

Sustainable Estates for 21st Century Scotland

An integrated study of upland estates and their role in sustainable development

CENTRE FOR MOUNTAIN STUDIES, UHI-PERTH COLLEGE

Estates are highly characteristic of Scotland's upland areas, and are bound up with the region's culture, identity and environment (for example, heather burning on grouse moors). There are many strong opinions, both positive and negative, concerning all types of estates. In particular, statements are often made regarding their economic and employment benefits, whatever the ownership.

This project will make a major contribution to our understanding of a key element of the region. No such integrative project has been done; there are few recent studies of estates, and most of them have tended to address only a few aspects (such as deer and forest management). In political and policy terms, the project will provide objective and independent research on the likely longer-term socio-economic and environmental impacts of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

The project will run from September 2007 to 2010, and recognises three key issues:

1. The significant proportion of land in private ownership, with many very large estates (one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Highlands and Islands).
2. The purchase of some of these estates by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with conservation, recreation, and sustainable development interests (e.g. RSPB, John Muir Trust etc.), especially in the last two decades.
3. The purchase of estates by their local communities, especially since the 2003 Land Reform (Scotland) Act.



The primary objective of the project is to understand both the complex driving forces influencing these estates, and also how their owners and managers make decisions that permit them to ensure that their estates fulfil their diverse roles, and are sustainable.



Other key issues to be examined will be the economic and employment benefits of estates to local communities, and the connections between land ownership and land management, exploring motivations, objectives and constraints.

Each PhD thesis will consider approximately 10 case-study estates in detail. To allow comparison in the post-doctoral phase of the project, a set of criteria has been agreed for estate selection. Case study estates must:

- be at least 2000ha in size;
- be located predominantly on land above 185m (above the upper limits of enclosed farmland and with poor land use potential, thus 'upland');
- have several land uses in operation (e.g. agriculture, forestry, sports, conservation, recreation etc.).

Four PhD projects will study a wide range of upland estates owned by private, community, and non-governmental organisations.

The research team

Privately-owned estates – Annie McKee

The role of private landownership in facilitating sustainable rural communities in upland Scotland

Private land ownership is predominant in upland Scotland. Often portrayed negatively in the media and in political debates, the private landowner is not well-recognised as a potential 'force-for-good' in rural areas, despite their ability to carry out long-term planning and integrated landscape management, as well as stewardship objectives. This research will explore the role of private landownership in ensuring the sustainable development of estate communities through the investigation of ten case-study estates which demonstrate 'good practice', thus examples where the actions of private landowners have been beneficial for community sustainability. Practical recommendations will be drawn from the case-studies to encourage more private landowners to facilitate sustainable rural communities and be supported by effective policy.



Community-owned estates – Amanda Calvert

How successful are community-owned estates? A study into the motivations and management of community land use and its interaction with other land users and government agencies



An increasing number of communities are taking destiny into their own hands by purchasing the estates on which they live and work. This study will look at issues relating to the capacity of these communities to manage their land and examine relationships and partnerships that are essential to create a sustainable environment.



Privately-owned estates – Pippa Wagstaff

Landowner motivation and perceptions of sustainability; exploring visions for the future of the Scottish uplands

The successful alignment of government policy to engender economic, environmental, and social sustainability for Scotland's uplands will depend on the government's ability to influence landowners. As a result, understanding landowner motivations is important in securing the sustainability of Scottish uplands. This project aims to investigate the motivations of Scottish landowners in order to understand how they perceive sustainability, as well as how they may influence future visions for Scotland's uplands. In order to achieve this, an analysis of the impact of motivation on landowners' perceptions of sustainability will be carried out, and landowners' visions for a sustainable future will be reviewed.



Non-governmental organisations – Jayne Glass

The identification, selection and implementation of indicators for evaluating sustainable estate management on NGO-owned estates in upland Scotland



Although sustainable development is a widely discussed topic, both globally and more locally, it remains complex and elusive in operational terms, particularly at the estate scale. This project will use a Delphi survey to explore the themes and issues that could define the concept of 'sustainable estate management', creating a sound rationale for the selection of suitable indicators for evaluating the sustainability of estate management practices. These indicators will then be implemented on ten estates owned by non-governmental organisations.



The research students are being supervised by Professor Martin Price (Director of the Centre for Mountain Studies), together with Dr Charles Warren (University of St Andrews) and Dr Alister Scott (University of Aberdeen). To ensure the on-the-ground and policy relevance of the project, an advisory board has been established, with representatives from: the Scottish Government, the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association, Scottish Environment LINK, Cairngorms National Park Authority, and the Knoydart Trust.

Through four PhDs and a post-doctoral phase (all fully-funded by the Henry Angest Foundation), the project will establish a coherent picture of Scotland's upland estates, providing an input to future management and policy

For more information please visit: www.cms.uhi.ac.uk

