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Scotland's Mountains: Valuing the Environmental Benefits

BY

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ABSTRACT

1. The environmental benefits associated with Scotland's mountains include wildlife and biodiversity, unique landscapes and wild land, hydrological services, cultural and rural heritage, and open-air recreational opportunities. These assets form the basis of an important tourism industry, and they also benefit society in ways that are not captured in markets – they are non-market or public benefits. Information about public preferences is very valuable for setting environmental management objectives, and this project uses a contingent valuation method known as the choice experiment to try and put a monetary value on public preferences for the different environmental benefits associated with Scotland's mountain environment.

2. A postal questionnaire survey of members of two mountain recreation organisations and recreational users living in mountainous areas elicited 281 usable responses. There was a significant willingness to pay for hypothetical tax policies that would enhance different environmental benefits in the Scottish mountains. Landscape, recreation, wildlife and local community benefits all had a significant influence on the choice of different tax policies. The highest willingness to pay is for the expansion of native forests (estimated at £76 per household per year) and protection of bird species (£72/hh/yr) and this study is unique in demonstrating a willingness to pay amongst non-mountain residents for policies that support mountain communities (£43/hh/yr). The relative preferences in the choice experiment match more qualitative tests of attitudes, which showed that aesthetic landscape and wild land attributes are very important to recreational users.

3. Thirty-two semi-structured interviews were carried out with key policy stakeholders and these were combined with the results of the public surveys to identify critical issues for future environmental management. Most prominent of these is the need for further expansion of the strategic approach to environmental management: integrating land-uses across wide areas; anticipating and managing change; and prioritising the aesthetic landscape and wild land values of the mountains.