



A sustainable future for Scotland's mountains

Scottish Parliamentary Election – May 2016

Scotland's mountains are a unique natural resource – covering over half our landscape. They are vitally important in planning a sustainable future for our nation. We want mountain issues to be high up the agenda for voters, candidates and canvassers in the 2016 Scottish Parliamentary Elections.

Why?

With nearly 13000 members, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) champions the enjoyment of Scottish mountains for hill walking, climbing and mountaineering activities, but we recognise the role mountains play in a sustainable future for our nation is far more wide-reaching. In 2015 we set this out in our vision statement, 'Respecting Scotland's Mountains'.

Scotland's mountain landscapes are amazing. Mountaineers, climbers and hill walkers cherish these wild and world-renowned places. They are essential to our communities in so many ways: recreation, tourism, employment, cultural identity, wildlife and biodiversity, peat conservation and carbon storage, energy production, water quality and flood mitigation to name but a few. Striking a balance between these is a challenge (and an opportunity) that we need the Scottish Government and Parliament to take seriously.

What next?

The MCofS urges each candidate in the forthcoming parliamentary election, and elected politicians in the next parliament, to pledge their support to protect and promote Scotland's mountains for the benefit of all Scotland's people. We highlight six key priorities for future political attention:

1. Develop a shared vision for Scotland's uplands

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. Only the Scottish Government is in a position to bring together a full range of stakeholders, landowners and user groups in partnership, to develop a clear, shared, vision for how this can be achieved and how future developments should be prioritised and directed.

2. Support sustainable economic development for mountain communities

Scotland's mountains and wild land can contribute to a thriving future for fragile rural economies. But these communities need support and investment to diversify and develop skills in ecosystem services,

sustainable production compatible with a high quality environment, mountain and nature tourism, and communications links which enable remote working.

3. Enforce existing legal powers & safeguard Scotland's access rights

Scotland's access legislation is widely admired for the freedom it offers to roam responsibly. Our access rights provide unrivalled opportunities to appreciate our mountains' wildness and grandeur, to encourage tourism, recreation, and the active lifestyles so essential for our nation's health and wellbeing. These rights are backed up by legal powers to deal with access abuses robustly and effectively. Due to a failure to effectively enforce the legislation, our universal access rights are increasingly at threat of erosion. Scotland needs enlightened political leadership to protect our access rights and invest in solutions that address the small proportion of access abuses.

4. Guarantee planning protection for Wild Land Areas

Development should be planned and regulated to enhance, not diminish, our mountain landscapes and wild land. Our planning system needs to provide greater recognition for beauty and wildness, giving protection against intrusive and industrial-scale developments in designated Wild Land Areas. Planning consent should also be required for vehicular access hill tracks, which can presently be constructed with minimal planning involvement, monitoring and quality control.

5. Capitalise on the health & wellbeing benefits of outdoor recreation

Here in Scotland we are ideally placed to capitalise on the health and wellbeing benefits hillwalking, climbing (indoors or outdoors) and mountaineering activities can offer, from childhood to older age, whether they be in terms of exercise or relaxation, teamwork or self-reliance. These benefits need recognising and promoting at a strategic and operational level in both education and health services.

6. Commitment to improving safety in the mountains

A sector-wide Mountain Safety Group, led by the MCoFS, is developing a strategy for improving safety in Scotland's mountains. Government investment in safety services such as mountain weather and avalanche forecasts, training and mountain rescue plays a vital part in this and must continue. An evidence-based review into access to safety information and opportunities to gain skills should help guide future investment.

Who we are

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland is an independent organisation with nearly 13,000 members for all those who enjoy Scotland's mountains, including hill walkers, climbers and ski tourers. Established in 1970 as the national representative body for the sport of mountaineering, it is recognised as such by the Scottish Government. We also act in Scotland on landscape and access matters for the 75,000 members of the England and Wales based British Mountaineering Council, which supports our work.

Find out more at www.mcofs.org.uk