A MOORLAND STRATEGY FOR SCOTLAND: INITIAL SCOPING

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Possible headings for a Moorland Strategy:

A. INTRODUCTION
1. Definition of moorland
2. Why do we need a strategy?
3. Policy Framework

B. DESCRIPTION OF THE CURRENT RESOURCE
1. Types of moorland
2. Objectives of moorland management
3. Current threats to moorland

C. ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT RESOURCE
1. Current importance of moorland:
    – Landscape
    – Biodiversity
    – Economy
2. Assessment of importance of each moorland type

D. VISION FOR MOORLAND

E. LOCATIONAL STRATEGY
1. Guidance on deciding the balance of moorland and woodland/forestry
2. Map-based identification of moorland core areas

F. MOORLAND MANAGEMENT
Bringing together all current best practice guidance

POSSIBLE PROCESS OF PRODUCTION OF THE STRATEGY

Carried out under the auspices of the Moorland Forum as all the main interest groups are involved including the Forestry Commission Scotland and farming interests

1. Presentation of a scoping paper to the Moorland Forum
⇩
2. Identification of funding
⇩
3. Agreement by Forum members to produce a strategy
⇩
4. Discussion with Scottish Government on the status of the completed strategy
⇩
5. Production of the Moorland Strategy
⇩
6. Agreement on final draft from all Moorland Forum partners
⇩
7. ?Ratification by the Scottish Government

OUTLINE CONTENTS OF THE MOORLAND STRATEGY

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Definition of moorland

Moorland is defined as any unwooded ground composed of natural or semi-natural vegetation, whether dominated by grasses, ericoid shrubs, cotton grass, bracken, gorse or bog mosses. It here includes peatlands because the distinction between moorland and peatland is not clear-cut.

2. Why do we need a strategy?

a. Locational strategy

The open moors of Scotland are a key characteristic of the country and currently cover about half the land area. There was greater cover in the past but the area has declined through agricultural and forestry/woodland expansion. Although agricultural improvement of moorland has now largely ceased, moorland is still threatened by woodland expansion; for example, the Scottish Forestry Strategy has a target of 25% of Scotland under trees. Assuming new woods will be targeted away from agricultural land and peatlands, achieving this target would result in a loss of 25% of the remaining non-peat moorland. The remaining small areas of moorland in the lowlands are particularly under threat.

Bearing in mind the importance of moorland to Scotland's landscape, biodiversity and economy it is surprising that there is no strategic policy guidance on its location and management similar to the Scottish Forestry Strategy for trees.

Although the justification for new woodland has been made strongly there is no similar justification for the retention of moorland: hence it can be hard to argue the case for moorland conservation, and loss of moorland will continue in an *ad hoc* manner. This is especially important in that there is new ecological thinking that suggests that moorland may well be the natural vegetation over much of Scotland, rather than the traditional thinking that what is now moorland should really be woodland. To date the proposed creation of woodland networks has been viewed from a woodland perspective with little thought on how such networks will result in the continual fragmentation of moorland.

The strategy will assist with decisions as to whether a given area of land should remain as moorland or be converted to woodland.

b. Moorland management

As well as a continuing overall loss of moorland area, there is also a continuing loss of the quality of moorland through infrastructural development such as renewable energy schemes, associated access tracks, new deer fencing, and changing grazing practice. There is currently a lot of guidance on moorland; hence, rather than reinvent the wheel, the strategy will bring all best practice together under a consistent policy framework.

3. Policy Framework

There are various documents which already provide some policy guidance:

> **Scottish Natural Heritage's Landscape Policy Framework (2005)**
>
> "SNH's overarching aim for landscape…
>
> "For the range of Scotland's landscapes identified in the Natural Heritage Futures programme this means working to ensure:
>
> ● Forests and woodlands which enhance the landscapes of which they form part.
>
> ● Uplands, hills and moorland landscapes characteristically Scottish in their openness and quality of wildness."

Hence it is SNH policy to retain the hills as predominantly moorland landscapes. It can be seen SNH also has a policy to retain woodland but there is currently no guidance as to where the first or second bullet point applies. The Moorland Strategy will clarify this.

> **SNH's Natural Heritage Futures objectives for Hills and Moors** (2002, updated 2009).
>
> "**Objective 1:**
>
> "To achieve common agreement on a new approach to the use of Scotland's uplands which places the natural heritage and environmental values at the heart of our land use policies.
>
> "At the heart of our approach is a new policy direction which places less emphasis on production in the uplands, in favour to a more sustainable approach to the use of land. **A strategic approach will be needed, recognising the diversity of the uplands** and their very varied capacity for productive outputs across the nation. The aim is to seek close working between all the main players who either lead on or implement land-use policies, or who have a key interest as managers or users of the uplands…
>
> "**Actions**: Develop a strategic approach to direct the achievement of this goal…"

The Moorland Strategy will provide such a strategic approach.

> **Scottish Forestry Strategy (2006):**
>
> "We would like to see Scotland's woodlands increase from 17.1% of our land area to about 25%."

If this expansion mostly takes place on moorland, this will result in a reduction in area of non-peat moorland of 25%. Is this what we want? One aim of the Moorland Strategy would be to ensure that any new woodland is targeted on the areas of moorland perceived as being of the least value.

B. DESCRIPTION OF THE CURRENT RESOURCE

1. Types of moorland
A listing of the different types of moorland (perhaps using the James Hutton Institute's Land Cover of Scotland 1988 classifications).
A map of Scotland showing location of the different types (from James Hutton Institute)

2. Objectives of moorland management
A list of the different objectives of moorland management, under the main headings:
– Landscape
– Biodiversity
– Economy (including Ecosystem Services)

3. Current threats to moorland
A listing of the factors causing a loss of extent and loss of quality of moorland.

C. ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT RESOURCE

1. Current importance of moorland

– For Landscape

Uplands, hills and moorland landscapes characteristically Scottish in their openness and quality of wildness (SNH Landscape Policy Framework 2005).

– For Biodiversity

Moorland habitats listed in Annex 1 of the EU Habitats Directive (*i.e.* internationally important):
– Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*
– Dry heaths (all sub-types)
– Alpine & sub-alpine heaths
– Siliceous alpine & boreal grasslands
– Species-rich Nardus grassland
– Active raised bogs
– Degraded raised bogs (still capable of natural regeneration)
– Blanket bogs

Note:
In fact all *Nardus* (mat grass) grasslands should be seen as of being of European importance. The 'species-rich' category was chosen to exclude most of Scotland's grasslands for reasons of political expediency (personal communication from Dr John Miles, then an environmental adviser to the Scottish Executive). These habitat types are of European importance everywhere they occur, *i.e.* not just within designated sites. Designation of some areas as SSSIs or SACs is a merely a pragmatic mechanism to prevent the whole landscape being designated as being of European importance.

* Nationally/internationally moorland birds to be added to this section

– For the Economy
Identify importance to the economy under the following headings:
– Field sports
– Farming
– Recreation (specific activities)
– Tourism (general draw of tourists to Scotland)
– Energy
– Ecosystem services/natural capital

2. Assessment of importance of each moorland type
Landscape, biodiversity & economic benefits of each type of moorland (following the classification used in the Description section)

D. VISION FOR MOORLAND

To be agreed by all partners, but along the lines of the statement in SNH's Landscape Policy Framework above? For example:

"We wish the uplands, hills and moorland landscapes to remain characteristically Scottish in their openness and quality of wildness, with the current area of moorland being retained."

<div align="center">or</div>

"We wish the uplands, hills and moorland landscapes to remain characteristically Scottish in their openness and quality of wildness, with an acceptance of a loss of …% of moorland by 2100."

Note: we cannot have it both ways: if we want more trees, we will have to accept further loss of moorland, but where? The ultimate purpose of this strategy is to resolve this issue in agreement with all parties.

E. LOCATIONAL STRATEGY

1. Guidance on deciding the balance of moorland and woodland/forestry
Under the headings:
> Key moorland **types** to be retained, with rationale
> Key moorland **areas** to be retained, with rationale
> Moorland types/areas where further loss is acceptable

Criteria to be developed based on the above to assist with decisions on the woodland/moorland balance for a particular site.

2. Map-based identification of moorland core areas
This would identify the core areas where all partners agree that moorland should remain the dominant landscape type.

F. MOORLAND MANAGEMENT

Bring together all current best practice guides for moorland management, *e.g.* those on the SNH, Moorland Forum, Heather Trust, and Best Practice Guidance websites.
Revise/add to the list if necessary.