



Mountaineering Scotland

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Dear Mark

Scoping a strategic vision for the uplands

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoS), also known as Mountaineering Scotland, is pleased to contribute to this scoping. It strongly supports the scoping and hopes that once it is submitted to the Scottish Government there will be no delay in building on it to develop a vision and land use strategy for Scotland's extensive, varied, valuable and valued uplands.

The MCoS is an independent organisation with 13,000 members who are hill walkers, climbers and ski tourers. It was established in 1970 as the national representative body for the sport of mountaineering in Scotland. We are recognised by the Scottish Government as representing the interests of mountaineers living in Scotland. We also act in Scotland for the 80,000 members of the British Mountaineering Council, which fully supports our landscape work and contributes direct financial support to our policy work.

The MCoS recognises the need to mitigate and prepare for climate change. We are confident that this can be done without harming Scotland's marvellous mountain landscapes provided an appropriate balance of interests is achieved and maintained. Our policy is set out more fully in our document [Respecting Scotland's Mountains](#).

We address the questions in the order of the discussion document.

Where are the uplands?

1. What broad characteristics should we use to define the uplands?

We agree that the definition of 'uplands' must be clear, robust and capable of gaining broad support across stakeholders. A purely physical definition is to be preferred since both

geographical communities and communities of interest (such as mountaineers) have strong interests in the uplands. On the other hand, an unnatural sundering of geographical communities from their hinterland is also undesirable and consideration should be given to having a physical definition of uplands and an 'associated settlement' definition for proximal and involved settlements, particularly but not only in crofting areas.

It would be advantageous for the definition to be clear on the ground as well as mapped. The 'limit of enclosed farmland' appears best suited to the task. There are perhaps places with extensive afforestation which may require a historic limit or notional line to be applied. Where a notional line is necessary, it should be drawn below and not above forestry, since the balance of forestry, conservation woodland, moorland and agriculture is a key issue for the vision.

What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?

2. What are the key social, economic and environmental benefits that the uplands provide for Scotland?

- A place for physical recreation and mental restoration.
- An ecological reservoir which is albeit, too often suboptimal
- A source of ecosystem services of value to man, e.g. water absorption, water supply, carbon sequestration
- A source of economic benefit and employment, e.g. tourism and recreation spending (including stalking, shooting and fishing), timber production, food production (from agriculture and as a by-product of field sports), and electricity generation
- Uplands, which can start at sea level in the north, are a key part of Scotland's image at home and abroad and a core part of the Scottish psyche and our understanding of who we are and where we came from
- Crofting and collective land management are social glue for 'remote' communities. The camaraderie and shared enthusiasms of communities of interest, such as mountaineering, may be less visible but they are no less socially significant

3. How can upland land use help to prevent or reduce the impacts of climate change?

Upland land use in Scotland, assuming we don't further damage extensive deep peat deposits, has a trivial impact on climate change compared with global emissions from heat, transport, electricity and environmental degradation. The key action would be to avoid further damaging natural ecological processes so that peatlands, moorlands and woodlands sequester carbon as a by-product of a healthy ecology. Damaging actions include gravel road and turbine construction on peat, mismanaged and excessive muirburn, and overgrazing on moorland and in woodland.

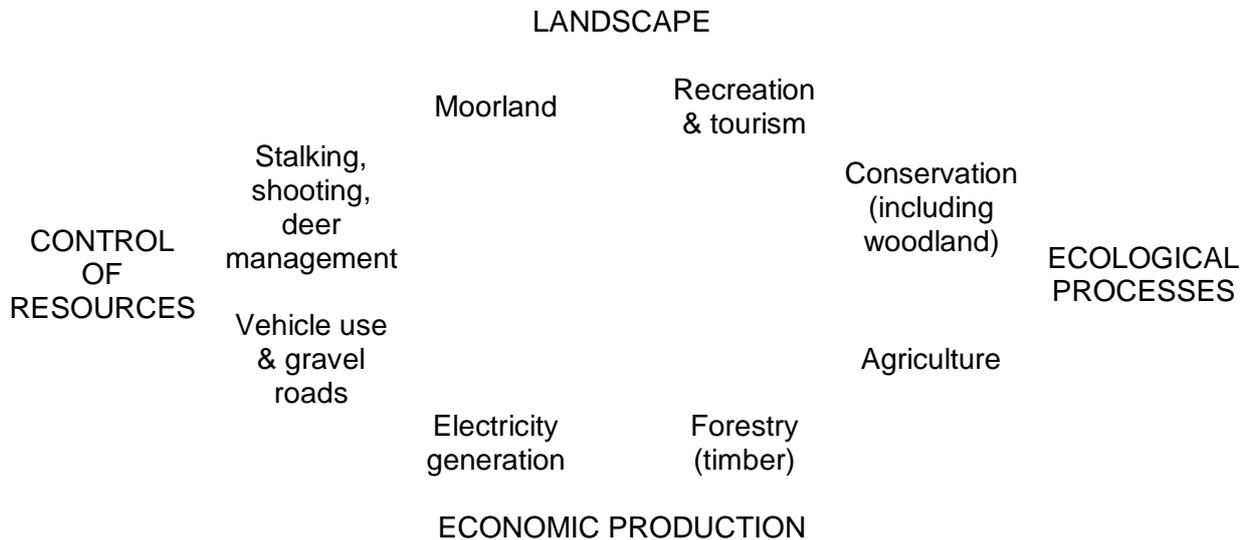
The question should not be what can the uplands do for climate change but how do we ensure healthy and productive uplands which, as a by-product, will benefit climate change? How do we achieve land management practices that produce a sustainable yield of ecosystem services and economic and social goods and services in harmony with ecological processes?

What should an upland vision include?

4. A strategic vision could inform decisions about the balance between different land uses in different parts of the uplands. What are the key choices that an upland vision should address, and why?

The diagram below attempts to show the range of sectors to be considered and how they might be 'framed'. It is not comprehensive – it omits water management and supply for example – and it simplifies complex interactions into a single sectoral interest.

For example, hill-walking, downhill skiing and mountain-biking are all recreations but may have different perspectives on the uplands.



The diagram tries to distil the key issues:-

- Landscape quality vs. economic production: it need not be vs. but at present the latter usually trumps to former. How to achieve a better balance so that both can be achieved?
- Ecological processes vs. control of resources: Can they be better aligned? Does it depend on who has control – government, private sector, local community, conservation body?

The future of Scotland’s uplands needs to be informed by where we want them to be at the end of the 21st century and beyond, not a pastiche of imagined ecological and social pasts.

The present unsustainable pursuit of economic growth will be increasingly unfit for purpose as the century proceeds. Over the next few decades Scotland needs to start restoring a balance between nature and human demands, not as one-off political photo-op projects but as the embedded core of our approach to the uplands.

As an example of present failure, we might contrast the recent rise of intensive land management for driven grouse shooting, unsustainable without external physical and financial inputs, with the much more ecologically sympathetic walked-up grouse shooting.

5. Are there any other topics or issues that should be included in an upland vision, and if so why?

None additional to what we have already indicated. We would emphasise the need to include all upland land uses. It is astonishing that the national land use strategy is virtually silent on electricity generation yet it is the building of generating stations that has arguably had the greatest impact on the uplands across Scotland in the last decade (and unarguably in terms of visual impact).

6. Are there any topics or issues that should be excluded from an upland vision, and if so why?

The focus should be on land management. It may be that ownership/control and management objectives cannot be separated, but it would be unhelpful if the vision was diverted into the issue of who owns/controls land rather than how it is used and how that can be achieved in a mixed ownership economy.

How should the vision be developed?

7. Which stakeholders do you think it would be particularly important to involve, and how? Would particular approaches be needed, for example, to reach particular groups?

As an illustrative list based on the diagram in our response to question 4, going clockwise from the top: Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland; Mountaineering Scotland; John Muir Trust; RSPB; Scottish Crofters and NFUS; Forestry Commission Scotland; Scottish Government Economy Directorate; Scottish Renewables; Scottish Land and Estates; Community Land Scotland; Scottish Gamekeepers Association; Moorland Forum.

This is a very, very partial list and it is vital that all organisations with a presence and membership on the ground in upland Scotland should be involved and engaged in the process of creating a vision. Purely campaigning organisations should be excluded.

8. What are your views on the process that might be needed to bring together the key interests and develop a shared vision?

Given the potentially large number of organisations with an interest, there may be merit in having both sector-specific process and cross-sector process. For example, a tourism and recreation sector grouping might meet to establish what views are shared and what differs between organisations in the sector so that these could be fed into cross-sector debate by a smaller number of representatives. However, the greatest value will come from organisations considering their position across sectors – as Mountaineering Scotland has begun to do with the Scottish Gamekeepers Association – and seeing where there is common interest as well as where there are differences, and how flexible or immutable positions are. Simply talking to those with whom one already expects to agree has limited benefit.

So a combination of sector-specific and cross-sector approaches is needed, possibly in an iterative cycle of assessment, reassessment and revision to reach a shared vision.

9. Who would be best placed to lead this process?

It needs to be an organisation, and perhaps individual, that would be seen by all sectors as independent and neutral.

That is really challenging given the very public conflicts between, for example, some conservation bodies and some land management organisations. On this basis, SNH may be acceptable to many but perhaps not all. More universally acceptable facilitation might be found within academia, for example in the Centre for Mountain Studies of the University of the Highlands and Islands, with SNH providing the secretariat.

10. What form should a vision for the uplands take (visual or descriptive, maps, diagrams or text)?

This is a premature question. The form of presentation can only be determined as the content begins to emerge.

11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

None at this time.

Mountaineering Scotland is grateful for the opportunity to feed into this process. We hope our comments are helpful and we look forward to contributing in due course to the creation of a vision and strategy for Scotland's uplands.

Yours sincerely

David Gibson
Chief Executive Officer