

## SCOPING AN UPLAND VISION: KEY QUESTIONS

Scottish Environment LINK would like to see the following key actions come through in the production of a strategic upland vision for Scotland:

- Full and thorough consultation of all relevant stakeholders in order to develop a shared vision for the uplands. This will be challenging, but is essential if the Vision is to be translated into delivery
- Apply Ecosystem Health Indicators (EHIs) at sub-catchment scale in the uplands, so that rapid assessments of the state of ecosystem health can be made.
- Adopt the Scottish Landscape Charter and incorporate SNH's Landscape Character Assessment into relevant policies
- Designate the National Ecological Network (NEN) as a 'national development' in the National Planning Framework and ensure that the principles are embedded into all relevant policy instruments.
- Ensure that the principles or objectives arising from the Upland Vision are fully embedded within regional land use frameworks developed under the Scottish Land Use Strategy
- Promote, and where possible facilitate, quantification of the benefits of peatland and wetland habitat restoration for upland catchment hydrology, water quality and carbon capture and storage
- Reform the subsidy system and develop market mechanisms which incentivise low impact management regimes, securing sustainable livelihoods whilst delivering of environmental goods and services in the uplands
- Develop and support the skills base required to deliver upland management needs, particularly as the demographic of current upland managers changes
- Fully investigate the implications of future climate scenarios for the populations, ranges and conservation needs of upland species
- Identify the likely implications on upland ecosystems of responses by other sectors, such as forestry and agriculture, to different climate change scenarios
- Develop new statutory guidelines to mitigate the impacts of energy developments in the uplands.
- Use existing regulatory powers to secure better management, monitoring and reporting of wild deer densities for landowners, to ensure deer populations and densities are managed at truly sustainable levels
- End wildlife crime using effective monitoring and enforcement.
- Develop a strategy for investment in upland paths to ensure that design reflects projected use, environmental sensitivity and landscape characteristics; and that they are repaired and maintained, enabling people to enjoy the outdoors while safeguarding Scotland's finest landscapes and habitats

## Where are the uplands?

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

Various metrics can be used to define the uplands. Scottish Environment LINK is in agreement that possibly the most useful characteristics for defining upland landscapes are physical or geophysical. However, the vision must recognise that the benefits of the uplands, and conversely the impacts of unsustainable land management practices within them, will also be felt outside whichever boundary is applied. It must also recognise the local communities and communities of interest which live off and shape the uplands.

## What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?

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

The multiple benefits delivered by upland systems are discussed in detail in published literature. We have not attempted to carry out a literature review. However, some of the key benefits are summarised below:

- Peat soils play a vital role in carbon storage and sequestration
- Climate and topography in Scotland mean that upland catchments are the source of most of the fresh water we use
- Peatland restoration can contribute to flood regulation by holding more water on the hills. Restoring peatlands can also reduce leaching of soils during flash floods, as higher water table means that water travels more slowly over the surface.
- Uplands provide health and wellbeing benefits through cultural links and recreational opportunities
- Scotland's iconic upland landscapes attract visitors which contribute to the tourism economy: nature-based tourism in Scotland is worth £1.4 billion per year and supports 39,000 jobs
- Uplands provide food in the form of livestock, game and fish
- Uplands provide habitat and food for a range of priority species

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

Again, there is considerable literature available on the role peat soils play as carbon stores and in providing clean water. However, around 80% of our peatlands are degraded in some way, which not only limits their ability to act as carbon stores, but also means that some badly degraded peatlands can act as carbon sources. Thus restoration of peatlands is a vital step towards climate-proofing our uplands. Healthy, functioning peatlands may also play a role in reducing flood severity by slowing the water at source.

## 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?

Uplands deliver a wide range of ecosystem services. However, there are also multiple uses and multiple users so tradeoffs are inevitable. Large areas of the uplands are in private ownership and thus are often managed for one primary purpose, for individual gain. However, land management

for one purpose can have an impact off-site or downstream and an upland vision will need to tackle some of the conflicts and tradeoffs which occur in such circumstances. In developing a strategic vision for the uplands, one outcome must be to identify what we would like to see our uplands deliver in future and what is currently in the way of that. Some potential conflicts are outlined below but the list is not exhaustive:

- Elevated deer numbers for deer stalking Vs. forestry
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- Burning of moorland Vs. drinking water quality
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- Burning of moorland Vs. carbon storage in peat
- Raptor persecution to increase grouse numbers Vs. raptor conservation
- Drainage for agriculture or grouse moors Vs. peatland restoration
- Inappropriately sited forestry Vs. peatland restoration
- Forestry planting targets Vs. agriculture
- Access tracks Vs. landscape quality/wild land character
- Localised recreation pressure Vs. conservation (path erosion/wildlife disturbance)
- Renewable energy development Vs. forestry/landscape/biodiversity interests

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

- **Disconnect between users and providers:** Moving towards more sustainable land use in the uplands is challenging because the beneficiaries of upland ecosystem services tend to be located in urban areas, whilst the providers/land managers bear the costs of provision. Much more investment is required in developing a framework and delivery mechanism for payments for ecosystem services, which incentivises delivery of public goods for public money.
- **Challenges facing upland communities:** Upland communities have suffered in recent years from few job opportunities, out-migration of young people, farm abandonment and increased average age of farmers. Lifestyle migration into more rural areas has pushed up house prices and reduced access to affordable housing. In some areas, jobs and income are dependent on sporting estates so less intensive grouse moor management or reducing deer numbers could have a socio-economic impact. Increasingly, income is generated through development of renewable energy in the uplands, though this income does not always reach local communities. Any Upland Vision must outline how sustainable livelihoods could be secured whilst positive land use change is delivered.
- **Uncertainty over future of subsidies:** Farmers in LFAs rely heavily on subsidies, which have been decreasing, and Brexit introduces even more uncertainty for the future of farming in these areas.
- **Opportunities for rewilding:** where, on which habitats, at what scale?
- **Landscape value:** Any exercise of the kind proposed should also take full account of the high landscape value of many of Scotland's upland areas, and of the diversity of their character across the country. These landscapes have long been recognised as being of outstanding quality – in many cases through designation as National Scenic Areas – and are widely prized, not just within Scotland, for their recreational potential. In this context it is important that national designation alone should not form the basis for decisions about value. Regional Parks, for example, are major environmental and recreational assets within easy reach of the country's main population centres. Likewise Wild Land Areas, which have now been mapped by SNH and which are mostly upland areas which have particular

aesthetic, biodiversity, recreational and other features that contribute to Scotland's natural capital and ecosystem services on both a local and a global scale. Wild Land Areas are referred to in SPP and are a material consideration in upland planning.

- **Land Rights and responsibilities statement:** an upland vision should guide and be guided by the rights and responsibilities associated with land use, ownership and management.

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

N/A

#### How should the vision be developed?

7. Which stakeholders do you think it would be particularly important to involve, and how? Would particular approaches be needed, for example, to reach particular groups?

Land owning and managing groups, local communities and communities of interest are an obvious place to start. However, it will be important to engage outside of the "usual suspects". Cultural and historical interests should also be involved and it will be important to engage the public of the central belt.

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

Issues and interest groups may vary from region to region so we suggest a dispersed consultation process which gives different stakeholders the opportunity to come together and discuss issues locally.

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

Given the challenging nature of gaining consensus on upland issues, the process must be facilitated or led by a neutral group/body, which will not stand to make a personal loss or gain from potential outcomes.

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

We would suggest that a range of outputs should be generated to engage a range of audiences in the production of a vision. All available media should be used to draw out issues. The vision should then be embedded within and delivered through development and delivery of regional land use frameworks.

11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

Scottish Government needs to provide leadership to nurture and deliver meaningful change. The connection between land use and land ownership are particularly apparent in the uplands so any upland vision must be linked to the land reform process.