

A Vision for Scotland's Protected Areas for Nature

Scotland's most valuable sites for nature have been protected and brought into favourable condition, reversing trends in biodiversity loss, enabling our most important habitats and species to thrive and people to benefit. They are effectively managed and well-resourced as part of an ecologically coherent network, helping nature to adapt and be resilient to pressures such as climate change and invasive non-native species. They provide everyone with the opportunity to experience nature, enhancing our understanding, health and wellbeing.

Purposes of Protected Areas

A comprehensive, effectively managed suite of Protected Areas that are embedded within a thriving wider National Ecological Network provides Scotland with a wide a range of benefits; contributing to the nation's prosperity and wellbeing and making an important contribution to global efforts to protect nature, halt and reverse trends in the loss of biodiversity. In particular they will:

- Enable Scotland to meet its international commitments including the UN Sustainable Development Goals and post-2020 Convention on Biological Diversity targets and deliver outcomes linked to Scotland's National Performance Framework,
- Safeguard and improve the remaining most important and vulnerable areas in Scotland recognised for their nationally and internationally important habitats, species and earth science interests,
- Form key hubs, where nature is the primary objective, in an evolving ecological network of natural and semi-natural habitats across Scotland,
- Provide resilience to, and mitigate the effects of climate change and other environmental drivers such as carbon storage, coastal protection, food production and flood mitigation,
- Provide places for everyone to access, experience and appreciate nature, contributing to the nation's health, wellbeing and understanding of the natural world.

In addition to these primary purposes Protected Areas may also provide places for sustainable economic activity such as tourism, recreation, food and timber production where it does not undermine the conservation objectives of the site.

Common Principles

Scotland's Protected Areas represent and safeguard our most special places for nature, from the sea bed to the tops of mountains, in our cities and most remote wild places. Some Protected Areas provide homes for rare wildlife, dependent on specific conditions where other places allow for natural processes to drive change. Within this broad spectrum however there are some common principles that will apply to all Protected Areas in Scotland (recognising that other areas will also make a contribution to the purposes and benefits listed and may adopt some or all of these principles):

- Protected Areas will meet the IUCN definition¹

¹ A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other means, to achieve the long term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values

- Protected Areas will receive strong legal protections from damaging development and land use, protections which are effectively enforced and overseen by an independent body or mechanism, so that their designated interests are provided with the appropriate weight in decision-making
- Where there are conflicting management objectives, measures to protect and enhance nature conservation will take precedence
- Protected Areas will be sufficiently resourced to achieve their conservation objectives
- Within the protected areas network the focus on management will be to improve the condition of their designated features and act as a catalyst for improvement off site through establishing or strengthening ecological processes and networks in adjacent areas
- A collaborative approach involving land managers, local communities and wider stakeholders will be taken to identify the priorities for management to safeguard and enhance biodiversity within and around the sites, and where appropriate maximise the societal benefits derived from the area
- The health of sites and the impact of management measures upon defined attributes (physical features, habitats species and natural processes) will be monitored and results published to agreed timescales and methods defined within a National Protected Areas Monitoring Strategy, which is subject to formal external consultation
- The status of other ecosystem services, should be monitored in addition to data on the designated features where appropriate, but must be reported separately for transparency and data consistency.