

# Scottish Wildlife Trust

## Scoping a strategic vision for the uplands

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Dear Mark,

Please find below the Scottish Wildlife Trust's response to the key questions posed by SNH regarding scoping a strategic vision for the uplands. These comments add to the points that were covered at the LINK/SNH meeting held earlier this year. As you will be aware, the Trust has published its own vision for the Scottish uplands (which is enclosed), and the answers to many of the questions reflect the Trust's own vision.

Our key point is that as the uplands make up a significant proportion of Scotland's land mass, and upland land management decisions are integral to the rural economy and mitigating and adapting to climate change, we believe a strategic upland vision is an essential part of implementing the Land Use Strategy. The vision for the uplands should aim to both maximise benefits to sustain local communities and enhance natural capital for Scotland's benefit.

For brevity and where appropriate the Trust has used bullet points.

### **Where are the uplands?**

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

The Trust recognises there are many ways to define the 'uplands.' In our vision we used altitude<sup>1</sup> re:

*"This policy covers all geographic areas in Scotland which fall into the definition of 'uplands', defined as land above the level of agricultural enclosure<sup>1</sup>, which is typically 300 - 400 m above sea level (ASL) but can be lower, particularly in the far north and west. "*

### **What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?**

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

Ecosystem services derived from the uplands include:

Food; fibre; biodiversity; tourism; pollination; carbon sequestration; climate change adaptation (e.g. flood risk reduction), air and water quality regulation; waste detoxification; cultural and spiritual services; recreation - outdoor pursuits including hill walking, mountain biking, canoeing, hunting, shooting, fishing, ornithology, nature and other educational studies; photography; renewable energy.

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<sup>1</sup> From: Ratcliffe, D.A. & Thompson, D.B.A. (1988) The British uplands: their ecological character and international significance. In: Ecological Change in the Uplands (M B Usher and DBA Thompson, eds), pp 9-36. Blackwell Scientific Publications, Oxford.

It may be helpful to assign benefits in line with the National Ecosystem Assessment groupings of ecosystem services i.e.

- Supporting
- Provisioning
- Regulating
- Cultural

We also recommend a section outlining the ‘disbenefits’, or in other words the liabilities, that arise because of unsustainable upland management and/or perverse incentives such as:

- Degraded peatlands
- Loss of biodiversity
- Increased greenhouse gas emissions
- Reduced soil quality
- Lack of native woodland regeneration
- Increased flood risk
- Increased habitat fragmentation
- Lack of habitat resilience
- Wildlife crime

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

Prevention of climate change (e.g. reduction of greenhouse gas emissions):

- Carbon sequestration through soils, peatlands, woodlands, forestry and shrubs – therefore we need these habitats to be in good condition - which means addressing other land uses, pressure and perverse incentives which impact on them including: drainage, burning, over and under grazing.

Reduction of the impacts of climate change:

- Through adaptation measures using ‘nature based solutions’ e.g. forestry and woodlands holding back and /or slowing water movement in catchment; restored or intact peatlands acting as ‘sponges’ to store water; river channel realignment.
- ‘Joined up’ landscapes increasing ecological resilience (thereby contributing to ecosystem health) – e.g. ecological networks allowing genetic exchange and a more permeable landscape for species movement’
- Increasing ecological resilience through ensuring protected sites are in good ecological condition and are connected at the landscape scale’
- Promoting management which protects or enhances biodiversity at the catchment scale’

### **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 and ecosystems linked lower down in the catchment. What are the key choices that an upland vision should address, and why?

To get the balance right and deliver sustainable upland land management, the starting point should be adopting an ecosystem approach<sup>2</sup> and part of this involves habitat mapping of ‘opportunities and constraints’ to maximise ecosystem benefits and minimise environmental damage (See Policy Futures 1: Living Landscapes<sup>3</sup>). For example: identifying suitable areas (and targeting incentives) for tree

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbd.int/ecosystem/> - integral to this is the involvement of local communities and the recognition that management should involve all stakeholders and balance local interests with the wider public interest.

<sup>3</sup> [http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/docs/002\\_050\\_publications\\_Policy\\_Futures\\_Series\\_1\\_Living\\_Landscapes\\_1292841506.pdf](http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/docs/002_050_publications_Policy_Futures_Series_1_Living_Landscapes_1292841506.pdf)

planting/regeneration in upper catchment to deliver multiple benefits including: slowing water movement, increasing water quality, preventing landslides, increasing biodiversity and ecological connectivity, storing carbon and potential for agroforestry. For maximum results, the grazing regime and stocking densities (either by sheep and/or deer) would need to be examined and fit with desired outcomes.

Key choices to be addressed to deliver an upland vision include:

- How to maximise carbon storage- e.g. by restoring peatlands, encouraging woodland regeneration, or native woodland/forestry planting – but also to identify areas where tree planting is a sub optimum solution – e.g. on deep peat
- How to reduce flood risk and improve water quality
- How to maximise other ecosystem services with appropriate incentives
- How to maximise economic benefits for local communities
- Resolution of conflicting land use objectives such as:
  - managing deer densities for private sporting interest versus appropriate densities for addressing the public interest
  - driven grouse moor management e.g. where practices such as muirburn on deep peat are incompatible with climate change objectives and contribute to decreased water quality
  - siting of renewable energy projects
  - restocking conifers on degraded peatlands
  - restoring drained peatlands which have been used for sheep grazing
  - identifying 'rewilding' sites and suitable areas for species translocations and or reintroductions
  - high sheep stocking densities vs low stocking density grazing

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

It will be important to set policy context and identify cross cutting issues such as:

- Climate Change Act
- Land Reform Act
- Scottish Biodiversity Strategy
- Forestry Strategy
- Water Framework Directive and Flood Risk Management
- Deer Act and Wild Deer a National Approach

Other issues that should be included because they influence land management decisions or arise from land management decisions include:

- subsidies
- perverse incentives
- climate change mitigation and adaptation
- local economy and cost of choices
- creating resilient landscapes
- recognising keystone species - including reintroductions

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

**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?

Suggested stakeholders to involve (and to note here, the Trust would like to be involved in the process) include:

- Representative bodies of land managers and sample of land manager practitioners
- Sporting interest bodies
- Statutory agencies
- Enterprise development agencies
- Relevant research institutes
- Economists and land agents
- A sample of local authorities and both national parks
- Visit Scotland
- Community groups – both rural and urban
- Young Scot
- Key recreational user groups
- NGOs

Workshops should be visual, include scenarios and held in a ‘charrette’ style. To engage hard to reach groups – allotting appropriate times and location of events will be important.

A balance will need to be struck regarding the level of engagement to ensure inclusion of desired stakeholders but it should not be so exhaustive that the process becomes too drawn out. Facilitators from the two LUS pilot projects should be consulted.

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

A model similar to the Scottish Access Forum could be a helpful one to replicate – with equal representations from different stakeholder groups. Alternatively a process such as that used for the Wild Fisheries Review with a small independent Panel gathering evidence and making recommendations to Scottish Ministers.

This process should not only be about developing the vision it should help build a shared set of outcomes and measures of success, and co-ordinate best practice guidelines for applying the vision through regional land-use partnerships under the Scottish Land Use Strategy. The visioning process is just the start of the process and it is important that this is followed through into policy, best practice and real change to land management. The focus must be on maximising benefits and incentivising land managers to achieve desired outcomes.

It is particularly important that the “RAFE” bodies play a full part in the process – both statutory agencies and the relevant Scottish Government divisions.

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

There are two options here. 1) A group which is co-chaired by the Cabinet Secretaries for Environment Land Reform and Climate Change and Rural Economy and Connectivity to provide the leadership required from the Scottish Government. Or 2) an independent chair appointed by, and accountable to, Scottish Ministers for progress – akin to the Wild Fisheries Review process model.

An adequately resourced secretariat is required and this could be provided by SNH if adequately resourced.

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

We believe the text should be minimal and images used to bring the shared desired outcomes and the vision to life. Best practice examples should be included that are targeted at audiences and ecosystem outcomes.

11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

Ecosystem Health Indicators should be used to measure progress towards achieving the vision and outcomes. The sustainability of the vision can be measured in the long term through the Natural Capital Index.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Keegan'.

Maggie Keegan  
Head of Policy  
Scottish Wildlife Trust