

SCOTLAND'S WILD LANDSCAPES: WHAT FUTURE?

A Quality Environment

- good for the economy,
- good for health,
- good for people.

“We have to learn to see wild land as a place that is vital for a society that is increasingly becoming sequestered from those things that were once held to be sacred; indeed we need to recognise that wild land is part of our society, an integral and vital part of what we call civilisation.”

Cameron McNeish, broadcaster, writer, mountaineer, 2002.





WILD LAND AT A CROSSROADS

Our wildest landscapes are presently being seriously depleted. Hill tracks have steadily scarred their remote character. Deer fences have stretched across hillsides. Ill placed wind-farm and hydro-electric schemes and associated transmission lines now represent the most significant threat to wild landscapes for generations. Telecoms masts increasingly protrude from hill-tops.

With the current reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and a timber industry crisis, there is the opportunity to reverse the trend where wild land is being lost. Tracks can be removed, ground restored and remoteness and wildness regained.



Bulldozed hill track in the Cairngorms National Park

WHY WE NEED WILD LAND

Scotland's wildest places are recognised around the world for their beauty. They contribute massive benefits to the nation's sense of pride, identity and well-being. These qualities represent a key element of our biggest industry - tourism, with many localities now dependent upon the enjoyment of wild and remote landscapes as the basis of their primary source of income.

GOOD FOR URBAN SCOTS

On the edges of Europe, Scotland not only offers some of its remotest and wildest landscapes, it also has one of the continent's most urbanised populations. Visits to some of the finest wild places in the continent inspire the jaded, give confidence to the vulnerable and can even avert youth crime. Walking in the open spaces readily accessible from towns can play a major part in addressing stress and other chronic health problems, benefiting both physical and mental health and enhancing personal well being.

The Scottish Executive states in its 'Building a Better Scotland' vision that it has the target of "improved public enjoyment and protection of the countryside measured by increases in the number of visiting walkers".

GOOD FOR RURAL SCOTS

Foot and mouth disease demonstrated that visits to wild land are vital to remote rural economies. Day walking trips alone are officially estimated to benefit the Scottish economy to the tune of £900 million of spending annually, averaging around £6 per head per trip, (Source SNH 2001). Such spending is often with smaller locally based businesses.

The wild characteristics of some parts of Scotland are actually leading to re-population of some rural communities. Such places offer an attractive alternative to the crowding and congestion that for many are the intolerable aspects of urban life. Local community identities are frequently intertwined with the surrounding land.

GOOD FOR VISITORS TO SCOTLAND

Scotland's wild places are increasingly recognised across the rest of the UK and Europe as offering recreational experiences that are both readily accessible and of outstanding quality. Overnight visits benefit remoter areas like the Highlands and Islands, with 39% of overseas visitors going walking or climbing in wilder landscapes and spending £370 million. (Source Transport for Leisure 2001).

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“Wild, lonely, isolated country is a thing of very high value to men. It is a value that has been greatly underestimated by all but a very few of our planners.... The remnants of wild Scotland will become a priceless asset, if we resolve now to keep them.”
W.H.Murray, 1968.

WILD LAND - NEW STEPS IN SCOTLAND

Following the passing of Scotland's historic Land Reform Act, wild landscapes have a renewed place in the nation's thinking. The strengthening of access rights should provide a stronger bond between the people of Scotland and our wilder places making them more attractive to more people.

Consequently Scotland needs to take the next step in securing the value of wild landscapes for those who live beside them, those across Scotland as a whole and those who come to our country to marvel at those places where they can find peace, sanctuary, adventure and physical and mental restoration.

Scotland therefore needs to :-

- Recognise the value of its wild land within its forthcoming National Planning Framework.
- Provide for sound protection of its unsurpassed landscape in the anticipated new Planning Bill.
- Develop an effective national strategy that addresses the potential effects of wind farms upon the character of wild land.
- Exploit the opportunity of CAP reform and a changing timber sector to restore the natural character of much wild land.
- Adopt the Scottish Natural Heritage proposals for wild land as a minimum if Scotland's rural potential is to be secured for the benefit of those generations to come.



TO FIND OUT MORE

The Scottish Environment LINK member organisations listed below recommend the following:

The government agency Scottish Natural Heritage produced an authoritative report in 2002, *“Wildness in Scotland’s Countryside”*, which sets out a far reaching vision for the minimum needs of Scotland’s wild land. Copies are available from SNH at Publications Section, Battleby, Redgorton, Perth PH1 3EW (01738 444177; pubs@redgore.demon.co.uk), or on the SNH website (www.snh.org.uk).

The Scottish Wild Land Group, a member body of LINK, produced an independent publication *“Scotland’s Wild Land - What Future?”*, which offers a series of expert perspectives on the issues surrounding wild land. Copies are available by post (price £5) from SWLG at Creagmhor Lodge, Lochard Rd, Aberfoyle, Stirling, FK8 3TD or enquiries@SWLG.org.uk

LINK’s largest member body, the National Trust for Scotland, has a detailed policy which draws on its experience of managing extensive wild landscapes. Copies are available from National Trust for Scotland, Countryside Dept, 28 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh EH2 4ET, tel 0131 243 9413 or easily downloaded from www.nts.org.uk then click on Conserve then Policy then Trust Policies.

KEY FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Another LINK member body, the John Muir Trust, is organising a major international conference on *“Wild Land”* from 20th to 23rd October 2004 in Pitlochry, Perthshire. The event is aimed at demonstrating the importance of Scotland’s wild land from a local to an international level.

Further details on this and JMT’s wild land policy are available on www.jmt.org or from JMT at 41 Commercial Street, Leith, EH6 6JD. Tel 0131 554 0114.

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