

# Just Transition and Wild Places

How people and wild places can  
help achieve net zero in Scotland



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# Foreword



One of the laws of life and nature is that nothing ever stays the same. Everything is in a constant state of flux, sometimes slow and gradual, sometimes rapid and abrupt. The triple emergencies of Covid, climate and biodiversity have underlined the speed at which old certainties can melt away.

Change can be both exhilarating and frightening. It can create opportunities for some and leave others behind. It can increase prosperity while magnifying inequalities.

The idea of a just transition to net zero began with a recognition that decarbonisation of energy should be managed in a way that protects workers and communities dependent on the fossil fuels industry. It has since evolved into a broader ambition to ensure that the gains and losses of the transition to net zero should be spread widely and fairly.

The John Muir Trust wholeheartedly supports the principle of a just transition that combines environmental and social justice. In this publication we focus specifically on Scotland's wild places and set out some ideas to show how these can contribute to a just transition.

We recognise that not everyone is familiar or comfortable with the term 'wild places'. In recent years, it has become a popular term among the general public to describe areas that, at least on the surface, appear to be natural. Yet for many who live in and around these areas, the description can feel like it ignores their presence or could be a barrier to economic and social progress.

The John Muir Trust – founded on Knoydart in 1983 out of a community-led campaign to oppose a

plan by the MOD to turn the peninsula into a military training zone – has always tried to have a balanced approach that seeks to protect, repair, and restore wild places while working to support local people. For us, wild places are not pristine wildernesses, but areas of land where nature has most freedom to regenerate itself. People are as much part of wild places as the plants, insects, birds and other creatures that live there.

I have lived and worked for most of my life in small, rural communities in the Highlands where there are deep interconnections between people, land, nature, history, culture, economics and social life. The John Muir Trust believes that transforming land use for the benefit of climate and biodiversity should be done in a way that helps diversify our land ownership and management; that revives our most sparsely populated areas socially, economically and culturally; and that ensures local communities reap a fair proportion of the financial benefits from any economic activities.

The ideas set out in this publication are not tablets of stone, but, we hope, the opening of a dialogue with all those who have an interest in transforming the way Scotland's land and wild places are used, owned and managed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Daniels'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

**Mike Daniels**  
Head of Policy and Land Management  
John Muir Trust

# Carbon and a just transition

**A**s the climate needle shoots up into the red danger zone, we need sweeping change on all fronts to avert global catastrophe. Heating, transport, agriculture, energy supply and much more will need to change rapidly. Here we focus specifically on land use.

In particular, we want to look at our moors, mountains, forests and peatlands that until recently were seen by many town and city dwellers as places of interest only to deer stalkers, grouse shooters, hill walkers, shepherds and wind farm developers. Conservationists and environmentalists have long argued that these vast areas, spread across 55,000 square kilometres according to Scottish Government land classification statistics – 70 per cent of our landmass – could provide us with so much more.

We know that our wild places have the capacity to sequester carbon on an immense scale. Combined research by the Scottish Government and the School of Earth and Environment at the University of Leeds suggests that the restoration of Scotland's drained and degraded peatlands alongside extensive natural regeneration of our native woodlands could, within several generations, mop up the annual equivalent of almost a third of our total current greenhouse gas emissions (see *Carbon Emissions Land Tax*, John Muir Trust, 2021).

Large-scale public, private and third sector investment into nature-based climate projects could become the catalyst for an economic renaissance across some of our most sparsely populated and economically fragile areas. With landowners and business already awakening to new financial

opportunities, we need to make sure that, as a society we maximise all possible benefits not just for climate and biodiversity, but also for local communities.

## Green lairds

Over the past year, upmarket land agents have reported a sudden change in the land market. “The Scottish sporting estates market is booming,” announced the *Sunday Times* back in August 2017. It reported that over the previous year, property firm Savills had sold 26 sporting estates for a combined total of £90 million.

In 2021, the same firm announced another “extraordinary year for the Scottish estate market” with a 98 per cent increase in the number of wealthy clients registering to buy land. But this time round, the attraction is not deer and grouse. “Climate change is fuelling a seemingly insatiable demand for land suitable for tree planting,” said a Savills spokesperson.

On the face of it, this should be great news all round. It is certainly a step up from the ecological wreckage currently strewn across tens of thousands of square kilometres of Scotland's sports shooting estates. Before we stand back and wait for the carbon market to restore our ecosystems, however, we need to take stock and ponder the experience of onshore wind.

In the early days, the idea of clean, green energy to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels was popular with the general public. Over time, it became clear there were downsides as well as upsides: the commandeering of large tracts of land for private



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We call for a Scottish Government 'gold standard' accreditation scheme for carbon sequestration that sets out clear environmental and community objectives



PHOTO: THE FLOW COUNTRY BY MARK HAMLIN/SCOTLANDBIGPICTURE.COM

profit that left communities divided and shut out from most of the benefits; soaring land prices, which slowed down the drive towards a more diversified ownership pattern; and ecological damage to wildlife habitats and peatlands inadvertently caused by industrialisation of some of our most sensitive landscapes.

Land and property is subject to the laws of the market. But governments, local and national, have a responsibility to ensure that the surging demand for land for carbon sequestration does not degenerate

into a free-for-all that enriches a small minority of big landowners and companies while excluding local people, harming biodiversity, failing to maximise overall reductions in carbon output, and perpetuating concentrated ownership patterns.

Government bodies should also find ways of safeguarding the right of future generations to change land use decisions, so that communities that acquire landholdings, for example, are not locked into decades-long commercial contracts signed by previous owners.

## Ethical carbon funding

Maximising Scotland's potential for natural carbon sequestration will require major funding from public and private investment. But the way forward is not by inviting fossil fuel businesses to carry on with business as usual in return for planting trees – ie 'offsetting.'

Every square kilometre of our land that is effectively requisitioned by an airline firm or an oil company, to relieve them of responsibility to reduce their carbon emissions, is a square kilometre that has been neutralised in the fight against climate change.

Nor do we believe that it is in the public interest to see a new spread of densely planted Sitka spruce plantations across Scotland's hillsides. Sitka grow fast and can provide low-carbon timber to replace plastic and steel for a range of products, so will remain a component of our forests for the foreseeable future. But when planted on an industrial scale, with no other tree species to provide diversity, their dense canopies shut out daylight and turn the land they occupy into ecological dead zones. And when sited on unsuitable soils, they can release decades of stored carbon into the atmosphere during planting and felling.

Carbon funding needs to be done properly and managed in a way that will instil public and community confidence. By putting in place a robust framework, the Scottish Government could help steer rural Scotland into a transformational new era with land at the heart of ecological, climate and economic regeneration.

## Gold standard

The John Muir Trust believes that the Scottish Government should do everything within its powers to ensure that carbon sequestration projects meet the highest environmental, community and social justice standards.

It should develop a national, nature-based carbon offsetting standard for landowners – private, public, community and charity – backed by an accreditation scheme, which would be both a seal of governmental approval and a precondition for public funding.

For illustrative purposes we set out here some of the key criteria that could be considered.

## A checklist for community involvement

- Offer communities a fixed share along with an invitation to be involved in major decisions.
- Allocate small plots of land to communities for eco-housing, huts and cabins.
- Avoid binding long-term commercial contracts that lock in land use for generations to come.
- Prioritise local jobs (e.g. foresters, deer stalkers, ecologists).
- Work with educational institutions to offer training opportunities for local young people.

## A checklist for environmental protection

- Deliver real net emissions rather than allow heavy carbon polluters to continue with business as usual.
- Avoid 'leakage' whereby emissions are shifted from one location to another.
- Avoid quick-fix tree planting schemes for short term gains.
- Be fully transparent and audited to guard against double counting.
- Have an Environmental Impact Assessment to ensure carbon reduction is not being achieved at the expense of biodiversity.
- Have a target of 50 per cent native species in new woodland schemes for biodiversity, amenity and long-term climate resilience.
- Reduce overgrazing pressures to allow natural regeneration, with a presumption against deer fencing.

## Carbon Emissions Land Tax

Society needs a fundamental transformation of the way we manage our uplands. Eighty per cent of our peatlands are degraded as result of human activity. Our native trees have been reduced to just four per cent of our total land area. This needs to change fast.

Over the past year, the John Muir Trust has developed the concept of a Carbon Emissions Land Tax as a lever to accelerate the pace of land management change among Scotland's biggest landowners. It would place all landholdings over 1000ha into a tax band according to their actual and potential carbon emissions, positive and negative, and could become a powerful lever to transform land use, especially in areas of marginal agricultural productivity.

Across much of our uplands, the sporting estate culture in particular has been entrenched for the past 150 years. Yet these huge expanses of land dominated by sports shooting have some of the greatest potential anywhere in the UK for mass ecological restoration for carbon and biodiversity.

Those landowners who insist on running their estates without considering urgent public objectives of mitigating climate change and restoring biodiversity would be placed in higher tax bandings, with revenues ring-fenced to help communities and smaller landholders make the transition to carbon negative.

The proposal has won the overwhelming backing of Scotland's Climate Assembly and is now steadily gaining ground among politicians, scientists and economists.

To ensure compliance with devolved powers, we envisage that the tax would be collected and distributed by local councils.

# Biodiversity and a just transition

Scotland, like the rest of the UK and the wider world, is staring at a biodiversity crisis without parallel in human history. According to a report published in 2019 by the United Nations, around one million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction, many within decades.

This is not someone else's problem to solve. All four nations of the UK rank among the worst in the world for failing to protect wildlife and wild places from human activity. In the Natural History Museum's Biodiversity Intactness Index of 240 countries and territories worldwide, England is ranked 7th from the bottom; Northern Ireland 12th; Wales 16th; and Scotland 28th. Scotland may be ahead of the rest of the UK, but we still trail dismally behind 211 other countries when it comes to protecting nature.

Does this matter? Yes, because nature is at the heart of our existence. Without plants, insects, birds, mammals, fish, fungi and other living organisms, the human race would vanish. Since the dawn of history, the natural world has furnished us with food, clothing, shelter, medicines, clean air, fresh water, building materials and everything else we need to survive.

The biodiversity crisis is both distinct from, and interconnected with, the climate emergency. Both are rooted in unsustainable consumption. Nature should provide us with an abundance of everything we need, in perpetuity. But we are devouring our life support systems.

Nature does not figure in the GDP calculations of

economists. If we close down an oil rig or reduce the number of flights from our airports, our GDP figures look worse; but if we lose half our species, it is not even recorded as a blip on the national economic balance sheet.

Fortunately, society is starting to awaken to the scale and depth of the crisis we face. To move forward at pace, we need to break free from traditional economic and planning orthodoxy that sees nature as a barrier to be torn down in the name of progress. In Scotland, ecological impoverishment walks hand in hand with economic stagnation and depopulation.

We could do things differently, and set a shining example for other countries across the globe. Instead of pitting economics against environmentalism, we could revitalise our rural economy, especially in our most sparsely populated areas, by putting nature at the heart of a green economic renaissance.

## Damaged uplands

Scotland is strongly placed to become a citadel of flourishing biodiversity.

Enclosed farmland accounts for just 20 per cent of our landmass, compared to 55 per cent in England and over 40 per cent in both Northern Ireland and Wales. In contrast, Scotland's mountains, moors and heathlands – collectively described as 'uplands' – make up 44 per cent of our land, which is more than double the percentage of Northern Ireland, four times that of Wales, and nine times higher than in England.



**The Victorian-based model that seeks to maintain unnaturally high deer and grouse densities at the expense of most other species is incompatible with public objectives for nature.**

## From grouse moor to nature reserve

In early 2020, the Langholm Initiative launched an audacious bid to turn a former grouse moor into a nature reserve.

The former mill town in the south of Scotland has since completed the first phase of the community buy-out: 5200 acres at a cost of £3.8million.

The Tarras Valley Nature reserve is now well underway, six new jobs have been created, and a plethora of community-led projects are now in progress.

Detailed plans are now in progress to buy the remaining 5,300 acres and drive forward with a visionary programme of social, economic and ecological regeneration in a community hit hard in recent times by the slow death of the local textiles industry.

PHOTO: TARRAS VALLEY NATURE RESERVE BY DAVID LINTERN



These vast expanses of uplands, spread across 35,000 square kilometres, have low agricultural value – but high biodiversity potential. The key word here is ‘potential.’ Right now, much of that land is severely nature-depleted as a result of overgrazing, burning, draining and the historic planting of dense commercial forestry plantations.

The latest Scottish Government statistics, published in 2019, show that 80 per cent of our peatlands are damaged and our forestry and woodland covers just 18 per cent of our total land area, less than half the European average of 44 per cent. Most of our trees are Alaskan Sitka spruce and other species of low ecological value when imported into Scotland.

The biggest single obstacle preventing ecological progress across most of our uplands is the dominance of a land management culture that prioritises sports shooting over all other activities.

According to a 2013 report by the Scottish Moorland Group, 12.5 per cent of Scotland’s total land area (10,000 square kilometres) is managed to ensure a super-high density of red grouse during the

autumn shooting season. Intensive driven grouse moor management focuses on maintaining an open, treeless landscape composed almost entirely of heather that provides food, shelter and nutrition for red grouse.

Most other wildlife is discouraged through trapping, snaring and shooting an array of species that might interfere with the red grouse population, such as foxes, stoats, weasels, mountain hares and crows – and despite public outcry, the persistent illegal trapping and poisoning of protected birds of prey. Undoubtedly, some other species, such as ground nesting waders, coincidentally benefit from this highly managed system – yet overall biodiversity is greatly reduced compared to areas of natural vegetation.

An even larger area of Scotland’s land – 18,000 square kilometres, or 23 per cent of our total land area – is devoted primarily to recreational deer stalking, according to a 2016 report commissioned by the Association of Deer Management Groups. These estates purposely maintain high deer densities to ensure an abundance of stags for trophy hunting



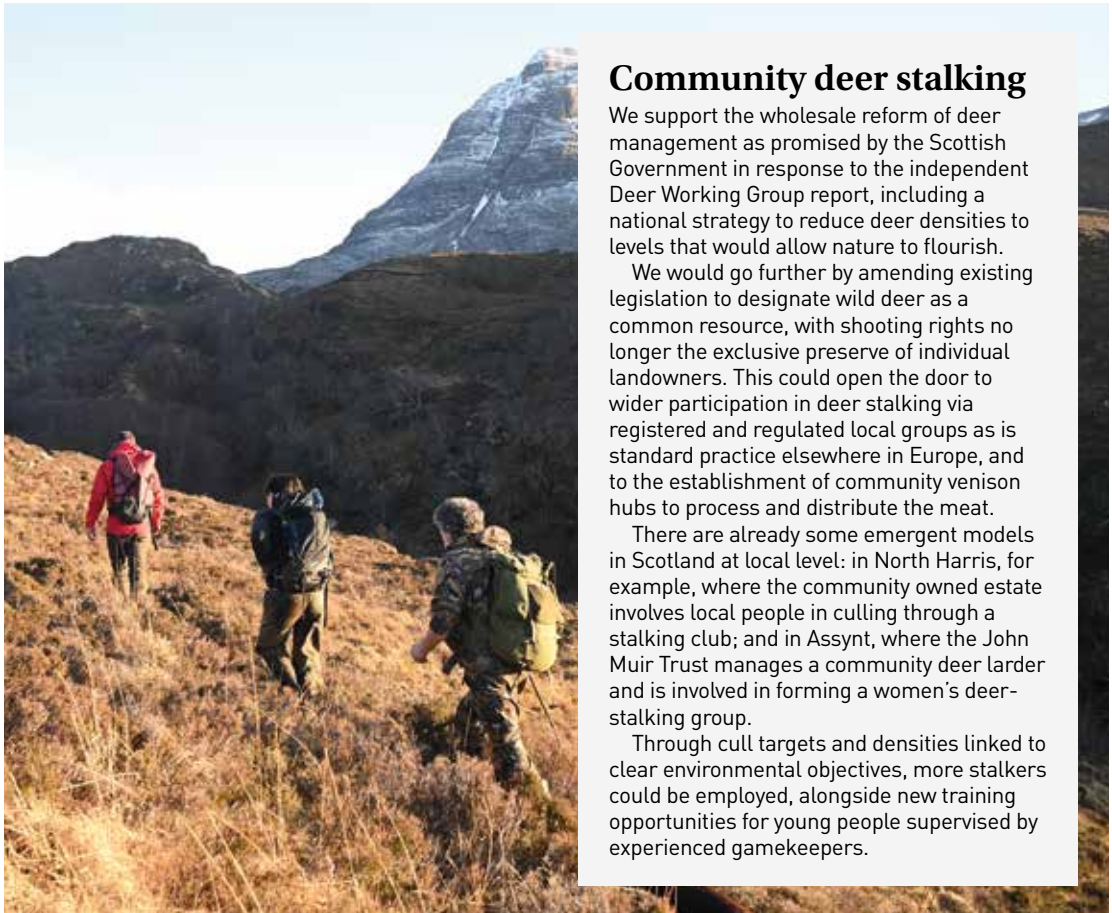


PHOTO: STALKING AT QUINAG BY DAVID BALHARRY

## Community deer stalking

We support the wholesale reform of deer management as promised by the Scottish Government in response to the independent Deer Working Group report, including a national strategy to reduce deer densities to levels that would allow nature to flourish.

We would go further by amending existing legislation to designate wild deer as a common resource, with shooting rights no longer the exclusive preserve of individual landowners. This could open the door to wider participation in deer stalking via registered and regulated local groups as is standard practice elsewhere in Europe, and to the establishment of community venison hubs to process and distribute the meat.

There are already some emergent models in Scotland at local level: in North Harris, for example, where the community owned estate involves local people in culling through a stalking club; and in Assynt, where the John Muir Trust manages a community deer larder and is involved in forming a women's deer-stalking group.

Through cull targets and densities linked to clear environmental objectives, more stalkers could be employed, alongside new training opportunities for young people supervised by experienced gamekeepers.

during the autumn shooting season. The grazing pressure of high deer densities on our uplands is profoundly destructive.

While deer numbers remain at artificially inflated levels, it will be impossible to achieve the scale of natural habitat and especially woodland regeneration necessary to restore most of our land back to ecological health.

As well as laying waste to the natural environment, the dominance of sports shooting across more than one third of our land has severely stunted the economic potential of the Scottish Highlands and other remote rural areas.

A recent report commissioned by the Scottish Government (*Socio-economic Impacts of Moorland Activities in Scotland*, October 2020) carried out several in-depth case studies measuring the economic balance sheet of different forms of land management. It included an analysis of a large deer stalking estate covering 38,500 ha in the Scottish Highlands. It found that its deer stalking operation ran at a £116,950 annual loss and employed five 'deer-specific' full-time equivalent roles. This works

out at one full time job per 77 square kilometres.

This low level of economic activity makes a negligible contribution to the rural economy and involves a tiny number of participants, perhaps no more than a few thousand annually.

The John Muir Trust believes that, while there may be a place for deer stalking and low-intensity, or 'walked-up' grouse shooting as part of a mix of land uses in rural Scotland, the Victorian-based model that seeks to maintain unnaturally high deer and grouse densities at the expense of most other species is incompatible with public objectives for nature, climate, re peopling and the economic regeneration of rural areas.

## Ecology and economy

A just transition in the sphere of biodiversity will require a fundamental change in land use. We recognise that there are competing pressures on our land. We need space for farming, housing, renewable energy, recreation, forestry and tourism.

Over the past century and a half, the balance of land use across most of rural Scotland has been

A landscape photograph showing a large, dark mountain range in the background under a blue sky with white clouds. In the foreground, there is a large, green pine tree on the left and a valley with a mix of green and brown vegetation on the right.

**The John Muir Trust works closely with Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust who own and manage the 500 hectare Dun Coillich woodland near Schiehallion**

## **Community woodlands**

Large landowners – public, private, community and NGO – have a major responsibility to drive forward landscape-scale ecological restoration for climate and biodiversity.

But to achieve a just transition towards a more diverse ecosystem, we need to widen the involvement of local people in rural and urban communities. The Community Woodlands Association, formed in 2003, now has 200 affiliated groups involved in owning and/or managing local woodlands.

It is also involved in pioneering the development of woodland crofts – units of land that can provide livelihoods from woodland products, sustainable grazing and habitat management.

These are at an embryonic stage in Scotland, though commonplace in one form or another in many other European countries.

**We call for a speedy reform of deer management and a robust licensing system of driven grouse moors**



PHOTO BY MORRIS MACLEOD

excessively skewed in favour of narrow private interests at a heavy cost to local communities, the natural environment and the wider national interest. This has to change. We need to press the reset button.

A number of research reports published over the past few years have set out a compelling social and economic case for a shift towards nature-based economies across much of our land, especially in our uplands and other wild places where productive agriculture is absent.

### **Some key findings include:**

- Nature-based tourism currently generates £1.4 billion a year and 39,000 full-time equivalent jobs for the Scottish economy. (*A Nature Recovery Plan*; RSPB Scotland; Scottish Wildlife Trust; WWF; 2020).
- Large scale investment in nature restoration in Scotland would have a cost-benefit ratio of 1:7 over 25 years. (*A Nature Recovery Plan*; RSPB Scotland; Scottish Wildlife Trust; WWF; 2020).
- A 54 per cent increase in FTE jobs in 33 'rewilding' sites in England over the past decade, including in education, nature tourism, food and drink production, ecology and events. (*Rewilding and the Rural Economy*; Rewilding Britain; 2021).

### **To help achieve a just transition for people, habitats and wildlife, the John Muir Trust would like to see:**

- Speedy reform of deer management in line with the recommendations of the independent Deer Working Group.
- A robust licensing system for driven grouse moors that protects wildlife and habitats from destructive practices.
- Financial support for crofters and small farmers to step up the shift towards nature friendly agriculture.
- Public money for public goods and an end to subsidies for land principally managed for private recreation (for example, agricultural subsidies paid to sporting estates).
- Councils promoting and funding an expansion of local community woodlands, and woodland crofts.
- At least 50 per cent of all new woodland to be native species to provide a balance between short term jobs and long-term transformation of landscapes, ecosystems and local economies.
- A holistic strategy to maximise biodiversity recovery, including housing, infrastructure and transport that will support new nature-based jobs in sparsely populated areas.

# Communities, land reform and a just transition

**I**n 2017, the Holyrood parliament established the Scottish Land Commission with a remit to modernise and diversify land ownership.

The John Muir Trust fully supports this objective. This is not because we are ideologically opposed to private ownership. It is because we believe that there are strong environmental and social justice reasons for challenging the historic pattern of landownership, which is one of the most concentrated in the developed world.

Some private landowners, large and small, manage their properties in an exemplary way – welcoming public access, working to restore nature, cooperating with communities, providing housing and creating jobs. These are still the exception, however, rather than the rule.

Data from a range of sources (for example, the Association of Deer Management Groups, the Scottish Moorland Group and NatureScot) suggests that the extent of private rural land dedicated to the minority interest of sports shooting far exceeds that which is managed for the benefit of local communities and the natural environment.

In addition, private land ownership can be capricious. How land is used and managed is almost entirely in the hands of the individual. Private landowners come and go, buying and selling their land or passing it on to future generations. Either way, priorities can change along with the title deeds.

From an environmental, as well as from a social and economic perspective, there is huge value in diversifying land ownership so that a much larger

number of people, especially those living and working locally, have a direct stake in how the land is used. If we want to drive ecological change in Scotland on the scale needed to redress centuries of destruction, we need to involve as many people and as many rural communities as possible in plans and decisions. Transformation from the bottom up will always be more powerful than change imposed from the top down.

Land reform is not just about ownership. In the words of the Scottish Land Commission, it is also about “embedding responsible land ownership.” We want to work with others to instil a new ethos around responsible land ownership.

Our mountains, moors and wild places are part of our common heritage: precious local, regional, national and international assets rather than just personal possessions. All landowners – private, public, charity, community – should be encouraged to behave as guardians and stewards of the land, with statutory obligations to the natural environment, to local people and to future generations.

## Community ownership

The specific form that land reform has taken in rural Scotland over the past 30 years is partly rooted in Scotland’s topography, which does not lend itself easily to the creation of hundreds of thousands of individual small-holdings, as began in Ireland in the late 19th century. The more collective model of community ownership seems to be more suited to Scotland’s larger, geographically diverse landscapes.



**From an environmental perspective there is huge value in diversifying land ownership so that a much larger number of people have a direct stake in how the land is used.**

## As well as being subject to charity regulation and transparency, community land trusts are elected by and accountable to local people.

The community model is highly democratic. As well as being subject to charity regulation and transparency, community land trusts are elected by and accountable to local people. That means they are more able to reflect and balance the broad range of priorities – environmental, landscape, social, economic – that exist within every community. At the same time, they tend to be more closely attuned to and connected with national priorities through wider partnerships.

One major obstacle to further expansion of community land ownership is funding. In 2014, the Scottish Government announced a target of one million acres in community ownership by 2020. It barely reached half that target, mainly because of rising land prices.

According to the Scottish Land Commission, land values across the UK have soared by more than 450 per cent since 1995 (and are continuing to grow exponentially).

The John Muir Trust supports the work of the Scottish Land Commission in trying to find solutions that might curb the free market in land prices, including some form of land value tax. At the same time, we recognise that there is no quick-fix solution.

In the meantime, we have tentatively begun to explore new models of ownership, which could bring together the dynamism, commitment and breadth of experience of local people with the wider reach, stronger financial capabilities and specialised expertise of environmental and conservation organisations. The public sector too could be involved, along with benevolent individual donors and businesses.

We would also like to see universities and colleges provide training to existing and prospective community landowners in areas such as business, land management and environmental science.

### Green island

One existing model for a hugely successful community/conservation/public partnership is the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust, whose board comprises representatives from the Eigg Residents Association, Highland Council and the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Its constitution ensures that elected community representatives have a majority on the board.

Since the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust took over in 1997, the island has been transformed into a beacon of social and environmental progress. A landscape that was once scarred by damaging conifer plantations introduced by the private landowner is well on the way to being restored to ecological health. The only island-based tree nursery in Scotland supports the spread of alder, rowan, elm, oak, hazel, birch and hawthorn (helped by the fact that there are no deer on the island).

The human population has risen by 60 per cent since the 1990s. All homes have been refurbished and rents reduced. Community-owned renewables supply 24-hour power to every household, all of which have smart meters and a trip-switch installed to keep daily usage below 5Kw.

A community-owned broadband network allows local people to work for remote employers. A vibrant local economy includes story tellers, shop assistants, musicians, ecologists, brewers, website-builders, community energy maintenance staff, project managers, construction workers and tourism providers.

The spectacular Talla na Mara culture, social and business centre is run by the community landowning West Harris Trust

PHOTO: TALLA NA MARA, WEST HARRIS TRUST BY MARGARET SORAYA



## Wild places and reepling

At the root of the global climate and biodiversity crisis is rural depopulation and the subsequent rupture of the historic relationship between people and nature.

A large part of the John Muir Trust mission in Scotland is to restore, in a modern context, that lost connection between people and land, especially wild places.

Flowing from that, we support the work of those seeking to reeple some of our most sparsely populated areas. We believe this can be done in a way that is sensitive to landscape and nature.

We use the words ‘wild places’ to describe areas of land where nature is relatively free from the constraints imposed upon it within highly cultivated or intensively managed landscapes. It is an alternative to the term ‘wilderness,’ which conveys a near-natural landscape where human influence is marginal or even non-existent.

Along with most other countries in Europe, Scotland has no wilderness. Every square kilometre of our land, including our wildest land, has been

influenced by human activity. Historically, people and nature flourished side-by-side in these places.

We support the idea first raised by Community Land Scotland of a map of ‘no longer existing communities.’

In conjunction with existing maps developed by NatureScot, this could build a picture of places cleared or otherwise depopulated during the past few hundred years that may be environmentally and socially suitable for resettlement in the future.

We want to see people and communities thrive in a variety of nature-based jobs and businesses employing ecologists, foresters, crofters, deer stalkers, woodworkers, artists and tour guides, along with remotely employed homeworkers.

New nature-based economies would require places for people to live. To support a nature-led economic revival across the most remote parts of rural Scotland, we will need an expansion of sensitively designed, affordable housing and associated infrastructure, alongside low-cost, low-impact seasonal and visitor accommodation such as huts, cabins, campsites, bunkhouses and bothies.

We call for a doubling of the Scottish Land Fund and an annual increase thereafter to help extend the scope of community ownership



PHOTO: SKYE BY KEITH BRAME

**To support a just transition for communities in and around Scotland's wild places, the John Muir Trust would like to see:**

- A doubling of the Scottish Land Fund for community buy-outs, followed by an annual increase at least in line with land value inflation.
- Interest-free, long-term loans to be made available from the Scottish Government to prospective community landowners.
- A fixed percentage of Crown Estate revenues (now controlled by the Scottish Government) from seabed leasing for offshore renewables to be allocated to a new Community Wealth Building Fund.
- New models for community land ownership to be explored by the Scottish Land Commission.
- Provision in the new Land Reform Bill to remove the current requirement for communities to pay open market value for land.
- A public interest test for all transfers of land over 1,000 hectares based on clear environmental and social criteria.
- Revision of the planning system to give communities more say over decisions that affect the local environment.
- Training courses in community land management provided by relevant academic institutions and departments.

**New nature-based economies would provide sensitively designed affordable housing and infrastructure, alongside huts, cabins, campsites, bunkhouses and bothies.**

# Rural economy and a just transition

Scotland's population distribution is one of the most imbalanced in Europe south of the Arctic Circle.

More than 80 per cent of the population lives in urban towns and cities that comprise just two per cent of the total land area. At the opposite end of the scale, just six per cent of the total population live in 'Remote Rural Areas' that cover 70 per cent of the country's landmass (*Rural Scotland Key Facts 2021*; Scottish Government).

This is partly a product of geography. Scotland's Remote Rural Areas include precipitous mountain ranges and extensive blanket bogs, where soils are of low agricultural value and the climate is harsh.

But it is also a product of human history. The desolation of tens of thousands of square kilometres of the Scottish Highlands, for example, can be traced back to the aftermath of Culloden, the break-up of the clan system, the marginalisation of Gaelic language and culture, and the Highland Clearances.

The human consequences of these events have been extensively charted in history books, film, theatre, art and literature. Less well known is the wholesale ecological destruction that resulted from the violent transition away from low intensity agriculture to mass grazing on an industrial scale, first by sheep then by deer.

We can't turn back the clock to a bygone age, but we can reinvigorate the environmental, social, cultural and demographic health of the most blighted parts of remote rural Scotland. At the

heart of that endeavour is land. There are multiple competing priorities for land use in rural Scotland: agriculture, commercial forestry, ecological restoration, renewable energy, housing and repopulation, tourism and recreation.

Right now, each sector strives to maximise its own prospects, leading at times to friction and even conflict. To maximise public benefit from our land we need instead – at local, regional and national level – an integrated approach focused on public benefits, for local communities and for the nation.

## Farming and crofting

We welcome the ambition set out by the Scottish Government to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture (*Sustainable and Regenerative Farming*, March 2022).

Farming and crofting are deeply embedded in rural culture and will be an integral part of a diverse mosaic of land use in Scotland far into the future. Food production will continue to be a vital component of our rural economy to ensure we prioritise local over imported produce.

According to the Scottish Agricultural Census of 2018, around 75 per cent of our total land consists of agriculturally Less Favoured Areas (LFAs). These areas rely heavily on public subsidies.

To help move towards an environmentally sustainable future, small farmers and crofters will require ongoing financial support from government and expert scientific input from academic



**In the light of the climate and biodiversity emergencies, we would like to see the Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme updated to encompass carbon sequestration and biodiversity improvement.**





**Traditional, sustainable grazing cattle can improve soils and ecosystems within a diverse mosaic of land use in Scotland's uplands**

PHOTO: HIGHLAND CATTLE NEAR SCHIEHALION BY LIZ AULTY



Entire communities are threatened with being converted into winter ghost towns by the surging demand for short term rented holiday accommodation, tearing apart the fabric of cultural and social life.

Then there is the intense concentration of tourism into a small number of photogenic hot-spots, while many other settlements are struggling to survive as the resident population grows older, school rolls decline, and vital local facilities such as pubs, shops and libraries are forced to close.

The 26 key destinations listed on the home page of the VisitScotland website (including Edinburgh, Glencoe, Skye, Pitlochry, Aviemore etc) do not include one mainland location north of the Great Glen.

An alternative approach that moves beyond visual scenery and connects landscape with local culture, heritage, the Gaelic language, arts, ecology and

agritourism could help shape a less frenzied, more sustainable and more widely dispersed tourism economy.

Focusing on quality rather than quantity, and slow rather than speedy tourism, would help to ensure more money 'sticks' to local communities.

**Entire communities are threatened with being converted into winter ghost towns by the surging demand for short term rented holiday accommodation.**



PHOTO: STRATHAIRD, SKYE BY JEN DERR

**Small farmers and crofters have a crucial role to play in producing local food and helping Scotland meet climate and biodiversity targets**

## **Crofting opportunities**

More than 750,000 hectares – 7500 square kilometres – of land in Scotland is under crofting tenure. Because of the low intensity grazing that is part of traditional crofting culture, much of that land is, or has the potential to be, of high nature value.

Much more can be done that will benefit both crofting communities and the natural environment. The Scottish Government’s National Development Plan for Crofting points out that a strong focus on providing ecosystem services could open up new opportunities for crofters to develop vital revenue streams.

Crofting communities and their representative organisation, the Scottish Crofting Federation, are already adapting to a changing world and planning for more diversified activities, such as peatland restoration and woodland creation, which have the potential to secure a stable and prosperous future for generations to come.

As the Chair of the Crofters Federation, Donald MacKinnon has stated: *“The climate emergency is going to dominate all we do and crofters have an important part to play, having a very sound record in good management of our environment.*

*“A significant proportion of high nature value areas in Scotland are under crofting tenure, for example the machair, known for its incredible biodiversity, and peatlands, which are the best ecosystem for sequestering carbon. Crofting is starting from an advantageous position, but we can always do more to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.”*

## Infrastructure

During the 1990s, hundreds of millions of pounds poured into the economy of the Scottish Highlands from European Union Structural Funds.

It supported physical infrastructure such as the upgrading of roads and the construction of bridges, and funded the development of the University of the Highland and Islands, which has had a transformative impact. That funding stream began to dwindle after the Highlands and Islands lost its 'Objective 1' status at the turn of the millennium.

Since then, external companies – in oil, construction, renewables, communications, online retail – have extracted billions in profit from the Highlands with little direct investment in the region's infrastructure in return.

A longer-term vision for the rural economy should consider how some of that private profit can be invested into public infrastructure, including public transport, housing, broadband connectivity, home insulation and educational campuses. We also support the idea of '20-minute' rural hubs that bring together clusters of business, retail, medical, cultural and social facilities that are easily reached by most people on foot, bicycle or public transport.

### Encouraging rural renewal

- A dense network of rural '20-minute hubs' to cut car mileage and strengthen social cohesion
- High-speed broadband in every building along with well-connected phone networks for 4G or 5G connections
- The further expansion of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) campuses to more remote rural areas to specialise in land management, sustainable agriculture, biodiversity and natural climate solutions
- The insulation of every home to Scandinavian standards to reduce fuel poverty
- A major expansion of affordable housing targeted at young families, local and incoming
- Protection, development and expansion of the Gaelic language.

## Housing

With an average of just four residents per square kilometre – compared to more than 3,500 in Glasgow, for example – it is a bitter paradox that much of remote rural Scotland suffers a perpetual housing shortage.

In popular visitor locations, the crisis has been aggravated in recent years by runaway house prices driven by spiralling demand for second homes and investment in holiday accommodation for short-term let.

Businesses, schools, hospitals and care services in some areas are now reporting serious labour shortages because young people on low incomes are priced out of local housing.

The rural housing shortage also threatens other urgent public objectives such as large-scale peatland restoration and ecological regeneration. Without people, we cannot turn our ambitions into action. And without affordable housing, we cannot attract people into our wild places.

Second homes and holiday lets are integral to the economy of many rural areas. But a rampant housing market left unchecked could store up a demographic timebomb that will rip the heart out of many communities. Local and national politicians need to consider, carefully but urgently, how this timebomb is to be defused.

### Easing the crisis

Some options may include:

- Increased funding to the Rural and Islands Housing Fund.
- A National Land Bank to collaborate with landowners, housing associations, local councils and communities to acquire land suitable for affordable and permanent residential housing, including in remote rural areas.
- An upper limit on the proportion of second homes and short term lets per residential area.

# Renewable energy and a just transition

Scotland is now recognised as a world leader in renewable electricity generation. For more than a century, aided by topography and climate, we have harnessed the forces of nature to deliver clean energy, first from hydropower and, in more recent decades, from wind.

The John Muir Trust fully supports the Scottish Government's bold and ambitious climate targets, and we recognise that Net Zero by 2045 will require expanding our renewables sector alongside reducing our energy use and restoring our degraded peatlands and diminished native woodlands.

Future progress on decarbonisation will also involve complex decision-making to balance public needs against private profit. How do we decarbonise energy generation while protecting our natural assets? And how do we make sure that the economic benefits of renewables are spread more fairly in the future than they have been in the past?

In the past 20 years, the John Muir Trust has objected to a small handful of the thousands of renewables applications. Our objections have focused on large-scale onshore wind projects in sensitive wild places. To fulfil our charitable purpose 'to conserve and protect wild places with their indigenous animals, plants and soils for the benefit of present and future generations' we continue to monitor and assess individual applications and participate in the wider public debate around energy strategy and land use.

In October 2021, the Scottish Government set out an ambition – subject to public consultation – for an

additional 8-12 GW of onshore wind to help meet climate targets. This would represent an increase of between 93 and 140 per cent over existing capacity.

The John Muir Trust is not opposed in principle to expanding onshore wind. But we believe these ambitions now need to be reconsidered in the light of accelerating potential for offshore renewables as demonstrated in the outcome of the ScotWind licensing auction announced in January 2022.

In advance of the process, it was universally anticipated that the auction of leasing rights for the seabed would identify a maximum capacity of 10GW; instead, the winning bidders expect it to reach more than 24 GW, or almost three times the total existing onshore wind capacity in Scotland – which was developed over 20 years in sometimes controversial circumstances. With further potential offshore, it seems that we can afford to be more selective about how and where we develop further onshore wind capacity.

We believe that a future energy policy for Scotland should prioritise three objectives: decarbonisation; environmental protection; and impact – negative and positive – upon local communities.



**Net Zero by 2045 will require expanding our renewables sector alongside reducing our energy use and restoring our degraded peatlands and diminished native woodlands.**

## Energy reduction

The electricity generating companies have a direct financial stake in maximising consumption. That leaves out of the equation the other side of the carbon balance sheet: energy reduction.

The respected New Economics Foundation think-tank has calculated that whole-house retrofitting of one in three homes across the UK by 2024 would reduce annual energy demand by the equivalent of 19.23 million tonnes of carbon dioxide. That is the equivalent of half the entire UK onshore wind capacity.

It would also create up to 4,000 new direct jobs in construction, renovation and maintenance. It would also lift hundreds of thousands of families out of fuel poverty and seriously reduce winter pressures on the NHS.

To achieve a just transition in the energy sector, we need to think beyond supply-side solutions whose economic benefits flow to shareholders.

## Turbines and trees

According to a recent report by the Fraser of Allander Institute think-tank for Scottish Renewables, Scotland's onshore wind sector supports a total of 1900 full-time equivalent jobs (*The Economic Report of Scotland's Renewables Sector*, June 2021).

Although we have no geographical breakdown, we can assume that many of these jobs are off-site, including in the headquarters of big energy companies such as SSE in Perth and Scottish Power in Glasgow. With onshore wind development covering upwards of 1600 square kilometres of Scotland's land area (based on figures provided by the Climate Change Committee), this amounts to just over one job per square kilometre.

By way of comparison, recent research by three environmental charities indicates that annual creation and restoration of native woodland would support between four and six direct full-time equivalent jobs per square kilometre, most of which would be on-site – including in some of Scotland's sparsely populated areas. (*A Nature Recovery Plan*; RSPB Scotland; Scottish Wildlife Trust; WWF; 2020).

That is not to suggest that we cannot do both. But in developing onshore wind, it is crucial that we avoid the effective 'enclosure' of huge expanses of land that have the potential to combat climate change in perpetuity, enrich biodiversity and boost employment in rural areas.

## Expansion without destruction

The John Muir Trust believes that an expansion of onshore wind to supplement the core role of offshore wind in meeting future electricity demands could be done by a judicious mix of the following (all subject to normal planning conditions, including environmental and landscape impact assessments):

- Consented but not yet constructed onshore wind projects, which together add up to 5 GW of additional potential capacity.
- Repowered wind farms that replace older less efficient turbines, which according to NatureScot, could add up to 9 GW of extra capacity.
- Consent for those projects in the planning pipeline that are in suitable locations, avoiding ecosystems that have the potential to sequester carbon, such as peatland and wild land, with 2-3 GW of potential capacity.
- An increase in locally and community-owned renewable capacity from 853 MW to at least 3 GW by 2030.

We would further suggest that there should be a presumption against large-scale wind farms on sites of ecological, cultural and historical importance, including Wild Land Areas; peatland and other carbon-rich soils; National Nature Reserves; Sites of Special Scientific Interest; World Heritage Sites; and historic battlefields.

We would also like to see a change in the planning system to require that all energy applications above 50 MW capacity include a projected lifetime estimate of greenhouse gas emissions and reductions.



## Balance of power?

In March 2022, *The Ferret* investigative journalism team reported that communities in Scotland receive a mere 0.6 per cent of the value of the electricity produced on their own doorsteps.

We want to see a break with the pattern of the past 20 years, in which big energy companies and private landowners have reaped billions of pounds of profit from Scotland's land based on a model that concentrates on large-scale, multi-turbine wind farms spread over vast areas, squeezing out financial opportunities for rural communities.

According to a June 2021 report by the Orkney-based energy consultancy Aquatera, for the Point and Sandwick Development Trust, community-owned wind turbines produce 34 times more economic benefit to local people than the community funds distributed by commercial onshore wind developers under 'Good Practice' guidelines. Yet total community renewables capacity, including hydro and solar, amounts to just **one per cent** of total onshore wind capacity.

The main obstacle to expansion of community renewables is UK regulation that prohibits local suppliers from selling directly to local people. Instead they are forced to sell it to one of the big utility companies, which then sells it on to their customers. This involves extremely high costs and makes most local energy schemes unviable.

The John Muir Trust would urge all Westminster MPs – and the Scottish Government – to support the UK Local Electricity Bill to unblock this obstacle to community energy.



**All new onshore wind developments should avoid peatland and other ecosystems that have the potential to sequester carbon in perpetuity**

## Peat, smoke and mirrors

For those who see Scotland's empty uplands as a license to make money, peat is becoming a serious inconvenience. Not so long ago Scotland's extensive carbon-rich moorlands were regarded as bleak wastelands fit only for sheep, deer, grouse and turbines. But in recent years, their value has soared.

Peatland is now recognised as one of the world's most powerful allies in the battle to stop climate breakdown. According to the Institute of Biological Sciences at the University of Aberdeen, a typical hectare of peatland can store 5,000 tonnes of carbon – ten times more than a typical hectare of forest.

Most of Scotland's peatlands are degraded, which means they emit rather than remove carbon. But they have a remarkable power of recovery and can be restored to full health by 'rewetting' - blocking drains and regenerating protective vegetation cover.

Despite this knowledge, wind farm developers continue to target locations where peatland and other carbon-rich soils predominate. In north-west Skye, for example, a developer has recently brought forward a proposal for a 60-turbine wind farm on a site composed of 'Class 1 Peatland' – defined by NatureScot as containing "nationally important carbon-rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat". The associated infrastructure – concrete foundations, bulldozed vehicle tracks, pylons, cables, transmission lines, a power sub-station – will inevitably and unavoidably involve extensive soil damage and carbon release.

In the light of evolving climate and soil science, there is now a compelling case for Scotland's new National Planning Framework to have a presumption against large-scale development that involves major upheaval to the peatland and other carbon-rich soils that extend across most of Scotland's mapped Wild Land Area.

## Wind, land and sea

Scotland's marine area is almost seven times greater than its landmass and has outstanding potential to become the renewables powerhouse of Europe.

All energy generation comes at a cost to the natural environment. That is a balance that must be weighed up. Minimising damage should always be a key priority, whether on land or sea.

Although the John Muir Trust focuses on land, we were heartened by the fact that 10 of 17 projects selected for the ScotWind leasing scheme will involve floating turbines, which are anchored to the seabed. These can be sited in deep waters far from nesting seabird colonies and shallow foraging areas, with a lower risk to the marine environment. Research suggests that this technology can, with robust mitigation measures in place, pose a low risk to the marine environment.

Offshore wind can also provide greater public benefits:

- Leasing revenues – £700 million in the case of ScotWind – and future rents when operational flow directly to the Scottish Government rather than to private landowners as is the case with most onshore wind.
- It supports nine and half times more direct jobs than onshore wind (see The Economic Impact of Scotland's Renewable Energy Sector, Fraser of Allander Institute, 2020).
- The Scottish Government, as the owner of the seabed, has more control over the supply chain, which in turn opens up potential for thousands of local high-skilled, well-paid manufacturing jobs.



# Access, recreation and a just transition

Scotland's landscapes are globally renowned. Hillwalkers, mountaineers, anglers, photographers, film crews, artists, poets, musicians and others come from all over the world to explore and enjoy our mix of mountains, glens, forests, rivers, lochs, coves, cliffs and islands.

Human activity over centuries has left much of our rural land ecologically damaged, but it has also left a fascinating cultural and historic legacy. Some of our wildest areas are speckled with archaeological ruins of shielings, barns, bothies, cottages and castles, and criss-crossed by drovers tracks and old military roads.

Though the native population has been depleted, their language lives on in the descriptive Gaelic names that evoke the heritage of those who were once an integral part of these remotest of landscapes.

Despite clearance and depopulation, Scotland's remote rural areas remain places where people live and work, and maintain their culture and history. Many livelihoods in rural Scotland depend on tourism – and specifically on outdoor recreation facilitated by some of the best access rights in the world, enshrined into 'Right to Roam' legislation as part of the Land Reform Act 2003.

## Natural therapy

Over the past 20 years, a growing body of research has found that spending time in nature has multiple physical and mental health benefits. A range of international studies suggest it can soothe anxiety, lower blood pressure, strengthen the immune

system, reduce cortisol levels, improve mood, raise self-esteem, curb aggression, and even speed the rate of physical healing.

Public investment directed towards bringing people and nature closer together would reap far-reaching social, health and economic dividends far into the future. As well as elevating the general health of the population, it could also be used as a focused policy lever to help tackle drug and alcohol addiction, and reduce the prison population.

## Language of the landscape

Of the 72 Ordnance Survey Landranger maps of Scotland (1:50 000 scale), 46 contain a vast wealth of descriptive information in Gaelic.

The language has an extraordinarily close affinity with nature because of its roots and evolution in a pre-feudal Celtic society where the natural world was treated with reverence.

The John Muir Trust fully supports the protection and strengthening of the language in Gaelic-speaking heartland areas, and the work by a range of organisations to promote interest in the language outwith the traditional Gàidhealtachd.

The John Muir Trust is exploring the possibility of working with expert organisations to deepen understanding, locally and nationally, of the history, heritage and habitats of our wild places through the medium of the Gaelic language.



Over the past 20 years, a growing body of research has found that spending time in nature has multiple physical and mental health benefits.

For 100 years, the off-grid wooden huts and cabins at Carbeth, just ten miles north of Glasgow city centre, have provided a haven of tranquillity for Clydesiders



## Schools and the outdoors

Scotland has taken great strides forward in recent years in nature education.

The John Muir Award, for example, is now delivered in almost half of all secondary schools in Scotland, and many primary and special schools, as part of the Curriculum for Excellence.

Because it is free at the point of delivery, non-competitive and inclusive, the Award has been able to reach into some of Scotland's most disadvantaged communities, both within schools and among the wider adult population.

In partnership with the local council, a dedicated John Muir Award officer in East Ayrshire has helped raise morale, improve physical and mental health, increase attendance rates and enrich literacy and numeracy in some of the region's most deprived school catchment areas.

Tens of thousands more young people across Scotland could benefit from this concerted approach to nature education, especially in urban and rural communities that score high on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The John Muir Trust would welcome the opportunity to work with other education authorities across Scotland to help introduce young people from marginalised backgrounds to nature and wild places.

## Access for all?

Not everyone will engage with nature in the same way. Parks and other local green spaces are vital, especially for those who live in urban and suburban areas. But Scotland also has vast, under-explored landscapes that can offer a more exhilarating experience of nature. Yet, despite our progressive access laws, our wild mountain landscapes are inaccessible for a large part of our population.

Scotland's spectacular mountains may be world-renowned, but only a tiny minority of its own population ventures into these landscapes. For those who live in our most deprived communities, for ethnic minorities, for many women, for people with disabilities, our wildest places remain as mysterious as the dark side of the moon.

Barriers to access include poverty, low car ownership, inadequate and costly public transport, expensive accommodation, unaffordable outdoor gear, lack of accessible footpaths and a general sense that 'The Great Outdoors' is reserved for those from a more privileged background.

During the economic depression of the 1930s, a tradition began to take root in the urban centres of Clydeside, Aberdeen and Dundee of seeking adventure in the hills to escape the squalor of the city streets. The classic 1939 mountaineering book *Only a Little Further* by Alastair Borthwick portrays this new world, when mountains that were previously the preserve of a privileged elite began to echo to the sound of broad Glaswegian and Dundonian accents.

Back in Alastair Borthwick's day, and in the decades following, rural Scotland was served by

**Better and cheaper public transport could help ease rural traffic congestion and make our wild places more accessible for people on low incomes**

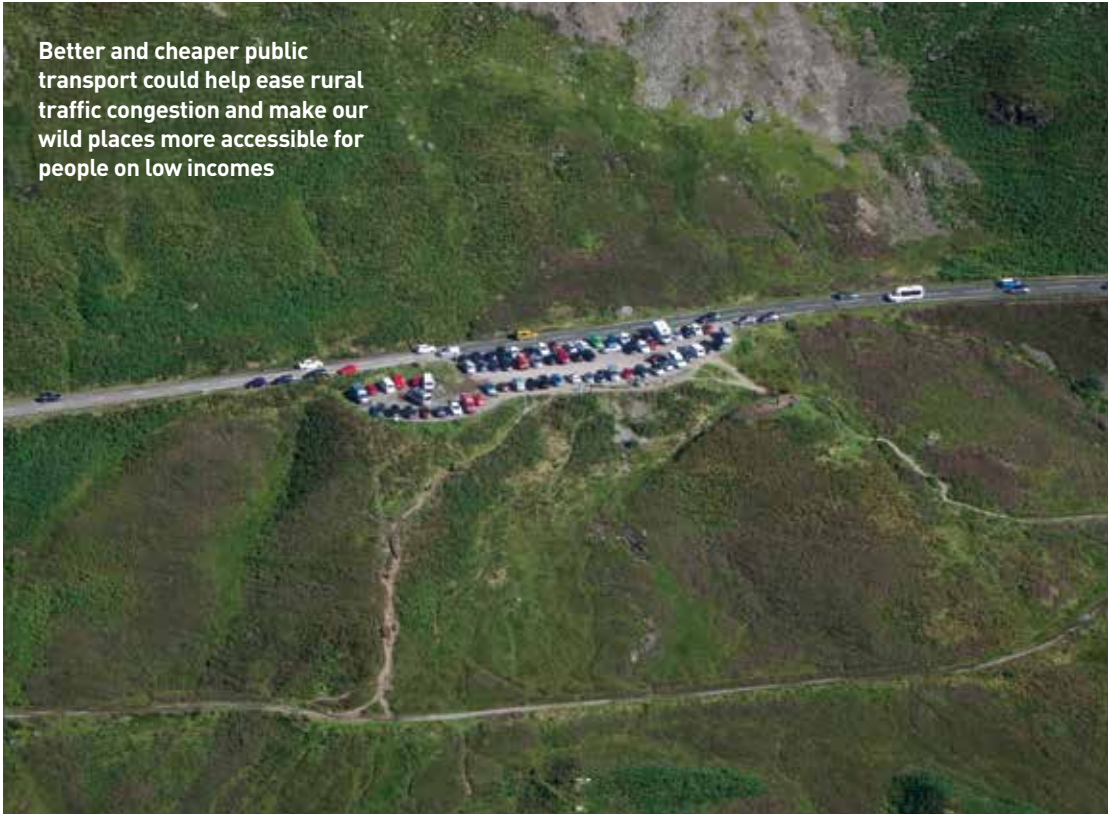


PHOTO: GLENCOE BY GRAEME NICOLL

a dense network of cheap bus services and local branch railway lines. In the 1930s it was possible to travel by tram from Glasgow to Milngavie (gateway to the West Highland Way) for 25 pence in today's money – 15 times cheaper than the equivalent rail fare today.

Even today, many people in urban Scotland do not drive. In Glasgow, almost half of households have no access to a car. These figures are much higher in the most socially deprived parts of the city, and the same pattern is reflected in other parts of Scotland.

According to a 2008 survey by Sport Scotland, only six per cent of men and just three per cent of women participate regularly (defined as once every four weeks) in hillwalking or climbing. Although there is no further demographic breakdown, it is highly likely that these figures are much lower still in those communities that score high in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), and among all ethnic minority groups.

## **Blazing a new trail**

Public access is not just about legal rights and responsibilities. It is also about infrastructure. According to NatureScot, Scotland has 7,000 rights of way – mostly ancient footpaths used over centuries for trading, droving, smuggling, deer-stalking, religious pilgrimage, and military activity. In modern times, these have been supplemented by improvised and constructed mountain paths used mainly by hillwalkers and mountaineers.

This dense but fragmented network of routes that weaves its way through every part of rural Scotland is a valuable national asset. Some of it is immensely popular – such as the West Highland Way which attracts an estimated 120,000 walkers a year. Much of it, though, is neglected and underused.

Public investment in upgrading, maintaining and linking existing rights of way, with signage and interpretation where appropriate, could help involve more people in physical activity in the outdoors, draw more tourist footfall into our lesser-known areas, and help build a significant employment and training sector in rural Scotland based around footpath work.

**We call for protection and reinforcement of Scotland's cherished 'Right to Roam' access laws**

PHOTO: BEINN EIGHE, TORRIDON BY MARK HAMBLIN/SCOTLANDBIGPICTURE



## Rights and exemptions

While the 'Right to Roam' is cherished as one of the great successes of the Scottish Parliament, it has come under pressure in recent years from several angles. In some communities, especially in scenic areas, the Covid lockdown ignited a debate around the impact of 'wild camping' – especially 'dirty camping.'

This followed pre-Covid restrictions imposed by the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park in various – mainly lochside locations – that in total account for 75 square kilometres, or four per cent of the total area of the National Park.

While there are clearly problems caused by anti-social activity in some places, the John Muir Trust is concerned that these exemptions could over time prove to be the thin end of a wedge used by landowners to justify further exclusion zones.

The Land Reform Scotland (2003) Act states that access can only be restricted or denied in specific circumstances, or for limited periods. 'Curtilage' – a legally vague term which refers to the immediate surroundings of a dwelling – is also protected.

Reports suggest that fences, locked gates and 'keep-out' signs have begun to proliferate in recent years.

In 2019 one estate on the Ardnamurchan peninsula tried to invoke a clause in the Criminal Justice Act 1994 banning 'aggravated trespass' to prevent local people from walking a path that has been an established right of way for 40 years. Although the attempted prosecution failed, the landowner continues to restrict access.

Scotland's globally ground-breaking and cherished access laws cannot be taken for granted. They need to be protected and, if necessary, reinforced by amendments to the wording of existing legislation to clarify rights, responsibilities and exemptions.

**Reports suggest that fences, locked gates and keep-out signs have begun to proliferate.**



Every school student should have the opportunity to learn outdoor skills, including navigation, the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and basic landscape Gaelic

PHOTO: GLEN NEVIS LITTER BY NATHAN BERRIE

## Cabin culture

As part of a just transition towards a fairer, greener Scotland, the John Muir Trust would like to see greater human diversity in our wild places, including more people from ethnic minorities and neighbourhoods of multiple deprivation.

In her book *Huts*, the journalist and land campaigner Lesley Riddoch evokes the close relationship between people and nature in Norway to advocate a major expansion of low-cost summer and weekend retreats in the form of basic huts and cabins. The Scandinavian country has 500,000 wooden huts for recreation – one per ten Norwegians. Scotland has fewer than 600 – one for every 8000 people.

There are obstacles – not least Scotland’s concentrated pattern of land ownership. We would like to see the Scottish Government and the 32 local councils work with landowners across all sectors – public, community, NGO and private – to identify parcels of land where such modest accommodation could be built initially under pilot schemes tailored to specific Scottish conditions.

If at least some of these new huts and cabins were allocated to community groups dealing with poverty and other forms of social exclusion, the benefits of wild nature could be harnessed more effectively to achieve wider public objectives to combat ill health, drug and alcohol problems and crime.

## Free public transport

In January 2022, the Scottish Government announced the start of a free bus transport scheme for all young people aged 21 and under. With the franchise for ScotRail recently transferred to the Scottish Government, this could be extended to rail travel.

These moves towards free public transport are very welcome in themselves, but also significantly open up a major opportunity to get more young people better acquainted with Scotland’s wild places.

The John Muir Trust is keen to work with the Scottish Government and other relevant organisations to build on this opportunity by exploring what further steps might be needed to open up more of Scotland’s wild places to young people – especially those facing social and financial barriers to access.

### Some key ideas that we believe can help ensure Scotland’s wild places contribute towards a greener, fairer future:

- Strengthening of access legislation to maintain and increase rights while addressing problems.
- Pilot schemes to develop affordable recreational accommodation such as huts, cabins and basic campsites.
- Support for the protection, development and expansion of the Gaelic language inside and outside the core Gàidhealtachd areas.

# Summary

A quick guide to just transition and wild places



## Carbon

To maximise natural carbon storage in a way that is socially just and environmentally robust, we suggest:

- A Scottish Government 'gold standard' accreditation scheme for carbon offsetting.
- This accreditation scheme to insist on a commitment to transparency, longevity, and biodiversity improvement.
- This accreditation scheme to insist on a community share allocation, and community participation in management of projects.
- A local authority led Carbon Emissions Land Tax on all landholdings over 1000 ha based on a banding system.
- Devolved powers permitting, Carbon Emissions Land Tax revenues ring-fenced to support communities, crofters and small landholders make a green transition.



## Biodiversity

To help achieve a greener and fairer Scotland, we suggest:

- Speedy reform of deer management and a robust licensing system of driven grouse moors.
- Financial support for crofters and small farmers to step up the shift towards nature-friendly agriculture.
- An expansion of local community woodlands, and woodland crofts.
- Fifty per cent of all new woodland to be native species to provide a balance between short term jobs and long-term transformation of landscapes, ecosystems and local economies.
- A holistic strategy to maximise biodiversity recovery, including housing, infrastructure and transport that will support new nature-based jobs in sparsely populated areas.



## Communities and land reform

To support communities, we suggest:

- A doubling of the Scottish Land Fund in the 2023 Scottish budget and interest-free loans for prospective community landowners.
- A fixed percentage of Crown Estate revenues to be allocated to a new Community Wealth Building Fund.
- New models for community land ownership to be explored by the Scottish Land Commission.
- A public interest test for all transfers of land over 1000 hectares based on clear environmental and social criteria.
- Revision of the planning system to give communities more say over decisions that affect the local environment.



## Rural economy

To support the environmental and social regeneration of rural areas, we suggest:

- 20-minute neighbourhood social and business hubs served by frequent, affordable public transport.
- High-speed broadband in every building along with 4G or 5G connections.
- The further expansion of University of Highlands and Islands campuses to more remote rural areas with a focus on land-related studies and Gaelic.
- A National Land Bank to acquire land suitable for affordable and permanent residential housing.
- An alternative approach to tourism that moves beyond visual scenery and integrates landscape, culture, heritage, arts and ecology.
- Government financial support for farming communities in Less Favoured Areas with a strong focus on carbon and biodiversity.



## Renewable energy

As part of a new national energy strategy, we suggest:

- A focus on increasing locally and community owned renewable capacity from 853 MW to at least 3 GW.
- The insulation of every home to Scandinavian standards to reduce energy consumption and end fuel poverty.
- All new onshore wind to avoid peatland and other soils with carbon-sequestration potential.
- Onshore wind expansion to focus on consented wind farms still to be constructed and repowering projects that meet planning criteria.
- All renewables applications above 50 MWs include a projected lifetime estimate of greenhouse gas savings.
- A strong emphasis on lower impact marine renewables, including deep-water floating turbines distant from seabird nesting and foraging sites.



## Access and recreation

To help reconnect more of our population to wild and remote places, we suggest:

- Pilot schemes to develop affordable recreational accommodation in wild places such as huts, cabins and basic campsites.
- Improved rural public transport and an extension of free and discounted bus and rail travel.
- Every school student to have the opportunity to learn outdoor skills, including navigation, the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and basic landscape Gaelic.
- Protection and reinforcement of the 'Right to Roam,' including legal enforcement where necessary.

This publication has been produced by the John Muir Trust – a community focused conservation charity dedicated to the experience, protection and repair of wild places across the UK.

Founded in 1983, we care for some of the finest wild places in the UK, including Ben Nevis, Helvellyn and Sandwood Bay. Over 25,000 members, supporters and partners contribute to our work.

**[johnmuirtrust.org](http://johnmuirtrust.org)**

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