

Scoping a strategic vision for the uplands – key questions for discussion

Comments from Helen Armstrong

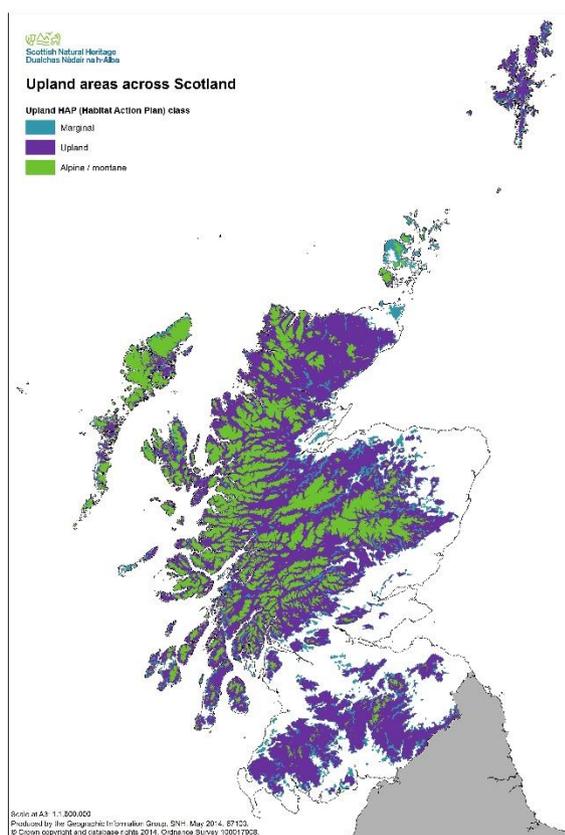
Where are the uplands?

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

I also summarized some approaches to defining the uplands in 'Armstrong, Helen (2015). The benefits of woodland, unlocking the potential of the Scottish uplands. Part 2: supporting evidence. <http://www.forestpolicygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/The-Benefits-of-Woodland-Part-II.pdf>':

The extent of the Scottish uplands, as defined by vegetation type, soil type and climate corresponds well with the European Union designation of Less Favoured Area¹. Scotland's Less Favoured Areas are defined by: (i) The presence of poor land of poor productivity, which is difficult to cultivate and with a limited potential which cannot be increased except at excessive cost, and which is mainly suitable for extensive livestock farming, (ii) lower than average production, compared to the main indices of economic performance in agriculture, (iii) a low or dwindling population predominantly dependent on agricultural activity, the accelerated decline of which could cause rural depopulation². The total area of the LFA in Scotland is 5.38 million ha (68.6% of Scotland's land area and 86% of all agricultural land)³.

Scottish Natural Heritage (S. Johnson, personal communication) has separately mapped lowland, upland, marginal and montane land types in Scotland using mapped features for the first three categories and a theoretical model of the altitude at which trees would reach no more than 3 m tall to determine the lower limit of the montane zone. This is shown in the map below. The upland and montane zones, which together make up the area above the limit of enclosed farmland, make up 63% of Scotland's land area. This, together with the marginal land, which cannot be classed as lowland, but may be enclosed, makes up 70.8% of Scotland's land area (5.56 million ha).



- 1 *Bunce, R. G. H. (1987). The extent and composition of upland areas in Great Britain. In ITE Symposium Agriculture and conservation in the hills and uplands (Eds M. Bell & R. G. H Bunce), 19-21. NERC/ITE.*
- 2 *UK Government. Less Favoured Areas. <http://data.gov.uk/dataset/less-favoured-areas>. (Last accessed 25/05/15).*
- 3 *Scottish Government. Economic report on Scottish agriculture 2013. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/06/5219/3> (Last accessed 16/06/14)*

I suspect that there isn't much difference between the different ways of defining the uplands but using vegetation type, soil type and climate rather than the more economic definition of the LFA will mean that the boundary won't change as economic circumstances change. I think that there is a good argument for including marginal land in the definition since this is often part of the same management system as the land above enclosure.

What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?

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

Currently the uplands provide some local employment e.g. of game keepers, gillies, sheep farmers, foresters. Although the numbers are relatively small, the people currently working in the uplands possess a knowledge of the land and of rural skills that are otherwise largely missing in Scotland. Currently the uplands provide far less in the way of environmental services (in terms of ecosystem services, biological productivity or biodiversity) than they have the potential to provide.

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

The expansion of woodland /scrub in the uplands would increase carbon capture and storage. Not only would carbon be stored in the woody material (both above and below ground) but carbon storage in the soil would also be increased. Increased woodland /scrub would also help to reduce the chance of downstream flooding, the chances of which are projected to increase due to climate change, by slowing the flow of water through the soil and into the river system. It would also reduce erosion and siltation thereby improving water quality for both humans and fish life.

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 key choices that an upland vision should address are between the maintenance of the currently predominant land uses i.e. sheep farming, sport shooting of grouse and /or deer and monoculture forestry using exotic conifers (largely Sitka spruce) and a change towards a more integrated, environmentally friendly and diverse way of using land that would supply multiple outputs, enhance the productivity of the uplands and potentially support a wide range of local rural businesses. Current land uses prevent the restoration of, and also further degrade, the productivity of the uplands. These land uses benefit a few, largely wealthy, land owners and a relatively small number of their employees /tenants. Although they provide some public benefits in terms of recreation, the maintenance of the uplands in a degraded state (and their increased degradation) means that their biological productivity is low and they do not provide the range, and degree, of ecosystem services that a more wooded landscape would provide. (see 'Armstrong, Helen & Forest Policy Group (2015). The benefits of woodland, unlocking the potential of the Scottish uplands. Part 1: overview' and <http://www.forestpolicygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/The-Benefits-of-Woodland-Part-I.pdf> 'Armstrong, Helen (2015). The benefits of woodland, unlocking the potential of the Scottish uplands. Part 2: supporting evidence. <http://www.forestpolicygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/The-Benefits-of-Woodland-Part-II.pdf>).

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

I think it is important that an upland vision does not limit itself to what might be economically achievable within the current economic environment. Large amounts of money are currently paid in subsidies and grants to upland land owners and tenants. Through changes in the targeting of these subsidies and grants, together with changes in the legislation regarding deer management (see

Armstrong, Helen (2015). The future of deer management in Scotland. Guest blog on Land Matters web site. <http://www.andywrightman.com/archives/4218>) and grouse shooting, a vision for the uplands that is rather different from the current state, is achievable. The vision should focus on what upland land uses would most benefit the people of Scotland in social, economic and environmental terms. The issue of how this might be achieved would be the next step once the vision has been accepted.

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?

Everyone in Scotland has a stake in a vision for the uplands since the uplands cover such a large proportion of Scotland's land area. Of course, it will be particularly important to involve land owners, land managers and tenants however many of these have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo so it is important that the costs and benefits to the Scottish people, both now and into the future, are carefully weighed up before the vision is finalised. Involving the larger population of Scotland in the process would need to involve the provision of background information. As such, it would be valuable for SNH to produce a background paper describing the history and current land uses and state of the uplands and the choices for the future.

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

I am not sure that it will be possible to develop a shared vision that all stakeholders will buy into. There are many vested interests and differences of opinion about what the uplands should look like and be used for. At the end of the day it will be up to the Scottish Government to decide on what would most benefit the Scottish people, both now and into the future.

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

Probably the Scottish Government.

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

Certainly descriptive maps of the current state and land use of the uplands would be useful background but I would doubt it would be helpful to provide a map or maps that indicate what particular pieces of land could /should look like or be used for. Photos, illustrations and diagrams would all help to illustrate the vision but it would need to be described, and justified, in text form. A short video would also help.

11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

The process of developing a vision in itself could be interesting, and useful, as long as it is well informed and does not just become a forum for those with opposing views to argue with each other. It will be important to pick apart the claims made by different stakeholders so that the vision can be developed on the basis of good quality information and well informed discussion.