



Respecting Scotland's Mountains:
MCoS Vision for the Future



Foreword



Photo credit: Alistair Young

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) is the representative body for mountaineers, hill walkers and ski tourers in Scotland.

Scotland's mountain landscapes and wild lands are amazing, unspoiled places that provide opportunities to enhance health, wellbeing and fitness – and can provide sustainable, high-quality employment. We recognise the benefits of attracting more people to these areas, whilst maintaining their attraction as wild places.

Unfortunately mountain landscapes and wild places are threatened as never before by ill-considered large-scale developments. We will fight to prevent this from happening.

We support the protection for wild land in the Scottish Government's 2014 planning

guidance, while arguing that it is insufficient. National Planning Framework 3, Scottish Planning Policy and the definitive Wild Land Areas map provide welcome guidance for planners, but in the past we have seen well-intentioned guidance reduced to irrelevance because it lacks teeth, especially when financial incentives promote development. A clear, legal guarantee of the integrity of wild and special landscapes is required.

This position statement reiterates the MCofS vision of how Scotland's mountain landscapes should be protected for the future. At the same time it also indicates how we recognise that some forms of development in mountain areas are both desirable and can be achieved without damage to the landscape.

Brian Linington, MCofS President



Introduction



Photo credit: Nineonesix Guiding

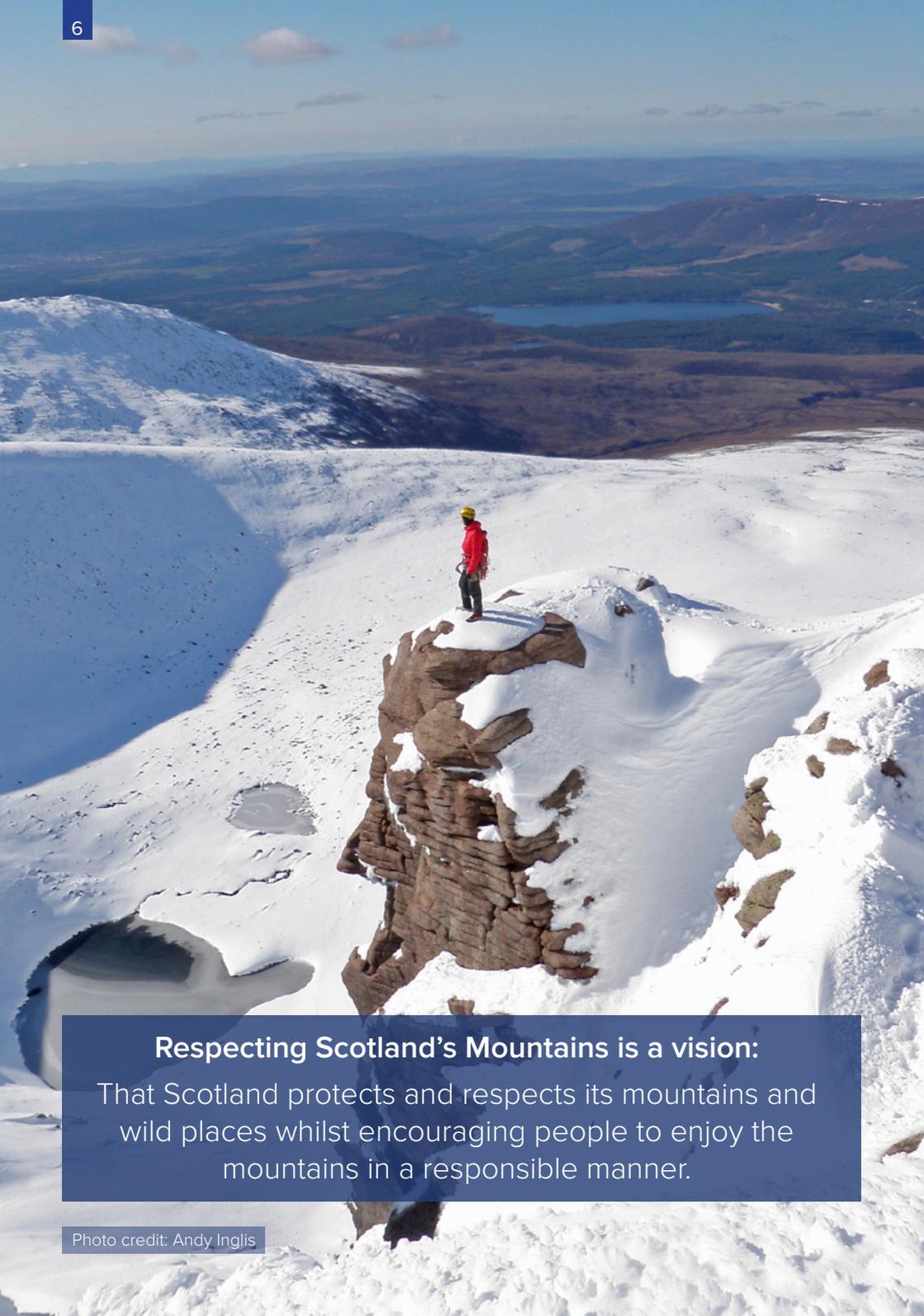
Mountains are a very important feature of the wild landscapes of Scotland. They are crucial in shaping the diverse complex ecosystems that underpin the landscapes, and support wildlife, biodiversity, peat conservation and water quality. Mountaineers, climbers and hill walkers cherish these mountains and wild places. The MCoFS understands their value and the need to protect their special qualities for the benefit of all. We seek to support and develop mountaineering and enjoyment of the mountains. Essential to this is the need to safeguard the wild landscapes that make Scotland special.

The most immediate threats come from inappropriate developments, such as industrial scale wind farms and unsuitable hill tracks, which damage the character and social value of these landscapes.

When wild places are lost, they are gone forever. Experience shows that one development often leads to another, resulting in progressively more damage.

The MCoFS wants to halt this trend. There must be care for our remaining wild mountain landscapes. A coherent, integrated national policy is needed for mountain areas that defines what can, and cannot, be done in such areas in the future.

This position statement complements our 2009 position statement on Landscape and Access. It clarifies the rationale for our position in relation to recent legislative initiatives by government and how we will respond in the future to proposals for development in Scotland's mountain areas.



Respecting Scotland's Mountains is a vision:

That Scotland protects and respects its mountains and wild places whilst encouraging people to enjoy the mountains in a responsible manner.

Our Vision



Photo credit: Nineonesix Guiding

Scotland is famous worldwide for its mountains and wild lands. They are fundamental to our national, cultural, ecological and historical identity.

Over the centuries they have inspired poets, writers, painters and film-makers.



Photo credit: Al Halewood

Nowadays they are a magnet for visitors. Some come to relax in a beautiful and unspoiled setting, while others want to get out and walk, climb, run, cycle or ski. Many also want to see the wonderful wildlife and plant species.

The vision is underpinned by **five key elements**:

- Scotland's mountains and remaining wild lands should be treated as an **irreplaceable natural, cultural and economic asset** – respected and safeguarded for the benefit of all.
- Their wildness and grandeur are a fabulous resource, and they provide unrivalled opportunities to **develop and improve informal recreation, tourism, health and wellbeing through Scotland's world-class access legislation**.
- Scotland should harness the potential of the mountains and wild land to contribute to a foundation for **sustainable futures for fragile rural economies**.
- **Change should be planned and regulated** to enhance, not diminish, our wild lands and mountains. Stopping intrusive developments such as industrial-scale wind farms will protect Scotland's natural heritage, wildlife, culture and world-wide reputation as a great tourism destination and place to live.
- **Appreciation and enjoyment of the mountains including good practice and responsibility** (avoiding litter, erosion and other damage) should be promoted from childhood.



Our Programme



Fulfilling our vision needs an integrated approach to developing the sport of mountaineering and maintaining our mountain landscapes.

The MCofS will support the vision by working to achieve:

- A mountain environment whose wildness is respected, maintained and safeguarded for the benefit of present and future generations.
 - Vibrant communities in mountain areas that have the chance to develop facilities and programmes to benefit their economies and enrich the experience of visitors, whilst at the same time protecting the mountain environment.
 - Better understanding of mountain environments and responsible participation in mountaineering by people of all ages.
 - Productive collaboration with those who share our agenda of valuing mountains and mountaineering.
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Protecting a National Asset

Supporting Communities

Wild land and mountains are valued by most of Scotland's residents (a Scottish Natural Heritage survey says 91%) and large numbers go walking and climbing.

A remarkable 55% of visitors (65% among first-timers) told a VisitScotland survey that they mainly come here for the scenery and landscape. Tourism is worth around £11bn a year. VisitScotland says it is "the engine room of the Scottish economy".

Scotland's population also faces major health challenges associated with lack of exercise and stress. People need to be encouraged to go out and experience the beauty, enjoy the exercise and benefit from the relaxation that our mountains can provide. This work should start at school and extend to all ages.

Many of the most fragile local economies and vulnerable communities are in highland areas. Sustainable businesses can be created by making the most of mountains as places for recreation and leisure. To do this their wild quality must be maintained – if not, the evidence increasingly shows that visitors will go elsewhere (MCofS, Wind Farms and Changing Mountaineering Behaviour in Scotland, March 2014).

Rather than pushing people away, the MCofS wants government, local authorities and others to help to make the most of our mountains and wild lands.



This can be done by empowering local people to provide the good-quality facilities and services that visitors seek. Such services mean opportunities for local people, contributing to broad-based, diverse and thriving local economies.

Onshore Wind Power Generation

The MCoFS supports the Scottish Government's aim of developing clean, renewable energy sources but opposes developments that threaten the wild landscape of Scottish mountains. The protection for wild land in Scottish Planning Policy 2014 is welcome but falls well short of the absolute protection required.

Our approach to proposed wind farm developments is based on a detailed assessment of each individual proposal taking into account a number of factors:

- **Position:** Proposals affecting areas of mountaineering interest, for example Munros and Corbetts (summits higher than 2500ft) or other iconic hills, are largely unacceptable, as are those in Wild Land Areas.
- **Scale:** Large clusters of turbines are highly intrusive and destroy a wild landscape. Small clusters in less sensitive areas can deliver environmental benefits and also benefit communities.
- **Size:** Scottish mountains may appear high but their grandeur is relative to their surroundings and a function of their setting in the landscape. Large turbines, often with ground-to-tip heights of over 120m, diminish the relative scale of the mountains and dominate the landscape. Small turbines are much less intrusive.
- **Siting:** Ridge and hilltop developments are most obvious. Careful positioning can sometimes reduce the impact, but usually they remain visible for miles in many directions.
- **Associated infrastructure:** Wind farms require access tracks for heavy equipment. These can stretch for miles, are wide, and scar the landscape. They are highly intrusive and add to the impression of industrialisation.
- **Pioneer and cumulative impact:** The first development in an area can be particularly harmful. Once approval has been granted for one wind farm in a sensitive area, further applications often follow in quick succession. Developers claim that, as one has been approved, those that follow will have a limited impact.



Hill Tracks

Footpaths made by man have given access to remote areas for millennia. In the past they were small scale and had minimal impacts on the surrounding environment and landscape.

Availability of mechanised earth moving equipment has facilitated the construction of tracks that are relatively wide, sometimes long, and often damaging to the overall landscape.

The MCofS appreciates that land managers need to access remote areas and that hill tracks facilitate this. The MCofS also acknowledges that mountaineers use these tracks to access the hills. However, we are concerned at the recent unconstrained proliferation of intrusive tracks in wild areas.

While welcoming the Scottish Government's current moves to bring tracks into the planning system, its new measures are too weak and fail to ensure democratic oversight. Local authority staff are under immense pressure and need adequate time to evaluate all proposals. A default position in which notifications not responded to within 28 days can proceed is unacceptable. All hill tracks should require planning permission.

Government and local planners must guarantee that certain factors are taken into account when approving the building of new hill tracks:



Photo credit: Alex Sutherland

- **Need:** The need for a new track in a particular position should be clearly justified, and there should be no satisfactory less intrusive alternative available.
- **Scale:** Small-scale tracks such as those for all-terrain vehicles are much less intrusive than those for 4x4 vehicles or trucks carrying heavy plant.
- **Position:** Tracks inevitably scar the landscape. Some eventually grass over, but on higher land they often remain very visible even after falling out of use. Careful positioning, appropriate drainage and high quality construction can minimise visibility.
- **Cumulative impact:** The presence of a number of poorly sited tracks in a limited area increases the visual impact substantially.

Managing Recreational Activity

Because of the wider societal benefits which accrue, it is good news that the popularity of mountaineering and other recreational activities in wild lands is growing. But this has an impact. MCofS wishes to work with other bodies to help manage the mountain environment to maximise the recreational benefits and minimise the environmental impacts:

- **Access:** Scottish law has led the way in confirming rights to access land for those who behave responsibly and in recognising that land managers have an obligation to enable responsible access. Yet some estates try to restrict access in breach of the spirit of the law. In a few cases their compliance with the law is in serious doubt. We will take whatever action is needed, within the legislative framework, to ensure that rights to responsible access are upheld.
- **Footpaths:** The MCofS supports measures to improve paths when needed to prevent damage to the landscape and environment.
- **Litter and human waste:** The MCofS applauds the action by organisations carrying out waste collection in areas, such as Ben Nevis, which attract large numbers of visitors. We will continue to emphasise the need for responsible behaviour in the mountains and for users to comply with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.
- **Car parks:** Most visitors reach the mountains by car, bringing a need for parking in popular areas. Limited facilities can result in road safety hazards, indiscriminate parking and damage to the land. We will encourage the provision of appropriately screened parking in areas of high public usage.





Realising the Vision



Photo credit: Chris Stuart

The 21st century will continue to bring pressure on our mountain landscapes that could never previously have been imagined.

Realisation of our vision would see a mountain environment that is enjoyed by people in a responsible way, maintained

as wild land by the highest standards of management, and preserved from damaging development.

These are achievable practical outcomes, and the least that future generations will expect.

Specifically, the MCofS will:

1

Support developments that enhance the mountain environment and oppose those that will cause damage.

2

Support and also provide educational initiatives, training and other activities that improve understanding of mountain environments and their responsible use.

3

Encourage the development of facilities and services by local communities that improve their economies and enhance the experience of mountain areas.

4

Work closely with mountaineers, government, local authorities, landowners and other key stakeholders to deliver our vision.



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