

WILD LAND NEWS 73: Summer 2009
Letter to the Editor: more on wild land mapping

Dear Sir,

I read with great interest David Jarman's article "Mapping Wild Land – the Fatal Flaws". I was the project manager for this study and as such I would like to add a few points to what he has said. Many of the issues raised by Mr Jarman were discussed in great detail at various stages of the study by Steve and his team as well as by the steering group. Whilst I have some sympathy for the general sentiment of his piece there are some issues with which I would disagree.

"Bureaucratising wildland can only diminish it" I have to say that I cannot agree at all with this. For wildland to be bureaucratised is for it to be recognised by the governing authorities, be that at local or national level. This surely is a good thing because to be recognised as such means that it can be given proper consideration. What is important is the *way* that it is bureaucratised.

Mapping wildland and wildness is undoubtedly difficult. Not least is the big question of whether to do it at all. I think however that we have gone beyond this question. Since 2002 we have had the SNH map "Search areas for Wild Land". It accompanies SNH's excellent wildland policy. It is my experience that the clear warnings about its limitations are often ignored by developers who regard the map as the de facto Wildland Map of Scotland. If a site lays outwith the mapped area it is usually considered not to be wildland. Rob McMorrans work on wildland typology has taken the mapping to a more detailed level and has provided us with a range of descriptions for wildness. This approach is attractive from a planning point of view because it gives the possibility of classifying land into distinct 'zones' each with a prescription for planning in each. However here too we have the possibility of land being regarded as either wild or not wild

What Steve's work has given us is a scale of wildness. The map shows relative degrees or strength across the National Park. It must be remembered that this scale is specific to the Cairngorms National Park, not the whole of Scotland. So if Dalwhinnie is only "middling at best" this is still very wild in a national context. What the map shows is that the Cairngorms National Park is a place that many people will find wild, though it has features that will reduce this perception for others. We are now in a position to have a useful debate about the complexity of the wildness values within this area and discuss ways to increase attribute strength, rather than simply say this is wild or not wild.

The discussion about development and wild land is not usually within the 'core' areas or upon those areas that are extensively developed but those places in between. These are the areas that for many have qualities of wildness and are therefore valued, however because they may have one or two features inconsistent with the 'core' areas are possibly not recognised in any way. The real value of Steve's work is that we now have a way of discussing not only the relative wildness but dissecting the component attributes to discover the ingredients at any particular point.

I would certainly agree that this work is not 'the answer'. There are problems as there are with most methodologies. However I am firmly convinced that it is as Steve says "robust and defensible" and it is the best answer that we have yet produced.

Mr Jarman also raises three issues with the study that he regards as flaws. It is the second of these that I would particularly like to address. This is the resistance of landowners to accept wildland and see it as 'yet another designation'. It is quite reasonable for landowners to seek an economic return from their land. It is therefore understandable for them to be suspicious about restrictions being placed upon their land. The CNPA would not describe wildland or wildness as a designation. In fact we see Steve's work, and the policy that shall be developed

from it as, providing opportunities for enhancing economic activity rather than limiting it. The character of landscape is heavily influenced by the same attributes as wildness and these have been built into the criteria for SRDP applications. There are opportunities for promoting wildness as a reason to visit certain areas. Ecosystem service analysis shows the importance of uplands for water quality, runoff regulation and flood prevention and not least for carbon capture and storage. It may well be that many of these functions are exactly compatible with wildland and rewilding. What Steve's work has given us is a valuable tool for analysing and describing these elusive perceptions in a way that can directly support efforts to realise such opportunities.

I find Mr Jarman's alternative mapping methodology of interest. It would certainly be simpler. However it would not recognise the complicated interplay of the attributes. For example a windfarm would be excluded but the area immediately outside this would still be heavily influenced by its presence but would be labelled wild. This would devalue the title as few would consider it such.

The work of Steve Carver and his colleagues is a beginning. It has given us a tool with which we intend to assist land managers, recreationalists and conservationists to discover and enhance the sense of wildness in the Cairngorms National Park. It is not a map of wildland but it will help us to define a policy to achieve the enhancement objectives that we all share.

Yours Sincerely

Matthew Hawkins

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