

Land Stewardship Policy (Draft)



“Protecting and enhancing our stock of natural capital ... is fundamental to a healthy and resilient economy.” First Minister Nicola Sturgeon MSP, speech to World Forum on Natural Capital, December 2015ⁱ

SUMMARY

1. The term *Land Stewardship* encapsulates the idea that we should manage our land so that it can be used in perpetuity. Therefore, the full range of activities carried out on land and freshwater in Scotland comes under the aegis of land stewardship: the production of food and fibre, water, energy, minerals; the enjoyment of land through recreation and education; and the protection of land for its nature conservation value. The natural capitalⁱⁱ of some land has been damaged by past use, impacting upon its ability to provide us with the full range of ecosystem services we depend upon, but with better stewardship this capital can be restored.
2. This Land Stewardship Policy provides a set of solutions for safeguarding and enhancing the natural capital value of land in Scotland in order to address the challenges facing society, the environment and the rural economy: better protecting and preserving our soils; reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to a changing climate; and restoring wildlife habitats and reversing biodiversity loss.
3. This policy is therefore a practical mechanism for delivering Scotland’s National Outcomes and the outcomes of Scotland’s Land Use Strategy; and, so, improving the prosperity and well-being of the people of Scotland.

Policy structure

4. The basis of this policy is a common framework for regulating and incentivising land stewardship. This has four tiers (see Table 1 and the example of agriculture below). Table 1 sets out the measures sector by sector in each tier.

Agriculture

5. The following measures are specified:

Public investment to support Scotland’s farmers and crofters is linked to the provision of public goods which deliver enhanced natural capital stocks and ecosystem service flows i.e. the benefits which accrue to society and the economy from a healthier, sustainably managed environment. Regulation and support of farming and crofting is through a four-tier structure.

Regulations – retention and implementation of Regulations as at 2017, with new soil testing and conservation regulations.

Natural capital maintenance payments: designed to ensure that we maintain, rather than deplete, our stocks of natural capital. These are area-based payments for meeting a combination of mandatory criteria for all farms, as well as optional criteria tailored to farm type. Mandatory measures include providing wildlife habitat on at least 12% of the area of every farm.

Natural capital enhancement payments: designed to incentivise actions that will help build our natural capital. These are non-competitive area-based payments available to all farms for carrying out additional optional actions. These include increasing wildlife habitat >12% of farm area; reducing livestock stocking densities on sensitive habitats; conservation grazing; wildlife-friendly cropping practices; mixed farming; and measures to encourage pollinators.

Natural capital restoration payments: designed to enable the delivery of a greater level of public benefits and address societal risks such as resilience to climate change. These are competitive additional payments targeted at specific public good priorities including natural flood management, habitat and species conservation, and support for specific high nature value farming systems

Forestry and woodland

6. The following measures are specified:
- I. Highest rates of grant support for the establishment of native woodland by planting and by natural regeneration, ensuring natural regeneration is an attractive option compared to planting.
 - II. Grant support for the establishment and restocking of productive non-native plantations linked to UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) requirements.
 - III. Annual woodland stewardship payments to support the management of existing native woodlands.
 - IV. On the National Forest Estate diversification of tree species and stand structure will be increased year on year through restructuring and increased use of native species for restocking, with a target of 60% native species by 2050.

Peatland

7. The following strategic intervention is specified:
- I. A discrete Challenge Fund of at least £16 million per year for peatland restoration, to be maintained in real terms.

The following regulatory measure is specified:

- II. A prohibition on installing land drainage on peat soils >50cm depth.

Deer

8. The following measures are specified:
- I. Land managers are required to agree forward cull plans with Scottish Natural Heritage. Cull plans are set to reduce deer impacts and improve condition of habitats.
 - II. Where cull plans are not achieved, Scottish Natural Heritage is empowered to require culls are achieved by a third party.
 - III. Deer management plans, deer count information, cull plans, and cull returns must be made publicly available.

Grouse and moorland management

9. The following regulatory measures are specified:
- I. Muirburn is restricted to land managed for grouse, and on such land burning is prohibited on all blanket bog and other wetlands, montane heaths, steep slopes, and woodland edges.
 - II. A *Moorland Management Code* to be developed by end of 2018. This will include the above mandatory requirements. The policy recommends that legislation is enacted to require grouse moor licensing as soon as possible. Once this is in place, compliance with the code will be a licence condition.
 - III. Muirburn on land which is not managed for grouse is allowed under licence where it is necessary to prepare sites for woodland expansion by natural regeneration or to manage designated moorland sites.

Protected areas

10. The following measures are specified:
- I. The higher protections given to Natura sites are maintained.
 - II. A comprehensive network of local biodiversity sites is designated and protected against inappropriate development.

The following strategic interventions are specified:

- III. A Challenge Fund of at least £4 million per year to fund work to restore protected areas to favourable condition.

- IV. A discrete Challenge Fund of at least £5 million per year for Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) control and eradication programmes.

Freshwater

11. The following measures are specified:

- I. River Basin Management Plans are fully implemented to deliver Good Ecological Status (GES) for the vast majority of water bodies in Scotland by 2027.

The following strategic intervention is envisaged:

- II. A discrete Challenge Fund of at least £10 million per year to fund works to achieve good ecological status and implement natural flood management.

National Ecological Network

12. This policy specifies measures which will contribute to a National Ecological Network. Measures on farms will create and restore habitats and incentivise collaboration between farmers to create connected habitats. Native woodland creation which delivers connectivity will be prioritised. Peatland restoration will enhance connectivity of this habitat. Implementation of River Basin Management Plans will achieve good ecological status for the majority of water bodies.

In addition to these measures the following Strategic Intervention is specified:

- I. An Environmental Co-operative Action Fund of at least £4 million per year will support collaboration between landholdings at the landscape scale.

Institutions – linking stewardship of land and water

13. Regional land use partnerships will be aligned to river catchments. They will carry out catchment-wide appraisals of constraints and opportunities for land stewardship and develop catchment-wide land stewardship plans.

Table 1 - Land Stewardship measures available according to land use

Tier	Agriculture	Forestry	Grouse / deer	Protected Areas	Freshwater	Integrated land use
Natural Capital Restoration	Land contributing to National Ecological Network					
	Creating native woodland			Favourable condition on designated sites	Restoration of water bodies to GES	Collaborative action fund
	Control and eradication of INNS					
	Peatland restoration		Peatland restoration		Natural flood management	
	Support for HNV farming					
	Natural flood management					
Natural Capital Enhancement	>12% of farm managed as wildlife habitat	Grants for restocking in accordance with UKFS		Positive management of local biodiversity sites	Support for integrated catchment management	
	Restoration of semi-natural habitats					
Natural Capital Maintenance	12% of farm area managed for wildlife	Woodland stewardship				
	Reducing fertiliser and pesticide use					
	Whole farm review					
	Cross compliance					
Regulation	Soil testing and conservation measures	Environmental Impact Assessment of planting	Moorland management code	Equivalent protection for Natura sites	Retain GES targets for water environment	
		Felling licence, requiring restocking				
			SNH approval of cull plans			