



Introduction

Nature is in crisis. Human activity is driving dramatic declines in wildlife and habitats at rates never seen before, while the impacts of the climate emergency are increasing the pace of change. The scale and urgency of what is required to deliver real improvements for people and nature mean we need to see bold ambition from Scotland's decision makers. Securing the Scottish Government objectives in response to the nature and climate crisis including woodland regeneration and peatland restoration, depends on reform of sporting land use over large areas of our uplands. **This briefing outlines five key actions in delivering sustainable upland management that we encourage the Scottish Government to take.**

1) Scotland's upland use and sporting management needs to work for nature and climate.

Tackling the **nature and climate crises** must remain central to achieving the Scottish Government's objectives in relation to land use in the uplands. About 70% of Scotland's land area can be characterised as uplands. Much of this landscape has suffered over centuries from deforestation; peat extraction; burning and overgrazing by domestic livestock; intensive grouse moor management; and from unsustainable deer impacts. Deer and grouse moor management systems operate on a largely unregulated and voluntary basis in contrast to most other forms of natural resources management, and to systems of administration in other similar European countries. Land use change has been identified as a crucial part of Scotland's response to the nature and climate emergency. Today, deer hinders the nature-based solution of peatland restoration and woodland expansion. Nature based solutions are essential as they respond to both the nature and climate emergencies.¹ This means that there is an urgent need for sustainable deer management in order to restore ecosystem services such as carbon capture and flood prevention, especially in the uplands.

2) The recommendations of the Scottish Government commissioned independent reviews must be implemented

The recommendations and commitments contained in the Scottish Government responses to the independent **Deer Working Group Report** and **Grouse Moor Review Group Report** must be implemented. For the recommendations that require primary legislation, either separate Grouse Moor Management Licensing and Deer Acts, or a combined "Wildlife Management Act" should be delivered as a top priority early in the next Parliament. The other non-legislative recommendations should be implemented immediately by the responsible authority, NatureScot.

3) Policy and legislative changes are needed to manage our uplands for climate, conservation and communities.

¹ <https://www.scotlink.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NbS-LINK-briefing-FINAL-8.pdf>



In more detail, new measures should include:

- the licensing of grouse shooting;
- the licensing of muirburn and banning this activity on peatland soils;
- the bringing of hill track development fully into the planning system;
- implementing a cull approval system for deer management and authorisation by NatureScot ;
- setting maximum deer densities for different habitat types;
- removing the season for shooting male deer completely and reassessing female deer seasons;
- and, focussing deer management objectives on tackling climate change, restoring biodiversity ecosystems and protecting human health (road safety and Lyme disease).

4) NatureScot must be fully resourced to deliver changes to upland management.

The nature and climate crisis means that we have to take action now. There have been decades of public tension around upland and sporting management in Scotland, and the changes required will be challenging. In order to successfully implement the policy and legislative changes needed, NatureScot must have the resources, systems and competencies to deliver this programme, acting as the regulatory authority. NatureScot should be given clear timescales, objectives and targets to deliver this work programme with annual reporting to Scottish Government on progress.

5) Deer management must be fully incorporated into wider land use strategies.

The recommendations of [Scoping of an Upland Vision](#) produced by NatureScot must be implemented to achieve sustainable upland use and sporting management in Scotland. Deer management should be fully incorporated into the **Land Use Strategy** and **Regional Land Use Frameworks**, also incorporating existing **Deer Management Plans** into this process.²

This response is supported by the following LINK member organisations:

John Muir Trust
Ramblers Scotland
RSPB Scotland
Scottish Wildlife Trust
Trees for Life
Woodland Trust Scotland

² <https://www.scotlink.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Managing-Deer-for-climate-communities-and-conservation-2.pdf>



Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with 40 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

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