Scotland's MOORLAND FORUM

TASK GROUP REPORTS 2008

INDEX

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Scotland's MOORLAND FORUM

SCOTLAND'S MOORLAND FORUM RESPONSE TO PROPOSALS BY FORESTRY COMMISSION SCOTLAND TO INCREASE WOODLAND COVER IN SCOTLAND FROM 17 TO 25% BY THE SECOND HALF OF 21ST CENTURY

INTRODUCTION

This policy statement has been produced following discussions amongst Scotland's Moorland Forum Upland Forestry Task Group (UFTG) on 23 July 2008, and informed by a contextual presentation by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS). The meeting involved representatives of a wide variety of organisations, namely ConFor; Deer Commission for Scotland; Highland Birchwoods; Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust; National Trust for Scotland; RSPB Scotland; Scottish Gamekeepers' Association; Scottish Natural Heritage; Scottish Raptor Study Groups and Scottish Rural Property and Business Association.

This policy statement is intended for submission by Scotland's Moorland Forum to the current FCS discussion paper on forest expansion in Scotland, with a deadline for responses of 30 September 2008.

CONTEXT

It was established at the UFTG that any increase in planting above existing levels to meet a 25% target of land cover in Scotland, would result in further net loss of "moorland" habitats. These upland areas are likely to be where much (but a presently unquantifiable level) of the available land for additional planting to meet the forest expansion targets is likely to be located. It was estimated that two thirds of the extra 650,000 hectares of new planting would take place in upland areas. It is noted however that there would be more sensitive planning in the design of new woodlands (following UK Forestry Standards, Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations etc.) than was previously the case from the 1940s-1980s, when much of the controversial upland softwood planting took place in Scotland.

The new levels of planting that would be required to meet the proposed FCS/Scottish Government target of 25% of woodland cover amount to c10,000 hectares of land per annum. This can be broken down to 4000 hectares of semi natural woodland and 6000 hectares of softwoods and energy crops. This level of planting is higher than in recent years however represents a similar mean planting level to that undertaken in the 1980s. Previous local council Indicative Forestry Strategies had identified areas of lower sensitivity that could easily accommodate this level of planting to meet the 25% woodland land cover target.

It is also recognised that areas with important other land use imperatives (for example, well managed driven grouse moors) are unlikely to come forward for further planting as relevant landowners will have to agree to land use change. There may however be areas with other management imperatives where more land could become available for additional tree planting/tree regeneration. For example; in the two Scottish National Parks for

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amenity/biodiversity and landscape purposes; to extend the native Caledonian pinewood and Atlantic oak wood resource; on land managed by conservation NGOs; on poorer quality agricultural land; and on degraded areas with limited current biodiversity interest (such as areas dominated by bracken).

Scotland's Moorland Forum was established to protect and enhance moorland habitats and the Forum needs to take a central view on whether further "loss" of moorland habitats to forestry is acceptable. This judgment may need to be based on a case by case basis, as well as a better definition of whether woodland habitats can also be considered to be part of the moorland mosaic of habitats, or whether the Forum is primarily interested in open ground habitats. It is suggested that open/semi natural tree cover can be considered a component of the moorland mosaic, but that the largely treeless landscape that typifies the Scottish uplands has sporting, tourism and cultural value.

We should note the Scottish Government policy context, and in particular the climate change, habitat restoration, ecosystem services, rural development and sustainable rural community agendas.

KEY POLICY POINTS

1 Strategic Planning

Most of the concerns arising from the content of the FCS discussion paper could be largely resolved by some better definition as to where future forestry establishment is likely to take place in the uplands, as well as greater clarity on the type of forestry, that will be promoted. It is suggested that indicative locational planning would be beneficial and this would help avoid some of the shortcomings of the current wind farm development debate in Scotland. It is understood that this information is largely in the report "Possible Opportunities for Future Forest Development in Scotland; A Scoping Study" and this merits better public explanation.

FCS Geographical Information Systems should now be able to accommodate data from a variety of sources. This should permit sensitivity analysis, including location information on commercial grouse moors; best agricultural land; areas with high biodiversity interest (SPAs, SACs); areas which support Annex 1 species which prefer open habitats (eg. golden eagle, golden plover etc.); as well as important open ground landscapes (eg. Flow Country, raised mires etc.). This should allow the development and matching of moorland connectivity models with woodland connectivity models.

This is an FCS/Scottish Government strategy for forest expansion. It would be helpful to have a combined Scottish Government vision for the uplands and what is likely to be the pattern of future land use in order to meet our various public obligations. It is understood that the Scottish Government is developing its thinking on a wider land use policy in Scotland and will be potentially hosting a land use summit in 2009, which would be a good time to explain future integrated policies for upland land use. The delivery of carbon storage in peatlands; water supply; prevention of flooding; food supply from agriculture; woodland amenity and timber supply; sporting management; rural income and employment and nature conservation are all pertinent and cross cutting issues.

There is a concern that a reading of the Scottish Government agency strategy papers for agriculture, forestry and biodiversity together reflects an element of "double counting" of land areas available for sectoral purposes. There is a need for improved integration of land use policies. This suggestion is more consistent with current Scottish Government policy, where rural agencies are being encouraged to work more closely together. An integrated approach would also assist in balancing woodland and open habitats.

It would assist to have a definition of "High Nature Value Forestry". "High Nature Value Farming" is currently being considered as part of current discussions about reform of the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS). The boundary of the LFASS area covers 85% of Scotland's land area and is loosely defined as being the upland and therefore agriculturally disadvantaged parts of Scotland. Undertaking this approach would assist with a better definition of the type of forestry that could be accommodated in the future in the uplands and offer guidance on its location.

It was noted that there is an option for new planting to be associated with windfarm developments. Planting in areas surrounding windfarms and within the windfarm development footprint could achieve multiple land use objectives.

There is concern about the implications of new woodland expansion in relation to wildfire. If new forestry planting is to take place in the uplands, fire management is an important consideration. This will require appropriate resources and planning, focussing on the risk in the woodland itself, on how controlled burning which can reduce risk might be affected in surrounding areas, and on how amenity use of woodland may increase fire risk in it and surrounding moorland.

2 Best Science

It is essential that new woodland planting in the uplands is underpinned by best scientific research. In the past, there have been mistakes, which are now being rectified at cost to the public purse (eg. planting in the Flow Country). There is concern about some of the baseline material being used by FCS to underpin the new planting strategy and some of the assumptions made (eg. knowledge of climate change implications for new planting, and extent of former woodland cover in Scotland). It is noted that information to inform how upland woodlands could best assist in water catchment management planning and flood prevention needs to be better understood. A review of our current knowledge gaps in relation to the expansion of planting in the uplands and likely impacts/benefits should be an essential pre-requisite particularly with respect to moorland connectivity. Is there any scope for delay, to ensure that at least the most important scientific questions are answered, prior to embarking on a large-scale new planting strategy? That would seem desirable. The monitoring and review of the impacts of forest and woodland expansion on open moorland habitats should also be undertaken.

3 Peatland Protection and Climate Change

There is a genuine concern about more planting of peatland habitats. Planting on deep peat, which is contrary to current FCS policy, results in a net carbon loss, even when taking into account the ability for woodlands to sequestrate carbon (deep peat is defined as areas with peat over 1 metre in depth). It is suggested that this premise of a

cut off point of peat depth beyond which planting can take place is based more on pragmatism and the desire to plant trees, than on best science and delivery of the wider climate change agenda. It is proposed that more work needs to be done to understand issues around planting on shallow peatlands, as well as mixed peatlands and better soils, particularly in relation to climate change impacts.

4 Biodiversity Conservation

There is a genuine opportunity to create woodlands that are currently nationally scarce, for example native Caledonian pinewoods, Atlantic oak woods or scrub woodland at the natural tree-line. There is also a chance to recreate habitat networks and allow migration of woodland species across currently fragmented upland habitats. The Great Trossachs Forest Project, recently visited by Scotland's Moorland Forum is a good example of such an initiative. It would be good if the FCS discussion paper could place greater emphasis on the delivery of such work in the future as part of forest expansion.

However, the FCS discussion paper takes little account of obligations under the EU "Birds" and "Habitats" Directives to conserve open ground species and habitats. It is noted that any planting within, or adjacent to, a notified Natura 2000 site is likely to require an Appropriate Assessment. However, whilst there is provision under the Directives to notify SPAs and SACs for the best areas for Annex 1 species and habitats, there is also a wider obligation under the Directives to conserve these habitats beyond notified areas. In the uplands, active blanket bog and dry heath (amongst other habitats) are both "priority" habitats under the Habitats Directive. Further guidance from SNH is required on areas as to how the extent and condition of these habitats in the uplands is best achieved in the context of forestry expansion targets. There is also a question as to whether Biodiversity Action Plan targets for certain habitats can be met in the light of proposed forestry expansion targets, and this needs to be clarified.

Account should be taken of the need to restore existing habitats and it was noted that this could involve the removal of trees that had been previously planted and support for the removal of bracken from former woodland areas encroaching onto heather moorland. It is suggested that a number of Natura 2000 sites, golden eagle and other upland bird territories could benefit from the removal of inappropriately planted trees. This was also the case with driven grouse moors, where some inappropriately sited plantations had resulted in increased predation problems of red grouse and ground nesting birds, as well as a decreased ability to conduct rotational muirburn on account of the fire risk involved. In other words, there should be a two way process of new afforestation and forest removal. It is unclear whether the planting targets as set out in the discussion document take account of the need to remove existing inappropriate forestry?

Research to quantify the effect upland woodland has on fox den and crow nest distribution is required to assess the indirect biodiversity impacts of woodland on moorland connectivity. Enhanced support for management, which suppresses predation pressure in areas bordering woodlands should be considered.

In-bye ground in Scotland hold important populations of open ground breeding bird species, including wading birds and black grouse, which do not favour closed woodland habitats. Most such species may not be protected by national designations,

as they are not listed on Annex 1 of the EU "Birds" Directive", but it is known that these species are undergoing national population declines. This needs to be considered as part of any additional planting policy on these areas as part of the moorland connectivity modelling.

5 Deer management and tick control

Wild deer are a great asset to Scotland, a key part of our environment and our rural economy. Deer (and red deer in particular) are a key species in maintaining open ground habitats. Deer generate income and sustain jobs in the uplands through the value of commercial deer stalking and venison production. Commercial deer stalking is largely undertaken by upland estates

It is noted that the FCS discussion paper takes little account of the likely increased costs of deer management that would be required if more new native woodland is to be established in the uplands. Such woodland would provide opportunities for roe deer population expansion, and make control of all deer species more difficult than at present in the open range.

Commercial deer stalking typically involves deer densities of between 10-20 deer per km2. Such densities are usually incompatible with natural tree regeneration or unfenced planting. If deer are present in such densities, new woodlands usually need to be protected by deer fencing. It would be of significant concern if more deer fencing is required to protect new native woodland due to concern for impacts on woodland grouse, public access and landscape. In addition, the impact of deer fencing on biodiversity was not considered. If deer fencing is not compatible with the wider objectives of any site, then substantial reductions in deer numbers may be required. To successfully establish 650,000ha of new woodland without deer fencing would require a huge change in the Scottish deer population. The socio economic impacts of such a wide scale reduction as well as the impacts on biodiversity, including native deer populations, require to be fully considered.

In this regard, it is essential that Deer Commission for Scotland and the Deer Management Groups be adequately resourced to fulfil their obligations. FCS and Scottish Government need to ensure a joined up agency approach on deer management issues.

There is concern that further woodland planting in the uplands could also result in increased tick burdens which are a significant risk to grouse (and possibly other bird species) and to human health. As noted above, woodlands can support large populations of deer, a key host for ticks. Woodlands are also often humid environments with dense under-storey vegetation in building and very mature stages, conditions which enhance tick survival and questing times. These host and habitat factors can act in combination, and recent research suggests that woodlands could be tick 'source areas' for surrounding habitats including moorland. Tick control relies on the management of wild host populations, and the use of domestic stock treated against tick. Both strategies are made more complex however with the introduction of wooded landscapes. Woodland expansion may have to be limited where tick populations are already high and the control of wild hosts and management of wild stock would be compromised until alternative control strategies have been tested.

The financial implications of widespread deer fencing and / or tick control need to be considered. Both could be important factors for deer management and forest establishment. However, the high financial cost and the requirement for management input need to be considered when establishing the viability of proposed forest expansion.

We also recognise that woodlands are a strategic resource for deer, particularly during the winter months when they can provide shelter and food. Where woodland is available to deer, they are more likely to spend time here and consequently reduce their impact on surrounding habitats. Increasingly, deer managers see these twin values of woodlands for deer management as helping them meet their sporting aims as well as maintaining the conservation value of open ground habitats. Many estates have woodlands that are in poor condition and it is important that there is planned succession of woodland to replace the older areas, which are becoming increasingly degraded. Some landowners, with existing woodlands, see the value of restructuring these woodlands to make them more suitable for deer to use. This represents an opportunity for improved upland woodland expansion and re-design of existing woodlands.

6 Energy crops

There was concern raised about the possible future planting of energy crops in the uplands, although it is understood that this is unlikely to happen in the short term. Interest in short rotation coppice and short rotation forestry has been expressed with reference to upland areas, which could involve the introduction of non-native species (although it is also possible for short rotation forestry to make use of native species). The same comments that have been made in relation to woodland expansion in the uplands would also apply to any future expansion of energy crops.

7 Water management and flood prevention

Prior to new planting in the uplands there should be a clear understanding of the opportunities for delivering multi purpose objectives under the Water Framework Directive and catchment management planning, including flood alleviation. New planting should therefore be integrated with this wider public obligation.

Upland Forestry Task Group

September 2008

Scotland's MOORLAND FORUM

Carbon Task Group

The Task Group was asked to:

a) Establish and promote a better understanding of the role of upland peat as a strategic store of carbon.

b) Establish a better understanding and advise on where trees and woodlands should and should not be planted established in moorland areas as part of ministerial ambitions for greater tree forest cover and climate change mitigation measures.

c) Consider the possibility of carbon management and trading as a source of future funding for the management of the uplands.

Introduction

If there is one thing that everyone involved in this subject can agree on, it is that it is very complicated. And the more you investigate it, the more complex it appears. This is perhaps inevitable, as a very large number of factors are interacting; climate (and weather), land management practices, vegetation, soil chemistry etc. Not only that but it brings together natural processes at the landscape scale with chemical process at the molecular level. The challenge is therefore not be put off by, or hide behind, the complexity, nor to ignore it, but to engage with it, distinguish between the certainties and the uncertainties, and deliver clear, concise messages which do not misrepresent the current state of knowledge. To achieve this we require in Scotland better integration of the research, policy and land management communities than currently exists.

Understanding of the role of upland peat as a strategic store of carbon

One thing we do know for certain is that Scotland has a lot of peat, mostly in the uplands. The deeper deposits are associated with blanket bog which covers more than 10% of the country. A further 20% is covered by shallower peat (<50cm deep). This peat is estimated to contain around 2.7 billion tonnes of carbon – almost one third of the carbon held by all of Europe's forests. Generally speaking, if the vegetation is intact, then the peat, and the carbon stored in it, is relatively secure. Whether the store of carbon is being added to is harder to determine. If the water table is regularly near the surface and there are large areas covered by bog moss (*Sphagnum*) then it probably is. On the other hand, if there is very little, or no, bog moss, the surface is frequently dry and the vegetation is dominated by heather then the addition of new carbon to the store is less likely.

Where peat is exposed to the atmosphere, whether as a result of natural erosion, burning, trampling by people or animals, peat cutting, wind farm construction, or any other means, then not only is it definitely not accumulating additional carbon, it will be losing stored carbon. This loss can occur in a number of ways, for example: in small particles of peat that get washed off in the rain or blown away by the wind, dissolved in water draining from the bog, or directly into the atmosphere as a gas.

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Maintaining the existing carbon store is the most important, and probably the easiest and least contentious, aspect of carbon management and it is worth noting that at least some of the moorland management options in the SRDP make reference to the carbon store.

Management to optimise addition to the carbon store is less straightforward, unless that is the sole, or primary, objective. For example, reduced levels of grazing or muirburn may not be wholly compatible with sporting, agricultural or even biodiversity objectives.

Given the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and the role that land use change can have in this, it would seem appropriate for there to be guidance to land managers on how to manage for carbon, particularly on moorland where most of the carbon is stored. Enough is probably now known to be able to do this, albeit in a generic way, and the Moorland Forum is well placed to, and should, develop such guidance.

Establish a better understanding and advice on where trees and woodlands should and should not be planted established in moorland areas as part of ministerial ambitions for greater tree forest cover and climate change mitigation measures.

This issue has been in part addressed by the Upland Forestry Task Group and its response to the Forestry Commission's consultation on Woodland Expansion. It is already Forestry Commission policy that there should be no tree planting on extensive areas of deep peat. It is on the shallower peat's and organic soils that trees are more likely to be established, whether by planting or natural regeneration, where the carbon dynamics are more complex and where competition for a diversity of land uses is likely to be the greatest. It is not possible to say at the generic level that any particular landuse is 'best' in such areas. Regional and local priorities will normally prevail. However, it is appropriate that all decisions are made in the light of information regarding the implications for all relevant interests; agriculture, biodiversity, carbon, forestry, game management, recreation, etc. Guidance for carbon management should be developed alongside guidance for these other ecosystem services. Equally important will be guidance on how to prioritise and, where possible, integrate the management for these different objectives, to help land managers and policy makers make informed decisions.

Consider the possibility of carbon management and trading as a source of future funding for the management of the uplands.

Although much talked about, there are still no reliable or regulated schemes, involving sound science and objectives, which are available to moorland managers.

Much more work in and around this topic has been carried out in England than in Scotland. Given that Scotland has a much greater peat resource this may seem somewhat anomalous, but essentially it reflects the generally more degraded state of large areas of England's blanket bog and the need for substantial resources to arrest their decline and subsequently restore them.

Work (as yet unpublished) undertaken as part of the 'Sustainable Uplands' RELU (Rural Economy and Land Use Programme) project suggests that under certain circumstances carbon off-setting may generate sufficient funds for peatland habitat restoration. There is probably little merit in potentially duplicating this effort in Scotland until the position is clearer.

In the meantime the focus should probably be on making better use of, and improving access to, currently available funds, particularly SRDP. In relation to blanket bogs, management for carbon and management for biodiversity (and indeed management for water) are often the same, or very nearly the same. Thus increasing the funds available for these could bring substantial benefits at relatively little cost.

Future work

From the above it should be clear that there remains much to be done on this topic. In their entirety, these are not issues which can be addressed immediately and it is therefore suggested that the Task Group as currently constituted stands down.

There is, however, an early need for guidance for land managers on how to approach carbon management amongst the range of other management objectives. Developing such guidance, even if of a provisional nature, would be a very specific task which could be undertaken either by a reconstituted Carbon Task Group, or a sub-group of the existing one.

Funding through carbon off-setting is probably best put aside for now – but certainly not forgotten about. However any opportunities to improve the SRDP from a carbon management perspective should be pursued.

Finally, a proposal has been made that the Task Group should continue, but with a significantly expanded remit, including the implications for biodiversity and carbon management of, for example, civil engineering developments such as wind farms. These issues are probably too big for a Task Group as currently planned, but the Forum may wish to consider whether they would be appropriately addressed in this way.

Andrew Coupar
Chairman
Carbon Task Group

15 October 2008

Scotland's MOORLAND FORUM

MUIRBURN PLAN TASK GROUP

Progress Report - October 2008

1 Group Members

Chris	Wernham	BTO Scotland
Uilleam	Smith	Crofters Commission
Derek	Robeson	FWAG Scotland
Adam	Smith	Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust
Simon	Thorp	Heather Trust
Jonathan	Hall	NFUS
Duncan	Orr-Ewing	RSPB Scotland
Tim	Baynes	Scottish Countryside Alliance
John	McMorran	Scottish Crofting Foundation
David	Greer	Scottish Estates Business Group
Fiona	Leslie	SG Nature Conservation (Habitats) Team
Ronnie	Kippen	SGA
Graham	Sullivan	SNH

2 Process

2.1 The aim was to establish initial views remotely and only meet if necessary. This was achieved by circulating an initial position paper and asking for comments.

2.2 Comments have been received from those who wish to respond, with the exception of the Scottish Government. A delay has occurred due to a change of staff in the appropriate department and the production of the Muirburn Consultation (see section 4 below). As a result, a meeting with the Scottish Government to discuss the proposed Muirburn Plan will not take place until the 31st October. As the Scottish Government is the lead authority for muirburn issues, and will be required to authorise any Plan before it was circulated, it is essential that the SG input is included in the development process for the Plan. As a result of this delay, it has not been possible to take this Task Group forward, as quickly as intended.

3 Outline proposals

3.1 The general consensus from those who responded to the initial paper was that there was a need for a muirburn plan template to be produced. The aim of this would be to make it easier for all practitioners, regardless of experience, to plan their muirburn and to show that they had adopted an appropriate approach.

3.2 The amount of detail that the muirburn plan required remains to be agreed. A minimalist approach has its attractions, but this is unlikely to satisfy the requirements for designated sites and other sensitive areas. One option that will be investigated is the possibility of producing several templates; which one is used will depend on the nature of the proposed muirburn area.

3.3 Production of a map will be an important part of the Plan and the preparation of a relevant example will be important.

3.4 Clearly, there is a risk of over complication and this will need to be balanced with the need to provide enough detail to satisfy the planning requirements for every location.

3.5 From a practitioner's viewpoint, it will be important that the muirburn plan is an aid to preparation for burning, rather than becoming a way to introduce additional restrictions.

3.6 The Group will need to address the additional costs involved in preparing a Plan and whether additional funding could be justified. This would be of particular importance on designated sites where more detail would be necessary.

4 Muirburn Consultation

4.1 Since starting on the Muirburn Plan work, the Scottish Government has issued a Muirburn Consultation, with a deadline for responses of 17th November.

4.2 The consultation has asked three questions:

4.2.1 In order to adapt to the possible effects of climate change on moorland, is it necessary for the Scottish Ministers to be given powers to vary the permissible dates for muirburn in the future?

4.2.2 Are there any other amendments required to the muirburn provisions within the Hill Farming Act 1946 to adapt to climate change?

4.2.3 Are there other climate change related impacts that affect how you carry out muirburn?

4.3 A response to this consultation will be prepared and circulated to the Group for comment, before submission on behalf of the Forum.

Simon Thorp
Chairman
Muirburn Plan Task Group

17th October 2008

Scotland's MOORLAND FORUM

ACCESS AND AWARENESS TASK GROUP

An Action Plan to Develop a Communications Strategy for Moorlands.

Purpose of paper

This paper aims to outline an action plan to develop a Communications Strategy by:
- identifying the communication objectives
- identifying current attitudes and understanding of moorland,
- identifying the issues that may impact on the development of a communications strategy,
- outlining draft key messages.

Setting the Context - Aims of the Moorland Forum

- To encourage management that sustains and enhances:
  - the extent, diversity and range of habitats, species and landscape;
  - economic prosperity and sustainable communities;
  - the long tradition of local stewardship of land, based on a variety of new and traditional enterprises; and
  - the role of moorland in mitigating climate change through carbon management.

- To engender a greater awareness of the needs of these valuable areas amongst politicians, policy makers, key stakeholder interests and members of the public;

- To encourage measures that will halt and reverse the loss of heather cover;

- To find ways of enriching the overall interest of Scotland's upland areas, not least the natural heritage, noting that the restoration of moorland habitats and related species is a high priority for management action;

- To help the Scottish Government meet its international and national obligations in relation to the conservation of moorland habitats and the eco-system services that they provide; and

- To focus on work to deliver outcomes that are of real benefit to the uplands.

Communications Objectives

The communications strategy should have the following objectives:

- Ensure collective ownership of the key messages across the forum membership.

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- Ensure greater understanding and appreciation of the value of moorlands throughout Scottish society.

- Ensure that decision makers are informed about and supportive of the aims and resultant work programmes of the forum.

Current Attitudes

There is little objective information on the general public's perceptions and understanding of the issues or benefits of Scotland's moorland.

Informal discussion with ca. 25 individual members of the public asking about how they view moorland in Scotland generated the following responses:

Negative	**Positive**
Wasteful	Open vista
Bleak	Valued landscape
Unproductive	Sense of space
Boring	Defines Scotland
Un-managed	
Barren	

The underlying impression was that the benefits and uniqueness (vitality) of Scotland's moorland resource is undersold and is countered by negative imagery and press coverage.

There is a requirement to conduct further research to better understand current attitudes to moorland. This will allow better targeting of any media campaign and provide a more robust baseline to assess the impact of the communications strategy.

Press Coverage: Press coverage is predominately negative and is dominated by raptor persecution, threats from wind farm development, loss by overgrazing and danger of public health scares from Lyme disease.

Issues

There is an underlying need to re-focus key messages (summarised by uniqueness, climate change, sustaining country skills, families in rural places) to prompt a more balanced and positive view of moorlands. Such an approach does not imply that the tensions that exist within moorland management are ignored.

The Forum is constituted by members with differing views and individual communication strategies which may or may not encompass the promotion of moorland. However, drawing on the synergy of these constituent plans/strategies has the potential to generate widespread understanding of the integrated nature of landscapes including moorland.

The Moorland Forum Communications Strategy should look to influence and utilise the individual communication plans from its constituent members. This approach would negate the need for the Forum as a body to project manage a communications campaign. The Forum's role would be that of influencing development, identifying opportunities and coordinating activity.

Key Messages

The key messages should result in the collective promotion of agreed, positive images of moorland and its management.

There are four themes:

1 Moorland as a globally scarce habitat for rare and iconic species

- Moorlands, in the form of wet heath, dry heather moorland and extensive blanket bogs, are arguably Scotland's most internationally valuable habitats.
- Some 50% of the world's heather moorlands are found in Scotland.
- Moorlands are undervalued as a habitat in Scotland because they seem so common but there is a clear international commitment to protect them.
- Moorland provides a home for some of Scotland's most iconic wildlife. Red deer, mountain hare, golden eagle, red grouse, golden plover and ring ouzel are some of the best known mammals and birds. Netted mountain moth, montane ground beetles, bearberry, crowberry, bog myrtle, heather itself and rare lichens are examples of important insects and plants which live on moorland.
- Moorlands are part of Scotland's heritage and culture.

2 Ecosystems services provided by moorland

- Moorlands absorb carbon.
- Billions of tonnes of carbon are stored in peat soils.
- In the future we must manage moorlands to ensure that stored carbon remains locked up in moorland soils and, if possible, find ways to increase the amount of carbon stored.
- Properly managed moorlands are crucial in the supply of clean water to Scotland's homes.
- All our major river catchments include large areas of moorland and many of our major reservoirs are located in moorland areas.

3 The socio economic value of moorland

- Moorlands help sustain rural economies, providing a resource for grazing sheep and cattle, wildlife, tourism and sport shooting.
- Red grouse shooting is a particularly high value sporting resource generating substantial income and employment, and funding much good moorland management.
- Moorlands are attractive to many people, particularly when heather is in bloom.
- Moorlands also provide highly valued and healthy recreational opportunities through activities like walking and mountain biking.

4 The need for Moorland Management

- Moorlands have been managed for game and livestock for generations.
- Moorlands may lose some, or all, of their biodiversity, agricultural or sporting interests through lack of management.

Audiences

At the broadest level, the target audience for a Moorland Forum communications strategy is all of Scotland's people whether or not they live in or take to access to rural areas.

However, within this, there are some specific target audiences where different approaches may be taken:

- **General public**: raising (or establishing) awareness of moorlands, their value and the extent of the resources and management required to maintain this specific habitat.

- **Those who visit Scotland:** promoting the value, extent and uniqueness of moorland and where the resource can be best experienced.

- **Local Authorities and community groups**: raising awareness of the existence and value of moorland areas at a local level.

- **Land managers:** promoting the value of raising awareness amongst other audiences of the value of moorlands and increase understanding of the policies that can support the maintenance and extension of moorland.

- **Government, MSPs, Ministers**: raising awareness, understanding and appreciation of moorlands and how policies and can support the maintenance and extension of moorland.

Action Plan

1. Commission survey of general public's attitudes to and understanding of Scotland's moorland.

2. Secure agreement and ownership of key messages by all Forum members.

3. Analysis of individual organisations' current promotional policies to moorlands identifying where these individual policies can be influenced.

4. Identify how to coordinate communication campaigns throughout the organisations represented on the Moorland Forum.

Colin McClean
Chairman
Access & Awareness Group

9th December 2008

Scotland's MOORLAND FORUM

AWARENESS & ACCESS TASK GROUP

DRAFT GUIDANCE ON ELECTRIC FENCE DESIGN

The use of long lengths of electric fencing on moorland has increased in recent years. The main objective of these fences is to reduce tick burdens on grouse moors by excluding deer. Seasonal electric fencing has also been used to exclude sheep from nature reserves. The use of long lengths of electric fencing on moorland is raising concerns particularly amongst outdoor recreation interests and there are issues regarding the compatibility of such fencing with the access provisions of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act. This guidance note does not seek to justify the use of long lengths of electric fencing but seeks to mitigate their impacts. Long lengths of electric fencing raise many similar issues to other types of deer fences e.g. impacts on landscape and natural heritage. These issues are fully addressed in deer industry Best Practice Guidance (http://www.dcs.gov.uk/BestPractice/crop_fencing.aspx).

Many people consider that electric fencing creates unique difficulties for recreational access as electric fences are particularly difficult to cross if adequate crossing places are not provided. Fences of all types require adequate crossing places which should be appropriate to the type and number of users. The provision of adequate crossing places on an electric fence are particularly important as, in their absence, they may become impenetrable barriers. The problems of crossing long lengths of electric fences have been raised at the Cairngorms Local Access Forum and are the subject of discussion between recreation and other interests at a national level.

All electric fencing should be installed and maintained to ensure there is no electrical hazard to humans, animals or their surroundings and should comply with relevant regulations and standards. Fence construction must not risk entanglement for people or animals.

Two types of electric fencing are commonly used on moorland:
1) a stock fence where some or all of the line wires are electrified.
2) a unelectrified stock fence with an offset electric wire.

Electric fences should be clearly identified so that people approaching the fence at any point should be aware that the fence is electrified. Adequate crossing places for electrified stock fences can be put in place by covering the top wire with 1m lengths of non- conductive material e.g. foam pipe lagging or plastic piping which should be firmly secured to the fence wire. Such crossing places should be positioned every 100m on moorland. Gates should be constructed where the fence intersects with all paths or popular desire lines to allow passage for other legitimate users such as cyclists and horse riders. Signage should be used to direct people to crossing places and gates. Estates should consider explaining the purpose of the fence through signage in locations like car parks.

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Normal stock fences with an offset electric wire should be identified so it is clear to people approaching at any point on their length which parts of the fence are electrified. An offset wire maybe positioned so as to allow most people to gain access underneath the wire. If that is not the case then adequate crossing places should be put in place as above. Paths and all obvious access routes should be gated.

Standard deer fences where some of the wires are electrified or where there are electrified offset wires are rarely used, but potentially cause much greater problems for access than an electrified stock fence. Any land manager considering the erection of an electrified deer fence is advised to consult with the appropriate statutory agency or planning authority and explore whether an alternative management solution is possible.

Colin McClean
Chairman
Awareness & Access Task Group

9th December 2008

Scotland's MOORLAND FORUM

UPLAND FARMING TASK GROUP REPORT

1 Members

1.1 The members of the group were:

Robert Balfour (ADMG), Jonnie Hall (NFUS), Alex Jameson (RICS), Richard Lockett (FWAG Scotland), Doug McAdam (SRPBA), Uilleam Smith (Crofter's Commission) and Tony Waterhouse (SAC).

2 Meetings

2.1 The Task Group met formally once and, thereafter, corresponded by e-mail.

3 Purpose of the Group

3.1 To consider the impact of changes to the support mechanisms for farming.
3.2 To develop an understanding of the impact of changing practices (such as moorland grazing reductions/abandonment, the use of sheep as tick mops) on bio-diversity, other land uses and rural communities.
3.3 To review the potential problems and the opportunities introduced by these changes.
3.4 To review the EU concept of high nature value farming.

4 Background

4.1 Scotland's unique open heather moorland is a managed semi-natural habitat. The three main land uses that drive its creation and maintenance are extensive livestock farming, grouse shooting and open hill deer stalking.

4.2 Often two or all three enterprises operate together on individual moors. Extensive hill livestock farming has relied on support payments to maintain economic viability. Neither grouse shooting nor deer stalking receive direct public funding.

5 Findings

5.1 The SAC Report headed "Farming's Retreat from the Hills", http://www.sac.ac.uk\mainrep\pdfs\retreatreport.pdf, has addressed many of the areas of concern. Since support mechanisms for agriculture in Scotland have changed to the single farm payment, a considerable reduction in livestock has occurred in the upland areas. This reduction in livestock numbers has led to a reduction in grazing. Where grazing reduces dramatically there can be possible environmental impacts, as it would appear that bio-diversity can be compromised and become less diverse. In some areas, where stock have been

removed completely, deer have moved into the vacuum created. The reduction in grazing has been less extreme in such areas and therefore the environmental impacts have been reduced.

5.2 The environmental impacts of reducing grazing may not be immediately evident. As standing and dead plant material volumes increase so does the risk of intense wildfire. Such uncontrolled fires can result in considerable losses of carbon stored as peat and have impacts on water quality and flood management.

5.3 There are also social and economic impacts. Black-faced sheep should be regarded as a cultural resource as well as an economic resource. In addition, this reduction in livestock in the upland areas has seen a corresponding reduction in finishing stock going to the lowlands and has upset the synergy between the two areas. It has also affected food production and, more particularly, local food production. Local food production is a public benefit.

5.4 It is quite clear from reading reports, and from our discussions, that if we are to stop the impact becoming more detrimental, we have to keep some form of upland agriculture in place. We have to accept that support payments in the upland areas are fundamental to supporting the economies of the areas and while agriculture is not the mainstay of the rural economies in these areas, it is the bedrock and without it communities may be at risk. It is also clear that if agriculture is to survive in these areas, it will not survive unsupported and given that there are financial constraints on future payments, whether they are social or subsidies, they need to be better targeted. The uplands do deliver public benefits which the market at present does not reward. For instance, LFASS payments should be regarded as social and need to be targeted better to the more challenged areas. There are cases, for instance Fife, where farmers receive LFASS payments and this should not continue.

5.5 Some years ago, when the single farm payment was coming in, there was considerable discussion about the so-called beef envelope. Again, this needs to be targeted more carefully so that it actually pays money to people to keep cattle in the upland areas and not just keep cattle anywhere in Scotland, which is the case at the moment. For instance, £7,500 paid to a low ground beef farmer, who probably does not need it, could be much more effectively targeted to 10 farmers in the upland area, each of them getting £750 in addition to what they would have got before.

5.6 We need to bear in mind that we are in the process of the mid-term review of the CAP, and this provides and opportunity to ensure that the single farm payment is linked to activity so that we can do away with the so-called armchair farmers.

5.7 There is a concern that climate change, the expansion of scrub, rough grassland and woodland as a result of low grazing pressure and expansion of the hill deer population could result in increased tick burdens. These parasites pose a significant risk transmitting a number of diseases such as Louping-Ill, Tick Pyaemia and Lyme Borreliosis to species of economic interest in the uplands including red grouse, sheep and posing a risk to human health.

5.8 Land management contracts need to be simplified and more money should be targeted to the upland areas.

5.9 Potential solutions to encourage appropriate livestock stocking / grazing levels to benefit heather moorland exist within SRDP and could be applied in addition to the targeting alterations proposed for LFASS.

5.9.1 Tier 2, Land Management Options (LMO), would be the most appropriate mechanism because:

- This is available to all farmers
- It does not involve complex on-line applications, often unavailable or unfamiliar to hill farmers
- It delivers a substantially greater proportion of public funds to the target, maintaining appropriate livestock farming.

5.9.2 To achieve this, a re-allocation of fund ceilings would be required to upland/heather moorland/farmland within the LMO individual total farm allocation. By definition upland farming requires large areas to be viable because it supports low intensity stocking rates.

5.9.3 Additional LMO prescriptions could be beneficial, for example:

- Summer payments to keep hill sheep & cattle breeds on the heather hill from May to August inclusive
- Transfer of SRDP Tier III Rural Priority payments for off-wintering to the LMO menu list.

5.9.4 Encouraging summer grazing with sheep would have the added advantage of providing an incentive for the operation of sheep as tick mops. The months specified cover the main tick rise periods in Scotland.

5.9.5 Use of sheep for tick and tick-borne disease reduction could be further encouraged by offering additional payments for those prepared to apply effective acaricide treatments to hill sheep working strictly to flock health programmes agreed with and monitored by their vets.

6 Further Work

6.1 The whole issue of upland farming is very much in the public eye at the moment with discussions particularly on LFASS and the beef calf scheme continuing in Europe.

6.2 We did not review the EU concept of high nature value farming.

6.3 It would be better to wait until there is a clearer idea of where the EU is heading with the reform of LFASS and the calf scheme. It is suggested that the situation is reviewed at the Forum's meeting in February 2009.

7 Summary of Recommendations

7.1 LFASS payments should be graded with more money going to the severely disadvantaged areas.

7.2 The Beef Calf Scheme should only be paid to farmers being paid LFASS

7.3 Beef Calf Scheme money should be increased for the first 10 cattle from the existing amounts.

7.4 Land management contracts should be simplified and actions taken; payments should be made for improvements in disadvantaged areas.

7.5 In order to claim single farm payment, there needs to be agricultural activity.

Robert Balfour
Chairman
Upland Farming Task Group

10th December 2008