with other CAMERAS partners and the private and public sectors and civic society.

3. An independent organisation (e.g. a research organisation such as the James Hutton Institute), with a steering group made up of stakeholders with a broad representation of private and public interests as well as environmental, social and economic perspectives.

In each case, care is required to ensure that there is no over-representation of any one interest.

10. What form should a Vision for the uplands take (visual or descriptive, maps, diagrams or text)?

It should be simple, providing a clear Vision, including communication of the significance of the uplands for public benefit. It should convey the direction of travel for implementing and maintaining the Vision, and provide a context for the development of an Action Plan. The positive and negative drivers affecting these benefits should be clearly identified (e.g. climate change, N deposition, other pollution, population pressure, increasing demands for ES).

Its presentation should use tools which are appropriate to its intended purpose. It should consider the opportunities of multi-media and online tools contemporary for use over the decade starting from its publication (e.g. 2020). It should utilise an infographic style of imagery and approaches to communication. It should reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of translating a definition into an associated boundary on a map. However, it should exploit suitable means of visualisation which are easily understood (e.g. maps, 3d models, dynamic imagery), appropriate for a Vision rather than a Plan, and provide links for the user to understand the diversity of the character of uplands across Scotland.

11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

The Vision should consider the requirements for its delivery. This may mean that a part of the Vision tackles changes or modifications to existing delivery structures. For example:

- Can the Vision help to target funding? If so how will the incentives such as SRDP need to change to support landscape scale management?
- Is the protected area concept (e.g. designated sites) fit for purpose in supporting a landscape scale Vision, and if not how can this be changed?
- Can the principles of adaptive management and adaptive governance be used as a framework to help assess, monitor and inform actions that may be implemented to achieve the Vision.

Vision or strategy? The scope could consider whether a Vision of the uplands is the most appropriate approach, or whether there is a need to have an *uplands strategy* analogous to a woodland strategy (i.e. How much 'uplands' do we want? What are the best areas that we do not want to lose? What are the functions of the uplands in delivering ecosystem services? How do we protect the natural capital they provide?).

Provision of public goods: The scope should consider how to identify the value of public interest provided by appropriate management on private landholdings (e.g. identify best practice, reward for its implementation, and mechanisms for such reward – accreditation, tax benefits, etc.). It should also consider the extent to which a shared Vision can help to bring about cooperation across the stakeholder community, advocating that land management in the private and public sectors are both part of the solution.

Conflict resolution: Consider the need and role for an 'ombudsman' to help mediate over conflicts in management where there are recognised trade-offs, and where there is a potential loser whatever decision is made. Linked to this is the need to scope out how incentives can be used to address trade-offs and identify what conflicts will have been addressed.

Acceptability: To be effective, the Vision will require a high degree of acceptance across all stakeholder communities, to reduce the risk of being ignored to the detriment of the resource and the communities that rely on it. However, it should also be aspirational and challenging for all beneficiaries. It should be accompanied by a wider plan for communication and engagement between the public who predominantly live in lowland Scotland, and an awareness of the value and significance of the uplands, once defined.

Link to research and the evidence base: The scope for the Vision should include identifying, from the major challenges, the main research needs, and identify links to the Scottish Government's Strategic Research Programme (SRP) (www.gov.scot/Topics/Research/About/EBAR/StrategicResearch/ strategicresearch2016-21). Within the existing SRP (2016-21), and Institutes such as the James Hutton Institute, there is substantial relevant expertise, independent data and analysis which should be used to help inform decisions over how the Vision can be delivered.

The James Hutton Institute will welcome opportunities to engage with Scottish Natural Heritage and its partners in developing the Vision for the Uplands.

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