

Scotland's Wild Landscapes

New Ways Forward

13/14th May 2010, SNH Battleby Conference Centre,
near Perth

Discussion summaries and key conference messages



Scotland's Wild Landscapes – New Ways Forward

This PDF has been circulated as a follow-up to the Scotland's Wild Landscapes Conference held at Battleby on May 13th/14th 2010. Over 100 delegates participated in a wide range of presentations and discussion sessions. A summary of each of these discussion sessions is presented below, together with a number of key concluding themes which emerged from discussions during the event and follow-up review of notes.

To facilitate wider access most of the presentations from the conference have now been made available on the conference website (www.wildlands.info). This website is also now host to a collection of filmed interviews with conference speakers. To reflect the success of the conference and further the original aims of the event the Scottish Wild Land Group is currently investigating the possibility of publishing a new version of the popular '*Wild land what future*' report developed in 2001 – the proposed title being: *Wild Land What Future – 10 Years on*.

DISCUSSION GROUP SUMMARIES

1. The policy framework and protection of wild landscapes

Discussion Coordinator: Hebe Carus

The existing policy framework was generally recognised as being inadequate with regard to the long-term protection of wild land in Scotland. The actual definition of wild land remains an issue – with further clarification of what and where wild land is viewed as key to the enhancement of existing and the development of new policy relating to wild land protection. Scotland's forthcoming Land Use Strategy was seen as an opportunity to further wild land conservation; however, the overall breadth of any such strategy was seen as potentially limiting the scope for inclusion of wild land.

Opinion was mixed with regard to whether a wild land designation was required in Scotland; however, it was generally agreed that without clear delineation of wild land planners were likely to struggle with the concept, which would result in a weakening of the case for wild land at public inquiry. The National Planning Framework (2) was recognised as progressive with regard to the wording used; however, it remained unclear as to how wild land should actually be given further protection in Scotland. The discussion group suggested that a non-statutory designation for wild land be developed initially and, in the case of such a system failing to adequately protect wild land, the development of a statutory designation. Further discussion centred around the possibility of the development of zoning approaches, whereby core wild land areas are subject to enhanced planning protection and are surrounded by (delineated) boundary areas (with multiple boundary levels which correspond to increasing limits of acceptable change as they move outwards from the core wild areas).

The use of wild land mapping through GIS was viewed as constituting an important element of either designation or zoning-based approaches. In general, it was suggested that a considerable reluctance to develop further regulation existed across a range of stakeholders; however, it was agreed that there is a considerable urgency with respect to the development of measures to further protect wild landscapes.

Further integration of key agendas (such as biodiversity, climate change, health and recreation) with the wild land agenda was viewed as desirable. The biodiversity agenda was

viewed as particularly relevant; however, it was noted that biodiversity and wild land are not necessarily dependant upon one another, although the potential for wild land protection (and enhancement) for conserving large areas of semi-natural habitats was highlighted. This potential outcome of wild land conservation was viewed as being directly related to the large-scale ecosystem management objectives of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. A further issue which was raised with regard to integration of agendas was the existing paucity of clear objectives for landscape in Scotland, with the European landscape Convention raised as a possible opportunity for clarification of objectives in this regard.

2. Recognising the benefits of wild landscapes

Discussion Coordinator: Jayne Glass

Wild land or wild landscapes were viewed as difficult concepts to focus in on, with a range of benefits and values of wild land apparent but a lack of clarity evident with regard to how these benefits are linked directly to the existence and management of wild areas. A crux issue appeared to be how we understand, gather evidence for and communicate these values in an appropriate and persuasive way – this was viewed as critical if the protection of wild landscapes is to move more towards a statutory wild land mapping or designation based approach. A considerable amount of well ‘flushed-out’ evidence relating to the tangible values of wild land was apparent (e.g. biodiversity benefits (peatlands), income from tourism income etc.); however, it is also apparent that less hard evidence exists with regard to the more intangible benefits of wild areas, such as benefits associated with human well being. This was seen as a potential stumbling block for communicating with politicians, policy makers and the wider public, particularly with regard to any potential new designation development, the strengthening of National Scenic Area (NSA) designations, delineating wild areas (or zoning approaches) or even creating a new National Park. A key priority was viewed as the linking of those recognised benefits into the key drivers of national policy (economic, social issues and health).

Recent research has highlighted the health benefits of recreation in natural environments. However, such research is not directly related to wild land as it is typically understood. Future research could focus in more on the health benefits directly attributable to wild areas and could, for example, attempt to quantify the potential savings to the NHS attributable to people spending time in wilder areas (through both physical and mental health benefits). Opportunities for using wild landscapes to address social issues were also highlighted, with outdoor activity courses (for example) viewed as offering potential for rehabilitating young offenders and diversifying the educational experience for young people.

3. Sustainable management of wild landscapes

Discussion Coordinator: Mike Daniels

Sustainable management of wild land was not considered a contradiction in terms; primarily due to the recognition that the discussion in Scotland was about wild land which was not the same as wilderness – human management and the existence of wild land were not viewed as mutually exclusive. Scottish landscapes were recognised as having been managed for centuries and, as a result, often continued to require a degree of management intervention to ensure their continued existence. In certain cases management was also noted as offering the potential to enhance a site’s wildness (through deer management or fencing of regenerating woodland for example). However, it was noted that on certain sites a minimisation of management intervention and the encouragement of natural processes offered potential for enhancing biodiversity and large-scale habitat restoration.

Wild land was also not generally viewed as being automatically incompatible with other (non-conservation) land uses. Wildness, as a landscape attribute was not necessarily viewed as automatically declining due to the presence of low intensity sporting or agricultural land uses for example. However, it was recognised that the intensity of the land use in question was a factor which could affect a site's wildness e.g. intensive agriculture as opposed to low intensity range grazing was seen as potentially affecting the wildness of a site. Individual (subjective) preferences for what constitutes a 'wild' experience were also seen as a major factor in this regard.

It was generally recognised that wildness occurred on a continuum and the types of land management and land uses occurring was of greater importance in core wild areas (where wildness was highest). One issue of importance was the question of whether historical/archaeological features in a landscape were viewed as affecting wildness and if whether a 'timeline' existed where artefacts became acceptable? The scale of (human created) features in a landscape were also viewed as an important factor, with the matching of the scale of development to the nature of the site viewed as important for maintaining wildness as a landscape attribute. Materials were also commented upon, with the use of natural materials (e.g. in path or shelter development) viewed as potentially complementary to wildness attributes.

In connection with the recognition that wildness occurred on a continuum, and was most strongly evident in core wild land areas, zoning approaches to management were advocated to control the intensity of land uses within and around the wildest locations. Responsible access and effective interpretation were viewed as constituting a key part of any such zoning approaches. The involvement of local communities and the development of wider awareness of management objectives and the benefits of wild landscapes was viewed as a particularly important part of zoning approaches to management of wild landscapes.

4. Restorations, reintroductions and re-wilding **Discussion Coordinator: Calum Brown**

The group recognised that 'wilderness' as it was understood elsewhere did not exist in Scotland. While it was recognised that there were some issues with the concept and definition of wild land it was generally agreed that biological naturalness should be emphasised when ecological restoration is being considered. It was felt that the restoration of wildness should not automatically imply the necessity for the exclusion of people, although it was recognised that the human role is difficult to define exactly. Critically, it was felt that the current wildness of Scotland's environments and/or landscapes should be judged from the extent to which environment is self-regulating and ecologically functioning.

In relation to defining what ecology should be restored in Scotland the group felt that emphasis on 'past states' was undesirable and work should be more 'forward-looking'. Climate change reinforces the need for taking a forward looking approach, as native species may become unsuitable for future conditions; it is also likely to become increasingly difficult to prove or decide what is 'natural'. It was recognised that in certain cases it may even be advisable to facilitate the movement of non-native species into Scotland. The development of understanding of underlying ecological processes was thought to be of greatest importance, followed by the requirement to replace as many component species as possible to strengthen ecological health and functioning. It was suggested that where reintroductions

were impossible, the roles of certain species in ecological communities could be filled by other species with similar niches, whether native or not.

The group suggested that apex predators (e.g. lynx and polecats) and other iconic species be prioritised for reintroduction. However, it was also felt that reintroductions should not be focused on to the detriment of a more ecosystem-scale approach to biodiversity conservation across Scotland – overall ecological functioning was viewed as being of greater importance than individual species. Furthermore, an emphasis on extensive habitat restoration prior to considering reintroductions was viewed as being of key importance. The beaver for example, would benefit from the existence of more extensive riparian woodland before being fully reintroduced. It was also felt that balancing human and ecological interests where reintroductions were concerned was important, with potential recognised for extractive uses associated with reintroductions – with lynx hunting for example, offering considerable opportunities for income generation. It was also viewed as critical to communicate the full benefits of reintroductions and large-scale habitat restoration to the wider public.

5. Lessons learnt from the continent – Reviewing the status and conservation of wild land in Europe - Discussion Coordinator: Mark Fisher

As a general exercise to recognise the potential applicability of IUCN categorisation (categories i-iii) to Scotland the discussion group classified the four photographic views from Mark Fisher's presentation as:

Coastal stack – IUCN iii (Natural Monument)

Caledonian Forest – IUCN ia or ib (strict reserve or wilderness)

Mountains and trees – IUCN ii (National Park)

Waterfall in landscape – IUCN ii or iii

Suggestions for other locations for IUCN categorisation were primarily in the category for IUCN iii and thus where there were predominantly stable features in the landscape, in particular waterfalls. Blanket bogs, especially in the Flow country could be stabilised and were considered to be IUCN iii in a refined/expanded vision of the category.

Zoning approaches were viewed as a mechanism which offered the potential for combining aspiration, timescale and differential regimes of management in ways which could allow for the future development of IUCN i or ii sites. As an example, the group discussed the hypothetical extension of an existing area of Caledonian Forest through the landscape and up to a montane area. A hard pan which existed due to the history of land use meant that the timescale for establishment of woodland could be measured in more than 100 years and would require land management to ensure success. Differential zones could be identified, based on the suitability of access and on the level of management intervention required. The existing woodland would have little intervention and could be readily accessible for walking. The next zone was proposed as being a development area, with restricted/guided access on trails that separated people's access from management activity (and possibly enclosures) but enabled people to witness establishment. The third zone would be a later stage into the montane/treeline area, and with its own development and access restrictions. The intention would be to remove restrictions once development had proceeded sufficiently

With regard to the potential for the development of a national ecological network in Scotland, discussion centred around the opportunity for embedding the existing forest

habitat network mapping into the National Land Use Strategy process and incentivising this system through agricultural subsidies. The group expressed little enthusiasm for a similar process to the German initiative of mapping suitable habitat networking for wildcat across Scotland. It was felt that habitat network mapping for beaver would have greater support in Scotland. The group viewed the re-introduction of lynx, and possibly wolf, as charismatic levers for promoting ecological networking.

The group were asked for the views on whether a summit process like the "Grenelle Environment" could facilitate the development of an identity and aspirations for a national protected area system in Scotland. In general it was felt that the Scottish Government was unlikely to embark on a joining of state with civil society to develop an identity and aspirations for a national protected area system unless it had been a manifesto commitment. As elections would be taking place next year (2011) it was suggested that considerable scope existed for lobbying of political parties in the intervening period. One suggestion was that Scot Link could facilitate a one year process with civil society to reach a consensus on ecology and sustainable development, and report the findings to Government. It was recognised that it may be difficult for individual NGOs to subsume their sectoral interests in achieving that consensus.

GENERAL CONFERENCE MESSAGES AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Clearly define and map the resource

To protect wild land and wildness in the wider countryside advanced GIS based mapping techniques (incorporating public participation to assist with defining the key (multiple) criteria for wildness in Scotland) offer major potential. Such techniques could be used by Scottish Natural Heritage to **map wildness on a continuum across the whole of Scotland**.

2. Recognise the benefits

Mapping of wildness could facilitate clearer recognition of the direct and indirect benefits associated with core wild land and surrounding (or smaller scale) wild areas. In particular, **stronger engagement with the ecosystem services agenda** and the creation of direct linkages between the existence of defined wild land areas with ecosystem services provision (e.g. fresh water and carbon storage) by stakeholders offers significant potential. Once recognised, **further awareness raising of ecosystem services and wider economic (tourism and land use related) and social and cultural (e.g. health, recreation and traditional land uses) benefits** offers major potential to raise the political profile of wild land and wildness in Scotland's Countryside.

3. Make ecology a central theme of wild land and wildness

The concept of wild land in Scotland has thus far centred on landscape and recreational perspectives (as opposed to a focus on ecological wildness), placing attributes such as remoteness and the lack of visible human artefacts at the core of the concept. These attributes remain important; however, further inclusion of ecological principles within the concept offers major potential for a broadening out of the topic area and for the development of **linkages with the biodiversity agenda – and specifically the objective within the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy for the conservation and restoration of semi-natural habitat areas at large scales across Scotland**. Building on existing forest habitat

networks, nationwide **ecological network mapping** is one potential avenue for such development.

4. Strengthen the policy framework

Together with themes 1-3 above, the **opportunity for inclusion of wild land and wildness as key elements within the Scottish Land Use Strategy** (currently under development) was recognised. National Parks have also emerged as the vehicles viewed as best suited to further initial development (and testing) of wildness mapping and wild land policy – with potential for follow-on expansion of such approaches across Scotland more widely. Wider opportunities for integration of the wild land agenda with climate change and health agendas also exist.

5. Apply zoning approaches

The potential for zoning of landscapes within designated areas (such as national parks) or in conjunction with the further development of IUCN sites in Scotland emerged as a key theme of the conference. Such approaches were outlined as those which **delineated core wild land zones (where development was subject to the greatest degree of control) surrounded by multiple levels of buffer zones where productive land uses occur at low to moderate intensities (multifunctional landscapes)** and the limits of acceptable human-induced change increase with increasing distance from the core. National parks were viewed as the most suitable vehicle (currently) for the early adoption of such approaches, with stakeholder and landowner collaboration likely to be a central requirement of any such approaches.

6. Expand the information base

In relation to all of the above messages, but particularly 1 and 2, expansion of the information base (e.g. GIS based mapping at the national level and quantification of ecosystem benefits) is of major importance to ensuring future coherency and consistency in discussions around wild land and wildness.

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