



# Wildlife Estates Scotland

Concept Briefing November 2010



**SRPBA**

Scottish Rural Property and Business Association

**S | E | B | G**

Scottish Estates Business Group



## 1. Background

Scotland is renowned for having some of the best shooting, stalking and fishing in the world; red grouse shooting and open hill red deer stalking are unique to Northern Britain and therefore of high value to the nation's culture and economy. Much of it is carried out to a very high standard, but there is always room for improvement and it could be better known as a sustainable land use that supports social, economic and environmental aims.

Hunting (shooting and stalking) and fishing are two of the oldest forms of sustainable land use, making use of the renewable resources provided by the natural and managed environment. These forms of wildlife management, the tourism they attract, and the foods they supply, are of great economic importance for Scotland's rural economies. They are also socially important to many communities and have a strong influence on our valued landscapes.

As such, they have an influence on both the animal and plant species concerned, as well as the condition of their habitats and on other biodiversity and processes within the ecosystems that support them. In this respect, they can also support and conflict with other interests including the conservation of natural resources and some other forms of outdoor recreation.

It is internationally recognised that both consumptive and non-consumptive uses of biodiversity are fundamental to the economy, culture, and wellbeing of our society and integral to its conservation. Sustainable utilisation is the use of biological diversity in a way that does not lead to its long-term decline, so maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations.

**“Scotland differs from other European countries in that wildlife/sporting objectives have been second only to farming as determinants of land use over very large areas of the countryside for many generations”**

This concept of “conservation through wise use” embraces both the provision of responsible access to, and enjoyment of, wildlife by society as a whole. The harvesting of a sustainable surplus of some kinds of wildlife by shooting and fishing, so as to provide sustainable benefits to a wide range of communities is vitally important. It also recognises the role of active and positive management based on the ability to deploy a package of legitimate measures designed to either enhance the survival and productivity of certain species, or to manage their behaviour or population so as to reduce negative impacts on other species or interests.

Where this management also takes into account the functioning of a healthy ecosystem to meet the needs of other species, the diversity of wildlife and its populations can be significantly higher than on unmanaged areas. Many rural land managers and landowners take pride in their contribution as “producers” of fauna, flora and landscapes. Through their role in managing competition within an environment, and its wildlife, long modified by human activity, they can be considered as

“solutions suppliers” for the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable land use. However, the added public value that can be generated by the sustainable management of wildlife and its habitat that they undertake is not always well recognised. By gathering evidence and communicating it effectively, misconceptions can be corrected, perceptions can be improved, the interdependency of the different elements of sustainability be better understood and the trade-offs necessary in land use decisions be better informed.

The Wildlife Estates Scotland initiative (WES) aims to improve recognition of best practice wildlife management for shooting and fishing. By establishing a set of principles, criteria and indicators that take into account the three pillars of sustainability (environment, economy and socio-cultural aspects), it aims to introduce an objective and transparent system to demonstrate how wildlife management undertaken by Scottish landowners in line with the principles of biodiversity conservation can deliver multiple benefits for society and rural communities. It will also offer a first step to assuring customers and consumers that they are contributing to sustainable land use.

## 2. Key objectives

A bold move now, as the Scottish Government establishes its Sustainable Land Use Strategy, could help to demonstrate the role Scottish sporting estates play in delivering a wide range of benefits to Scotland. In this way, it could also help to address some ongoing tensions in the Scottish countryside. There is much more to unite than to divide. WES aims to:

1. Engage the private and public sectors in collaboration to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity.
2. Promote and implement contemporary best practice in game and wildlife management to maximise the range of benefits they deliver.
3. Improve the political and public understanding and perception of estates, their management practices and what they deliver in terms of economic and other public benefits.



4. Provide a framework within which management initiatives designed to resolve conflicts and secure a sustainable balance between different interests and species can be developed and promoted.
5. Provide and disseminate robust information about wildlife management for educational, decision-taking and policy-making purposes.

### 3. Wildlife Estates Scotland

It is proposed to set up a pilot scheme to explore how a Scottish version of the European Landowners' Organisation's Wildlife Estates initiative (WEi) could deliver those key objectives in the long term.

WEi is endorsed by the European Commission's Director General Environment, whose objective is to protect, preserve and improve the environment for present and future generations.

Wildlife Estates Scotland is a national version of the EU Wildlife Estates (WE) label. The explanatory sections of the WE booklet ([www.wildlife-estates.eu](http://www.wildlife-estates.eu)) set out a clear vision for sustainable hunting across Europe which is highly relevant to Scotland. Scotland differs from other European countries in that wildlife/sporting objectives have been second only to farming as



determinants of land use over very large areas of the countryside for many generations. Shooting, stalking and fishing in Scotland are not by-products of management for other purposes; they are an important primary land use and integral to our landscape and culture.

The Scottish Rural Property and Business Association and the Scottish Estates Business Group, with advice from the Game and Wildlife

Conservation Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Cairngorms National Park Authority, have started preliminary work with the intention that a Steering Group be established to ensure the engagement of other key stakeholder organisations, whose expertise and support is critical to long-term success.

The Cairngorms National Park has been identified as providing the focus for a pilot scheme, with some potential participating estates having shown an interest. This pilot may also be extended to another part of Scotland to ensure regional differences are reflected.

The pilot phase will be a test bed for the development of a national scheme over a period of one to two years, starting in 2011. It is hoped that this will also provide an insight into how far sporting activities undertaken across other, often smaller or less diversified, units of land might be encompassed within it, or what the potential is for them to be carried out according to similar principles tailored to the scale and significance of the activity and the nature of the landholding.

In its final form, it is envisaged that Wildlife Estates Scotland will operate as an industry led voluntary accreditation scheme, with a number of different applications depending on what emphasis each individual estate and estate manager focuses on. It would have an independent assessment/review process.

An initial indicator of success is that by the end of 2012 at least 50 per cent of SRPBA member estates with sustainable hunting interests will have signed up to a Scottish version of the Level 1 EU WEi Charter, incorporating 10 Commitments of Wildlife Estate Management. These will tend to be the larger estates which cover a significant percentage of Scotland's land mass. At that stage it will then be possible to set further indicators for take-up of the scheme.

## THE WILDLIFE ESTATES COMMITMENTS (SCOTTISH VERSION<sup>1</sup>)

1. Identification of the landowner or nominated representative for the estate concerned.
2. Undertaking active wildlife management<sup>2</sup> following a long-term integrated wildlife management plan.
3. Maintaining records and monitoring delivery of the wildlife management plan.
4. Undertaking sustainable shooting, stalking and/or fishing.
5. Managing for a sustainable balance of game, deer and other species and their shared habitats.
6. Maintaining best practice standards of animal welfare.
7. Compliance with all legal requirements and relevant Scottish codes of practice.
8. Adhering to the requirements of the Agreement between Birdlife International and FACE on Directive 79/409/EEC, the European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity and the EU Commission's Guide on Hunting under the Birds Directive.
9. Maintaining active engagement with local communities and undertaking education/awareness raising activities.
10. To apply for the Level 2 Accreditation process.

<sup>1</sup> Fuller explanatory guidance to supporting these will be made available in due course.

<sup>2</sup> In this context the term "Wildlife management" means actions in relation to wild species that will secure:

- Sustainable use and harvest for economic or recreational benefit
- The management of conflicts of interest between wild animals/birds and people
- Control of invasive non- native animals/birds
- Conservation of vulnerable native animals/birds

## Accreditation process

If, based on the results of the pilot project, an effective accreditation scheme can be developed, those estates who signed up to these 10 Wildlife Estates Commitments would then be expected to go on to the full Wildlife Estates quality label through an assessment process. Achieving full accreditation for a large number of estates would inevitably take some time, but it is anticipated that the front runners would get there within the next three years.

## 4. Principal strengths

- ◆ WES is supported by the Scottish Government and its agencies because it will bind in Codes of Best Practice.
- ◆ WES provides a framework for Government, land management and conservation interests to establish a sustainable balance of economic and conservation benefits.
- ◆ The principles of the scheme complement the interests of a range of land management organisations.
- ◆ WES embraces all sporting management activities on an estate, and sets them in the wider land use context.
- ◆ WES will establish criteria and indicators for delivery of the economic, environmental and social elements of sustainability.
- ◆ WES is independent and supported by the whole industry.
- ◆ This approach aligns with the principles of the Scottish Government's draft Sustainable Land Use Strategy and its drive to achieve better and less regulation in the rural sector.
- ◆ In a time of financial constraint, the industry is coming up with its own solution.

## 5. How will WES benefit Scotland?

- ◆ It could help to improve and develop a successful "wildlife products economy" which is important to the international reputation and prosperity of Scotland, and the wellbeing of its people.
- ◆ It represents a public commitment by the industry to voluntarily set out to achieve the highest standards of wildlife management and conservation that deliver a wide range of social, economic and environmental public benefits.
- ◆ Estates will be committed to, and accredited for, best management and conservation practice and will be recognised as managing their wildlife resources sustainably with full consideration for the natural environment.



- ◆ It will provide a framework that will potentially facilitate the trial and practice of new and innovative management techniques to address and resolve any conflicts and underpin an effective balance between voluntary action, incentives and regulation.
- ◆ It will help achieve Natura 2000 objectives and those of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, contribute to other EU Directives, attracting support from the European Commission.
- ◆ It will help connect people with the land and the resources it provides by supporting the provision of better information and encouraging active engagement with communities.
- ◆ It will encourage and grow private sector investment in rural areas, so that businesses can provide the wider economic and public benefits.

## 6. Next steps

A Steering Group has been formed which includes Scottish Natural Heritage, the Cairngorms National Park Authority, the Game

and Wildlife Conservation Trust and RSPB Scotland, and it will call in technical expertise from the wider industry as required. This Steering Group will work on detailed plans for the Pilot Project which will be launched in the Spring of 2011.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alastair Gordon Cumming'.

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