

# WILD LAND NEWS 54

## Winter 2001/2



### COMMENT: Scotland as Europe's renewable energy capital? *Article*

The renewable energy debate intensified towards the end of 2001. A study for the Scottish Executive by a Glasgow-based consultancy quantified Scotland's enormous generating potential, prompting commentators to dub Scotland the renewable energy capital of Europe. The study examined a range of sources: wind power, both onshore and offshore; wave and tidal power (the latter involving underwater turbines); and biomass and small hydro schemes. The total capacity was estimated at a massive 58.9 gigawatts, almost 10 times Scotland's peak demand on the coldest of days, and almost ¾ that of the entire UK.

All this, of course, is a long way off, with many of the technologies in their infancy. But onshore wind energy is becoming well established in Scotland, and a proposal has been made for the world's largest wind-farm, at 600 megawatts (MW) on the Isle of Lewis. Electricity would be exported south by means of an underwater connector running from the Outer Hebrides to south-west England, and coming ashore at several points on its way.

As primarily a landscape organisation, SWLG has no specific remit on energy policy. However, as a group with a general interest in the environment, we support clean energy generation in principle, but with the crucial reservation that the installations must avoid damage to our wild landscape heritage. In the early days of the group we had to fight off proposals for small run-of-river hydro schemes in the Torridon area, and more recently we have opposed certain wind-farm schemes which we considered inappropriately sited.

The debate has now entered the public arena in a big way. A series of wind-farm proposals last autumn, some situated close to urban areas, has prompted some acrimonious correspondence in the Scottish press, with claims and counter-claims about the desirability of wind energy.

For us in SWLG, it is encouraging that there has been a detectable trend towards the choice of brownfield sites for some of these developments. One recent proposal is for a 120MW wind-farm on a former opencast mining site on Black Law in Lanarkshire, and another for a 29MW scheme on the site of a former explosives factory on the Ayrshire coast. This is exactly the kind of location we have been urging, ever since our 1996 AGM debate on wind energy (see WLN 40). There surely must be plenty of scope for such developments before any more turbines need to be built amidst our more valued landscapes.

Furthermore, the 11.5 gigawatt potential of onshore wind power indicated in the Scottish Executive study specifically excludes land protected for its scenic beauty and wildlife and natural habitats.

Alongside these large-capacity schemes, small-scale hydro schemes, such as the 3.55MW one proposed for Shieldaig and Slattadale just north of Torridon, look decidedly puny ([see WLN 52](#)). Yet that scheme, however carefully designed, would intrude into a spectacular mountain area just about as close to pristine wilderness as can be found in Britain. It would involve alterations to the natural hydrology and exaggerated fluctuations in loch levels which are inconsistent with the largely unspoilt character of the area.

Diversification of energy generation appears to be the main reason for the Government continuing to promote small-scale hydro schemes, but Scotland has already invested heavily in hydro power with the post-war dam-building programme which created large-scale

schemes in many of the glens. It clearly makes sense to have a range of options in the event of failure of one particular source, but in the light of the Executive's energy study it is increasingly hard to see the relevance of small-scale schemes such as the one proposed for Shieldaig/Slattadale. At 3.55MW, this would be the Scotland's largest hydro scheme since the 1960s, yet its output would be tiny compared with the massive capacity envisaged for some of the other renewable schemes currently being proposed. In the event of a large anti-cyclone over Scotland rendering most of the wind turbines inoperative, the mind boggles at the number of 3.55MW hydro schemes we should need to make up the deficit.

In the Executive's energy study, small-scale hydro had by far the lowest potential, with only 0.3 gigawatts of the total 58.9 gigawatts capacity. Is it really worthwhile trying to squeeze a few more megawatts from hydro power in this way? Wouldn't it be better to concentrate on some of the newly emerging technologies which offer so much more potential?

## Deer Damage on National Nature Reserves

Article

*Watchdog body warns of last resort action*

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has reported four estates in the north-west Highlands to the Deer Commission Scotland (DCS) for failure to exercise adequate control over their deer populations. SNH has stopped short of publicly identifying the estates, as the problem is widespread throughout Scotland. In this instance, however, excessive deer numbers have over a period of years been causing serious damage to the Inverpolly and Inchnadamph National Nature Reserves, both of which are Sites of Special Scientific Interest and are candidates for the status of European Special Areas of Conservation.

Woodland regeneration has proved impossible without fencing, erosion of soil and peat is causing concern, and numerous other species of plants are being suppressed as a result of grazing and trampling.

The DCS, the watchdog body, has responded positively. Its director, Nick Reiter, said that the Commission would set up deer management groups with the estates, but that it would use its "statutory powers to order culls as a last resort if necessary".

## Community Purchase Of Gigha

Article

At the end of October, the residents of Gigha secured the purchase of their island at a price of £4,000,250. Jubilation, however, has been tempered by serious financial concerns which hold implications for the Executive's wider land reform programme.

Almost all of the money for the purchase came from public sources. Highland and Islands Enterprise contributed £500,000, and a massive £3.5m came from the £10m. lottery-based Scottish Land Fund.

As part of the deal, the islanders are committed to paying back £1m. over two years and a fund-raising campaign is now under way. About £40,000 was understood to have been pledged by Christmas, and local fund-raising events are raising a few hundred pounds at a time, but £1m in two years is a tall order for a rural population of just over 100. As one of the trustees commented "For a while we were the centre of national press attention, but they have gone and the flow of financial support has dwindled away."

Despite refinements to the Community Right to Buy section of the Land Reform bill, the Executive seems barely to have acknowledged the central problem of small communities

having to match open market prices which, in the case of Highland estates are often inflated by speculative purchasers or those seeking the romance of a private kingdom.

The Land Reform Policy Group's 1998 consultation document "Identifying the Solutions" noted that a "fall in market value" would be one of the consequences of implementing land-value taxation, yet the Executive has failed to recognise the necessary connection between land reform and wider macro-economic policy. That connection urgently needs to be made if stability in the land market is ever to be achieved.

The Land Reform Policy Group forecast that the Community Right to Buy would "effect a rapid change in the pattern of ownership". At the moment that seems somewhat over-optimistic.

*The Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust can be contacted at [www.gigha.org.uk](http://www.gigha.org.uk).*

## International Year Of Mountains 2002 And The Scottish Wild Land Group

Article

*An overview by IYM's Scotland project officer, Andy Macpherson*

Most readers of Scottish Wild Land News will already have heard about International Year of Mountains through earlier issues of this journal or from other sources. Consequently, rather than outlining the general background to IYM, I shall focus on themes of IYM that I think are likely to be of particular interest to SWLG, and offer some personal perspectives on where IYM could lead.

IYM's mission statement is "to promote the conservation and sustainable development of mountain areas, thereby ensuring the well-being of mountain and lowland communities", whereas SWLG "works to protect and conserve wild land throughout Scotland, and is in favour of sensitive development of rural areas where it is sustainable and takes account of the interests of local communities." Wild land does of course not necessarily mean mountains alone (and it could be stretching things to call some of Scotland's mountains "wild land"), but the overlap is considerable.

Fiona Anderson opened an [article on defining wild land](#) in the summer 2001 issue of Wild Land News with the words: 'John Digney noted that in 19 years of the Wild Land Group's existence there had always been a strong, and usually unanimous, sense within the Steering Team of where a wild land issue was involved, but that we had never actually produced a specific definition of "wild land"'. It would be possible to spend more than a year trying to define terms and themes such as "sustainable development", "mountain regions" and "mountain communities" (for example, the Mountain Forum recently hosted a lengthy exchange of emails on the subject of defining mountains). Given that Andy Wightman's 1996 paper for the then Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link on sustainable mountain development appears to have been widely well received, it seems reasonable to proceed on the basis that roughly 70% of Scotland can be considered mountain country. As with wild land there can be a sense of when a mountain or sustainable development issue is at stake even in the absence of universally accepted definitions. Further work led by SWLG on defining wild land, and research proposals from the Centre for Mountain Studies at Perth College UHIMI on evaluating the research and policy priorities for mountains in Scotland, are set to be valuable tools emerging in 2002.

## New Initiatives

2002 promises without doubt to be a significant year for wild land, mountainous or otherwise, in Scotland. In addition to the launch of Scotland's first national park and the countdown to

the second, the coming year will also see access legislation, the first season of the Cairngorm funicular and the opening of the Adventure Centre at R فهو dedicated to the development of adventure sports. It is also International Year of Ecotourism, an industry again highly intertwined with wild land, and in September a "Rio plus Ten" summit is to be held in Johannesburg to evaluate progress towards sustainable development goals set in Rio in 1992, including Agenda 21's chapter 13, the "Mountain Agenda".

There are some key differences in emphasis between SWLG and the programme for IYM in Scotland. SWLG has been in existence for 19 years whereas IYM is by definition a short-term initiative. IYM has more of an overt "people" orientation, and of course is an international rather than specifically Scottish venture. Perhaps most significantly, IYM is aimed at maximising coverage of mountain issues in the time available, reaching as wide an audience as possible in contrast to the rather quieter and more tightly focused approach of SWLG. All of these differences serve to highlight the complementarity between IYM and SWLG. The IYM project in Scotland owes its existence in part to work done in previous years by SWLG and other organisations, and hopefully IYM can contribute towards raising mountains and sustainable mountain development higher in the policy agenda and so facilitating future work by SWLG.

Because IYM is by its nature of short duration, it is important to ensure that it does not vanish into the ether on 31 December 2002. This concern is frequently raised; indeed the UN's own guidelines for International Years state that they should generate activity in the long term. This process has arguably already started through the establishment of the IYM project in Scotland, bringing together as it has a collection of key bodies to fund and steer the project. IYM could also serve to help the Scottish Mountain Network to gel, and towards this end dates are now being sought to call a meeting of the wider network.

### **Public Profile**

Because the remit of IYM is so wide, it is possible to engage with a wider and larger cross section of society than SWLG, albeit to a lesser depth. By stressing the socio-economic and cultural as well as environmental significance of mountains, it may be possible to engage with policy makers proactively and stressing the positive; a task made easier by the work and experience of such bodies as the Cairngorms Partnership and the Access Forum.

There can be little doubt that pressures on wild land will continue to grow, and equally little doubt that delicate balancing acts will be needed to avoid polarisation of stances such as possible "wild land versus renewable energy" scenarios. The foot and mouth disease outbreak earlier this year served to bring to a wider audience than before the significance of mountains and wild land as an economic resource, yet the need to manage that resource on a sustainable basis was not so highly publicised. Earlier articles in Wild Land News have commented on the discrepancy between the working processes of the Access Forum and the draft legislation that ensued, and on the concerns arising over the lack of planning powers for the Cairngorms National Park, yet it remains the case that enormous strides have been made, through the strenuous efforts of players in all sectors. At the recent launch of the Nevis Strategy, the opening speech noted that a body such as the Nevis Working Party would have been unthinkable a decade ago. While much remains to be done and there is no room for complacency, another significant contribution that IYM can make can be to point to ways forward through celebrating what has been achieved.

Since I took up this job in August, I have encountered near-universal enthusiasm for IYM. If by the end of the year there is a general perception that mountains are of fundamental importance globally comparable to rainforests and oceans, and that they deserve protection, I should feel as though IYM had accomplished a lot.

I should like to thank SWLG for supporting IYM financially and for providing the space for this article. I should also like to take this opportunity to invite any comments or suggestions that any Wild Land News readers may have.

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## Native Pinewoods Under Threat

Article

*A report by Gus Jones*

Two outstanding areas of native pinewood within the proposed Cairngorms National Park are subjects of serious concern. School Wood at Nethybridge is close to two Special Protection Areas for capercaillie and is threatened by housing development likely to be predominantly second and holiday homes. The other wood, Anagach by Grantown on Spey is on the market and if a community purchase fails, could be sold in separate lots potentially resulting in unsympathetic management for landscape, wildlife and public access. Also in Nethybridge, construction of four luxury houses has recently been approved in a juniper rich pinewood holding red squirrels.

The owners of School Wood, Eagle Star (a subsidiary of the multinational company Zurich), are expected soon to make a second planning application, for 40 houses and a business site. In June they were refused permission for a slightly larger development, following a determined campaign led by people in the local community and supported by SWLG. This enlightened decision by Councillors for once to turn down inappropriate housing in Strathspey was against planners' recommendations. It owed little to an SNH report that played down the natural heritage importance of the wood.

School Wood is predominantly a native pinewood with some broadleaf trees and bog areas and is of great importance to the amenity and woodland setting of Nethybridge. It is listed in the Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland Inventory. The outstanding wildlife interest includes aspen, juniper, capercaillie, red squirrel, crested tit, blood red slave maker ants and otter. Soils are as pristine as in the most undisturbed sites in Abernethy. The wood is particularly significant as a wildlife corridor for capercaillie between the two European sites, Abernethy forest and Craigmore wood. Despite Council recognition of the sensitivity of the site, it is feared that the second application might be allowed with proponents claiming that it would be consistent with the local plan.

The School Wood controversy has uncovered some practices which have caused concern:

- In 1986, shortly after acquiring the site, Eagle Star attempted to fell broadleaved trees in this wood, including very large willows and birches. Fortunately District Council and Forestry Commission intervention stopped them.
- When Eagle Star sent notification papers of their planning application to neighbours, the accompanying maps were ambiguous and led to confusion over the extent of the proposed development.
- The conduct of Nicholas Woolley, Eagle Star's rural portfolio asset fund manager, at public meetings in Nethybridge, is the subject of still unanswered questions to Environment and Rural Affairs minister Margaret Beckett. The questions relate to unsolicited references made by Mr Woolley about his public position on the Board of English Nature, whilst extolling the sustainable nature of this private development.

Disquiet has arisen because of meetings held between Eagle Star and some elected community representatives, and a community council meeting from which members of the public were excluded. The wording of a petition, described by Eagle Star as indicating

community backing for their first planning application, made no mention of the building proposals in School Wood. SNH staff did not attend the site visit at the June planning hearing, possibly because of obvious deficiencies in the report they provided to Council planners. SNH has denied that its advice on capercaillie was inadequate, despite one of its conclusions being described as "nonsense" by the UK's leading scientific authority on capercaillie. An investigation is underway in Brussels relating to a complaint of a breach of the European Birds Directive on this issue.

*The Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group would welcome support for efforts to save School Wood. Please contact Tel/Fax 01479 821491; e-mail: [bscg@zett.net.co.uk](mailto:bscg@zett.net.co.uk) or BSCG, Fiodhag, Nethybridge, Inverness-shire PH25 3DJ*

## Superquarry News

Article

Despite being refused planning permission just over a year ago by the Scottish Executive in the longest planning wrangle in Scottish legal history, the application for a coastal superquarry at Lingerbay on Harris refuses to die. The applicants, Lafarge Aggregates, are now trying to revive a 36-year-old planning consent which covers an area four times greater than that to which the recent refusal referred. The Western Isles Council argue that the 1965 consent is no longer in force, but Lafarge Aggregates dispute this and an enquiry is to be held in order to determine its validity.

Meanwhile, the threat of another coastal superquarry on Loch Eriboll receded as the Liechtenstein-based owners of the land, a company known as Vibel SA, have offered to sell their 2300 acres to the local crofting community at Laid. Vibel SA have owned the land for 20 years, but as far as the locals are aware, no-one from the company has ever visited the place. The clerk of the Laid grazings committee, Hugh MacLellan, said "The sole reason they are here is to lodge a planning application for a coastal superquarry." The locals, he said, had resolved to lead the objections in such an event.

## Access Bill Update

Article

*Alistair Cant reports on the improvements to the Access section of the Land Reform Bill*

There was a huge groundswell of concern over the first draft of the Land Reform legislation, which was issued some months ago in 2001. The issue of Access was especially seen as controversial as this first draft was thought by many to give too much power to landowners. A magnificent 14,500 people signed a petition either electronically or by hand, expressing deep concern about elements of the draft. This petition was delivered from Dunfermline - the seat of the old Scottish Parliament, to the High Street of Edinburgh - to the new Parliament. It was transported by climbers, walkers, riders, cyclists and canoeists in a spectacular team effort.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill is now out and is progressing through the Scottish Parliament. There is some relief in the section on Access that certain aspects of the first draft have been toned down or removed. There is no longer the power for a landowner to suspend access on account of land management operations etc. There are no local authority emergency powers, nor new police powers. These deletions are all very welcome.

Ironically, experience gained during the foot and mouth outbreak played a significant part in the Executive's decision to remove the clause giving land managers the right to suspend access. Jim Wallace, the justice minister, noted the responsible behaviour by the public in observing access restrictions, and contrasted this with the "abuses by landowners and farmers who restricted access". Even the convenor of the Scottish Landowners' Federation, Robert Balfour, conceded the point. He had warned land managers "in public", and said "I

don't disagree with Mr. Wallace. You could say that people have been hoist with their own petard."

We welcome also the introduction of obligations of responsibility on land managers which helps to give more balance to the legislation, and the attempt to maintain the common law position of access. There is also the duty (as opposed to the original power) on Local Authorities to uphold access rights and new powers to Scottish Natural Heritage to safeguard conservation interests.

There are still many concerns that the Group has on the Bill. There should be a reduction in some of the complex details in the Bill - these should be hammered out in the Code of Guidance, not the Bill itself. The Bill seems overly concerned with rules and regulations, rather than setting out a spirit for access to be achieved for users of the countryside.

One major flaw still is the exemption of farmyards from the legislation. Many paths go through farmyards, thus all those which are not official rights of way are at risk of being closed down. It must be made clear that farmyards should still provide access unless there is a practical alternative in place that has been agreed.

It is vital to keep the pressure up on MSPs over the Bill as it makes its way through Parliament. Please visit your local MSP's surgery or write or e-mail him or her. The details of what issues give greatest concern can be found out from the Ramblers Scotland website ([www.ramblers.org.uk](http://www.ramblers.org.uk)). You can join an access campaign network by e-mailing [LucyB@scotland.ramblers.org.uk](mailto:LucyB@scotland.ramblers.org.uk).

The Group urges all members and readers to work hard to lobby MSPs as now is the time.