

Response from Tweed Forum to SNH on scoping a strategic vision for the Uplands.

10th October 2016

Tweed Forum is an umbrella organisation dedicated to promoting integrated catchment management and works with landowners around the whole catchment, (5000km²), fringed with uplands and hills rising to 841m altitude. Tweed Forum staff have many years of experience in working in the upland areas of the Tweed on multiple strategic fronts – carbon capture, biodiversity, habitat restoration, natural flood management, access and recreation to name but a few. Our vision embraces integrated land and water management using the ecosystem services approach. The Land Use Strategy pilot work, funded by Scottish Government, has given us a unique overview of objective land use planning issues.

Where are the uplands?

What broad characteristics should we use to define the uplands? Some possible approaches are summarised in the annex to this note.

The straightforward and most useful and pragmatic answer is the second on the SNH list; ‘the limit of enclosed farmland’.

*The uplands are often defined as land lying above the **limit of enclosed farmland**. This approach might attract reasonably broad agreement and could be based on existing data. This boundary is usually also fairly obvious on the ground.*

What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?

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

Employment, upland farming culture, recreation, sport shooting, wind and hydro power, landscape conservation including wild land, wildlife and wildlife habitat, carbon capture, forestry, deer management, flood mitigation.

The uplands (if managed and incentivised effectively) could deliver key policies and ecosystem services across a broad range.

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

Increasing the area of the uplands which has natural vegetation cover or commercial forestry will capture atmospheric carbon, and reduce flood impacts through increase interception of rainfall, increased soil infiltration and reduced soil and river bank erosion. Riparian planting will reduce the effects of increased temperature on fish in rivers, provide buffers to soil erosion caused by more intense rainfall events, and reduce the resultant diffuse pollution.

The services that society will need in future and which can be delivered in the uplands include

- Soil carbon storage
- Native woodland expansion
- Commercial timber expansion
- Low intensity livestock (Cattle and Sheep)
- Water quality/diffuse pollution enhancement
- Water regulation enhancement
- Recreational areas/sense of place

- Increased tourism potential
- More diversity in land use, farm incomes and community benefits.

What should an upland vision include?

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?

- Striking a balance between provisioning, regulating and cultural ecosystems services (using LUS approach)
- Discussion and development of a 'Land Ethic', where those in control of land should consider the wider consequences of how they manage land.
- Generally, work to restore natural processes and ecological dynamics, to build resilience to the threats brought by climate change.
- The distribution and conditions attached to agricultural subsidies, including grants to plant trees, as these massively influence the way in which large parts of the uplands are managed.
- A strategic policy on wind turbine and access track locations. This is particularly relevant in more remote upland areas as it impacts on landscape conservation and tourism.
- The intensive management of grouse moors. Alternatives exist where sport shooting can continue whilst habitat is restored to benefit other wildlife, landscape, carbon capture, water quality and flood mitigation.
- The need to protect small upland watercourses from poor management practices such as shading from conifer trees, poaching and bank erosion by grazing animals. Good management of watercourses, especially native riparian tree planting and adding woody debris, would be a simple way to target resources in the uplands and would lead to disproportionately large benefits.
- Wild deer management policy. The current system of self-regulation of deer densities is not working in all parts of Scotland, and high deer densities are having a deleterious effect on vegetation cover and natural tree regeneration.
- The upland vision should consider the potential to restore keystone species and top predators to restore natural vegetation cover and hydrological regimes.
- The objectives of the Water Framework Directive should be included as an aim in the uplands. Restoring and upgrading failing water bodies will require investment to alter damaged rivers and remove un-natural obstacles, but provide increased flood mitigation, recreation, wildlife habitat and carbon capture.
- Restoration of all damaged and poorly managed deep peatland to allow it to continue to capture carbon, benefit wildlife and reduce flooding.
- Design productive forests with resilience to diseases which seem to be more prevalent with climate change.

How should the vision be developed?

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?

All Forum members (see Tweed Forum - <http://www.tweedforum.org/about-tweed-forum/members>) but also Individuals and groups who are concerned with upland land use. Farmers, landowners, fisherman, catchment managers, shooting tenants, rivers Trusts, landscape lobby groups (e.g. John Muir Trust), Scottish Wildlife Trust, National Trust for Scotland, outdoor enthusiast groups (e.g. Mountaineering Scotland).

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

Could be a job for the Regional Land Use Partnerships as set out in the National LUS 2016-2021

Who would be best placed to lead this process?

Locally based interest groups (as different priorities will exist in different parts of the uplands of Scotland) including the Regional Land Use Partnerships perhaps

Contracted out to experienced consultants or academic institutions.

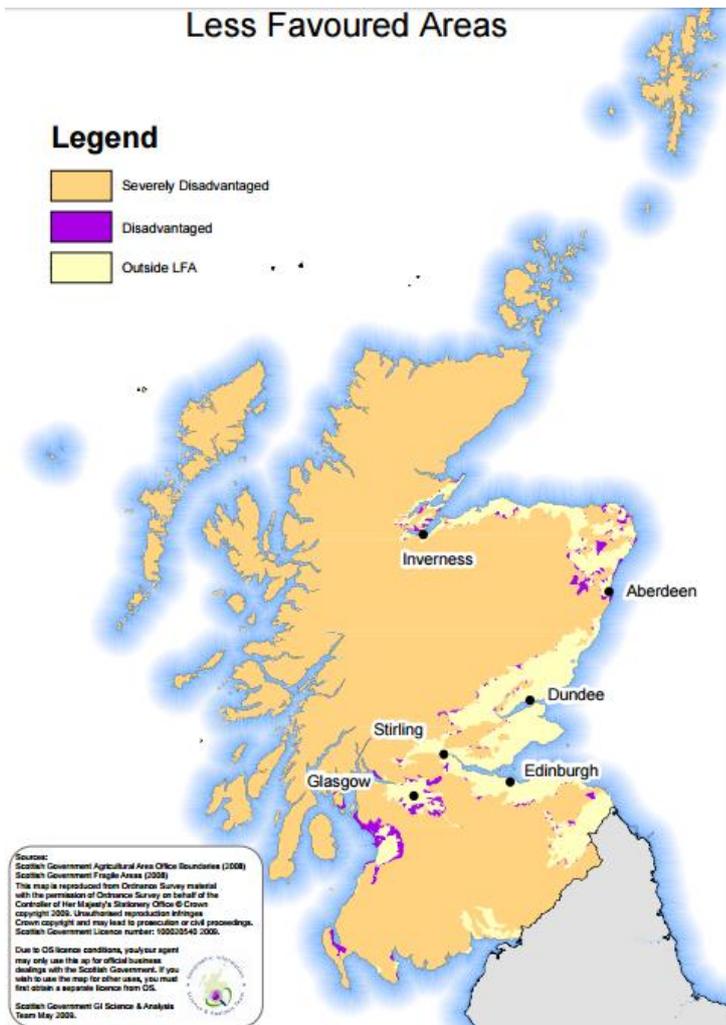
What form should a vision for the uplands take (visual or descriptive, maps, diagrams or text)?

All of the above, with added video film. Use of GIS map layers as per the Borders Land Use Study pilot.

Refer to examples from other countries and how they manage their uplands.

Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

As the LFA map below indicates, the uplands of Scotland make up the majority of the land mass of Scotland, so having an agreed vision for this area is of major importance.



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