



**Scottish Environment LINK**

**Land Justice and Nature Restoration:  
Draft Statement of Principles**

1. Humanity faces a climate and nature emergency. The twin crises of a warming planet and widespread nature loss are deeply connected and mutually reinforcing. Without radical action today and over coming decades, both will cause profound damage to the planet and to human society.
2. Our use of land has been one of the major drivers of both crises. A fossil fuel-based economy, deforestation and intensive agriculture have all contributed to unsustainably high greenhouse gas emissions and the loss of species diversity.<sup>1</sup> Changing established patterns of land use is crucial – to reverse biodiversity loss, stop emissions of greenhouse gases, to sequester carbon, and to adapt for a warming planet.
3. As an early industrialiser and historically high emitter, Scotland has a moral responsibility to act and to demonstrate global leadership. Scotland's diverse landscapes are amongst the most ecologically degraded in the world. Scotland also has enormous potential to restore nature while mitigating against climate change.<sup>2</sup>
4. The Scottish Government funding will be crucial in delivering this change but with prospects for Scottish public finances as they currently stand it can never cover more than a fraction of what it is needed. The Green Finance Institute estimate a funding shortfall of between £15-27 billion for the care and restoration of nature in Scotland over the coming decade.<sup>3</sup> In addition to direct funding, therefore, what we need is a set of government policies and interventions that steer significantly increased investment into nature recovery from the widest possible range of sources.
5. In recent years the level of private sector interest in this work has increased markedly. Private investors have purchased land in Scotland for rewilding projects and for carbon offsetting. Carbon offsetting remains an emerging market and some investment has likely been speculative, with an underlying assumption that land values will increase further as the market develops. As a consequence of this investment the price of land in rural Scotland has increased, exacerbating concerns over the viability of communities facing population loss and a lack of affordable housing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> IPCC, *Special Report on Climate Change and Land* (2020) <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/chapter/summary-for-policy-makers/>

<sup>2</sup> SPICe, *How does Scotland's biodiversity measure up?* (2021) <https://spice-spotlight.scot/2021/06/04/how-does-scotlands-biodiversity-measure-up/>

<sup>3</sup> Green Finance Institute (2021) <https://www.greenfinanceinstitute.co.uk/news-and-insights/finance-gap-for-uk-nature-report/>

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Land Commission, *Scotland's Rural Land Market and Natural Capital* (2022) [https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/62546512f4179\\_Land%20Market%20Summary\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/62546512f4179_Land%20Market%20Summary_FINAL.pdf)

6. The urgent need to restore nature offers enormous opportunities for local communities. Alongside the inherent benefits from creating more ecologically balanced landscapes, investment in nature restoration should create long-term rural jobs while the returns from investment in carbon sequestration should create new income streams.
7. However, land use change is not a notional event. Modern patterns of land ownership and land use have deep historical roots and are often arouse strong feelings and even bitter controversy. While ecological change is essential, policymakers must be conscious that, while the benefits of environmental action are shared across humanity, the impacts of specific changes are felt much more locally. Concerns that a carbon rush could worsen existing inequalities and leave little community benefit are legitimate.
8. A poorly conceived carbon capture scheme may deliver little in the way of biodiversity benefit. Similarly, a rewilding project designed without due consideration of the local context may benefit nature but be harmful for people. Policymakers, and stakeholders including environmental NGOs, must work to ensure that environmental and social objectives are delivered together.
9. The overarching principle determining Scotland's approach to land use change should be to ensure a Just Transition – emphasising *both* the urgent need to transition to an ecologically sustainable future, and the importance of doing so in a way that leaves neither individuals nor communities behind. The benefits of investments in changes on the land must benefit rural communities as well as wider society.
10. Although ownership is not the only determining factor in good use of land, a more equal distribution of land ownership would allow for a fairer distribution of the benefits from investment in nature.
11. Restoring nature is a task for many actors across society, including the public sector, NGOs, community landowners, and private investors. Whoever owns the land affected, there should be mechanisms for meaningful community input and consultation, and the revitalisation of nature that our common interest requires should as far as possible be driven by local circumstances and the priorities of local communities.

This statement comes from work led by LINK's [Land Use and Reform Group](#).