

SCOTTISH WILD LAND GROUP

CONVENOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2016 – 2017

During the past year we have continued to work towards our objectives as defined in our six main areas of campaigning work. We are in a situation in Scotland where many changes that have the potential to impact on wild land, hopefully positively, are pending. These include the implementation of the Land Use Strategy, the creation of a Land Commission, a forthcoming Planning Bill later this year, an updated National Performance Framework, a possible new Vision for the Uplands, a review of driven grouse shooting licensing, and new powers for communities to shape their local areas via Community Empowerment. We will participate as fully as we can in all discussions and consultations, either as SWLG or in association with our partners in the Scottish Environment LINK network.

One thing has changed, the Scottish Government now speak of “inclusive growth”, instead of “sustainable economic growth”, although this as yet hasn’t been officially defined so the implications of this aren’t clear.

The protection of wild land interests has been as resource demanding as ever. Several proposed Hilltracks and other developments have been commented on or objected to where this is, in our opinion, justified. Correspondence on these can be seen on our website. One disappointment this year was the fact that our letter of objection to The Highland Council on the development proposal to construct a permanent track at the ski facility in Glencoe was ineffective. Despite receiving many letters of objection on various grounds, the council granted permission for the track, albeit with several conditions attached. We will have to monitor delivery on these, and I would urge any keen walkers among the membership who could help by doing a site visit occasionally and taking photos, to get in touch with us.

Although we now receive Section 36 energy proposals and scoping opinion requests for comments, disappointingly, we have not as yet managed to engage with the work involved in submitting detailed responses due to lack of capacity. We did, however, give support to the John Muir Trust in their valiant endeavours to oppose the granting of permission for the Stronelaig wind farm. A couple of members of the Steering Group also wrote to the Scottish and Southern Energy Board members and Chief Executive advising them of the reputational risk to themselves of pursuing the Trust for inflated and unreasonable legal costs.

Through our role with the LINK Hilltracks campaign we have been alerted to many inappropriate hill roads, tracks, hydro scheme tracks and other development proposals by the growing and dedicated team of volunteers involved in the weekly scrutiny of local authority online planning portals. The campaign’s activities have been widely advertised and as a result even more members of the public than in previous years - and some SWLG members - have contributed sightings, photos and other details. All of these are investigated and the relevant local authorities are contacted where there is concern about a particular track and its construction.

Earlier this year we raised funding from the Scottish Mountaineering Trust, the British Mountaineering Council Access and Conservation Trust, LINK and the member charities of the campaign and this enabled us to employ a part time consultant to assist with collation and the next

phase of the campaign. Mel Nicoll, who also works part time for the John Muir Trust, was selected from a gratifyingly strong field of applicants. Mel's campaign update is displayed on our website.

We continue to work with other NGOs via the Groups and sub-groups in the LINK network, on planning, landscape issues, wildlife matters and wild life crime. Our Treasurer is also the LINK treasurer and our Convenor is the co-convenor and depute convenor of two LINK subgroups. Such participation is invaluable to a small voluntary charity like ours in keeping up to date, engaging in advocacy and being involved in the issues of the day that may affect our core interests.

The 2016 AGM was held in Bridge of Allan, in the parish church hall, which was an excellent venue and cost effective. Our main speaker was Nick Kempe, who runs the Parkswatch website, who spoke about his concerns over inappropriate developments in the National Parks, including badly constructed hydro tracks. Earlier in the year, Nick had accompanied the Steering Group members on a very useful site visit to upper Glen Falloch to view the damage caused on the ground and inadequate restoration associated with the many schemes there.

There have been two editions of Wild Land News, in the Spring and very recently this Autumn. The first was edited by George Charles, who has since had to resign from the role due to other commitments. James Fenton very gallantly took on the task, and produced the Autumn edition.

The Steering Group had a healthy membership and two new members were recruited at the 2016 AGM, Peter Willimott and Bill Stephens. With the resignation of Chrissie Valluri due to the increased demands of a growing family we would be appreciative of additional members considering whether they could join us.

Membership has remained stable over the year, and lapsed members have been effectively chased up by our Membership Secretary Grant Cornwallis. Plans are afoot to advertise our work more widely to achieve a modest increase in recruitment and this is in the capable hands of Pete Ewing.

Beryl Leatherland, October 2017