

The Scottish Wild Land Group

A Registered Scottish Charity SC004014

Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2020

Address – c/o Tim Ambrose, Treasurer
8 Cleveden Road
Glasgow
G12 0NT

e-mail: enquiries@swlg.org.uk

website: www.swlg.org.uk

Campaigning for Scotland's Wild Land

The Scottish Wild Land Group is a Scottish Registered Charity, number SC004014. It is a membership body, which welcomes new members who support Scotland's wild land.

Charity Trustees

General control and management of the Scottish Wild Land Group resides with the Steering

Committee, the members of which are therefore the “Charity Trustees” for the purposes of The Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005. They are elected annually by the members in general meeting.

During the year to 31 March 2020, the Steering Committee comprised:

Beryl Leatherland – Co-ordinator
Tim Ambrose – Treasurer
Grant Cornwallis – Membership Secretary
Dr Pete Ewing
Dr James Fenton – Editor Wild Land News
Jane Meek – elected December 2019
Andrew Painting – co-opted May 2019
Peter Willimott

Constitution

The Scottish Wild Land Group is an independent unincorporated association. Its purpose and constitution are set out in a written document, a copy of which may be obtained from the Treasurer. The Group is a member of Scottish Environment LINK, an umbrella organisation for Scottish environmental and conservation charities.

Recruitment of Charity Trustees

The trustees of the Scottish Wild Land Group comprise the Steering Committee which manages the activities of the Group. The Committee welcomes communication from members and the public. The Steering Committee is elected by members at the Annual General Meeting, to which all members are invited, and welcomes nominations to join the Committee.

The purposes and public benefit of the Scottish Wild Land Group

As set out in the Group’s constitution, the Group is a campaigning body, which aims to protect and preserve Scotland’s wild land. It publishes Wild Land News, a magazine sent free to members and to politicians and other decision makers to highlight issues threatening Scotland’s wild land, and to generate discussion and educate the public on land conservation matters. The Group encourages sound effective planning policies to protect and enhance wild land, and supports those local communities that nurture good land management. Its activities carry a clear public benefit, aiming to preserve Scotland’s wild land for future generations to enjoy and appreciate.

Main activities and achievements during the year to 31 March 2020

This was again a very busy year, and the members of the Steering Group were kept fully occupied. Even so, it was impossible to keep on top of all we feel we need to address.

Our principal focus was on two long-standing threats to Wild Land, and one more recent problem. Members will be familiar with our fight against obtrusive bulldozed tracks into the hills, and also to the continued growth of industrial wind farms in wild places. Both of these damage the views from miles around, and destroy the wildness, as well as the land upon which they are erected with their access roads, coarse drainage, concrete foundations, soil dumps and long-lasting damage to the vegetation .

A newer threat, whose damaging effects have increased greatly in recent years, is the plethora of “run-of-river” hydro schemes. Individually generally fairly small and local, these sound harmless,

and very “green”, but involve huge damage to the wildness of their glens, with concrete gather dams and pools high up the hills, wide access roads winding up the slopes for large machinery, straight pipelines down the sides of the glen, reduced stream and waterfall flow, and noisy and obtrusive hydro generating plant and buildings at the bottom. Even if the pipeline is buried, the disruption to the ground will be obvious for very many years, and as unsightly as the worst hill tracks. Jane Meek of the Steering Group focussed particularly upon the devastating proposals for Glen Etive, which has seven planned schemes.

Bulldozed hill tracks

The Hilltracks campaign continued to be main focus of our efforts, as it has for the previous 7 years. Work continued throughout the year, with several Prior Notification proposals being scrutinised most weeks. Many of these were in lowland areas for agricultural purposes or for forestry tracks, for extraction and new planting, but many were for new upland tracks. Of these it was frequently evident that the main purpose was for shooting and stalking, rather than the claimed “agricultural” purposes, and points have had to be made to the local authority to draw attention to this, plus other deficiencies in applications. Our Convenor leads the campaign with Helen Todd of Ramblers Scotland and they had several interesting meetings throughout the year to try to progress our objectives.

One of these was with the Cairngorms National Park Authority, when we urged them to develop an effective strategy to address the increasing problem of eroded tracks being made by ATVs. These damage the terrain so much that, once the damage has been done, and the line created on the ground, the estates then apply for a new bulldozed and surfaced track along the routes that have been over-used, claiming that this will prevent further damage! Of course, it will not as the tracks merely get extended because it becomes easier for ATVs to be used to penetrate further into the landscape. To reduce this we suggested that the National Park should consider developing guidance to encourage more sensitive ATV use, and set up a pilot study which could be used as an exemplar for best practice across Scotland. The Park, via one of their committees, has been working on this and we await the outcome.

We were grateful for the persistence of our monitors and other members of the public who alerted us to new track proposals and indeed the construction of unauthorised tracks. One of these was in Glen Clova which has been reported on in Wild Land News. After a great deal of work on the part of the National Park after we had alerted them and sent evidence, the estate was required to apply retrospectively for planning permission; this did not materialise so the Park required full reinstatement, to be completed by October 2020, and we will need to monitor delivery of this restoration.

In addition site visits were made to some tracks; these often caused further concerns due to the number of crow traps, tunnel traps, stoat traps and arbitrary gritting stations alongside them. We have reported to local authorities on several tracks over the course of the year, and there have been some successes with planning authorities requiring improvements to proposals and in a few cases applications being withdrawn. We objected to one case that had been a full planning application, and this eventually proceeded to a Reporter led Hearing. The Reporter used our comments in their judgement and found in our favour and that of the local planning department, and the track was refused permission. SWLG comments on development proposals have been posted on the website.

The LINK Hilltracks Group continued to pursue our aim to have Hilltracks brought into the full planning system. Members may recall that the Scottish Planning Minister, despite pressure from our cross party MSP allies, failed to do this, but as a result of our persistent campaign activity which was amplified by social media activity generously run by Ramblers Scotland, partially compensated us by setting up a phased review of General Permitted Development, and Hilltracks were given priority in Phase 1 of the consultation. Be assured that SWLG and Ramblers, with the support of the other members of the LINK Group, will be contributing a full and evidenced response, and that it will be sufficiently persuasive! We have a small number of Scotland-wide

volunteers (but would welcome more!) who continue to send us their findings from their weekly scrutiny of allocated planning portals. We collate these and also evaluate the proposed developments that they find.

Industrial Wind Farms

We expect that over the next few years applications for wind farms will increase. The early developments are coming to the end of their more effective generation capacity, so applications are already being made for these to be subject to repowering developments. This involves installing alternative, taller, turbines, around 200 metres high to blade tip. Their existing concrete bases are inadequate for these, so new bases and other infrastructure are required, plus statutory aviation lighting. Unfortunately the Scottish Government decided that the original EIAs and environmental statements are still relevant and can be used to support new applications. It would be preferable for these to be fully revised in line with the new baselines that now exist. Inevitably, when developers apply to upgrade their existing installations they will want to install additional turbines and extend the footprint of the wind farms that already exist. This has caused concern over increased cumulative effects in several areas, such as Dumfries and Galloway, the “ring of steel” in the vicinity of Lairg, and South Lanarkshire, to name but a few.

SWLG Website

The website is our main means to keep members up to date with current matters, campaigns, petitions, and when we have needed to encourage our members to take action such as writing to their MSP. In this digital age, matters can progress very swiftly and the website is the best way to keep informed and get involved in supporting our efforts. Peter Willimott continues to efficiently post material for us and manage the site. We would encourage our members to try to set aside a short time each week to look at the site and see what is new and how to help our work; you never know, your support for a petition or sending a timely brief email to a MSP could make all the difference!

Wild Land News

During the year we produced two editions of Wild Land News, thanks to the diligent efforts of James Fenton, the editor. It was to James' credit that he managed to produce such interesting copy, despite the difficulties of sourcing articles. Andrew Painting of the Steering Group has a real talent for writing and you may have enjoyed his material in several editions. As well as distributing the magazine to members Grant continued to deliver them enthusiastically and in person to many outlets throughout the Highlands and rural parts of Scotland, and we have posted copies to MSPs when there had been an article that might have interested them, the policy teams and individuals in other charities and NGOs, and to statutory bodies such as Nature Scotland [formerly SNH].

Membership and participation in Scottish Environment LINK

SWLG has been an active member of the Scottish Environment LINK network of charities and NGOs for many years. Our Convenor and Treasurer continue to serve as trustees on the LINK Board, and the Convenor represents SWLG in several LINK groups including Hilltracks as co-convenor, the Landscape group as depute convenor, sitting on the Planning, Wild Life Crime, Land, and Freshwater Groups and as a corresponding member of the Woodland, Wildlife, Economics and Governance Groups. This requires considerable effort and travel, but there are major benefits to SWLG as a small organisation from being part of the LINK network, sharing workloads, pushing the landscape agenda whenever opportunities arise, contributing to government consultation responses, participating in campaigns and vastly increasing our profile, especially with decision makers and civil servants. We also had access to useful events, informative workshops, and parliamentary events.

One significant successful campaign was delivered by the LINK Wildlife Crime Group. Donald Dewar, the first First Minister of Scotland, said that “Wildlife Crime in Scotland is a blot on the

country's reputation". Yet, many years after his death, the persecution and killing of Scotland's wild animals and birds has been allowed to continue without any effective government action. SWLG includes campaigning on species protection in our objectives. The Animals and Wildlife [Penalties, Protections and Powers] [Scotland] Bill 2019 was laid and the Group contributed actively; giving evidence to committees, making a full response to the consultation with many LINK member organisations signed up in support, and advocacy strategies. The Group was fortunate in gaining a vast amount of help and advice from the LINK parliamentary advocacy team, and LINK also funded an evening cross party event in Holyrood as part of our advocacy, where there were presentations and many MSPs participated from all parties. The Bill became an Act of the Scottish Parliament in March 2020, and work has continued on ensuring appropriate enactment. In the meantime, wildlife crime of all types has unfortunately continued, including many shocking cases of raptor persecution.

Scottish Landscape Alliance

The Scottish Landscape Alliance was launched in April 2019, and we have continued to be active on both the Executive Committee and one of the Working Groups. Follow up events were planned for October 2020, one for members and one had been arranged as a major event in the Scottish Parliament. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the latter has been postponed and instead in October 2020 there was an online event to update members and a wide range of other organisations on our publications and progress.

The Scottish Government at last, at the end of 2020, some months after its completion, made public the Werritty Report on various issues around the grouse industry, together with the group's recommendations. Urgent action was assured by both the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary but this did not materialise. Similarly the much delayed Independent Deer Group Report on deer management was released, with again, no follow up being initiated. LINK members were and are continuing to lobby for action on both of these.

Financial Review and Policy on Reserves

During the year the Group's income exceeded its expenditure by £1,941, (2019, surplus £1,597), leaving unrestricted reserves at 31 March 2020 of £18,021 (2019, £16,080).

The Group aims to retain reserves around the level of one year's gross income, to ensure adequate funds to meet day to day expenses, and a sufficient level of continuity. At present, funds exceed this level, which is welcome as it enables the Group to embark upon a larger project or objection. All funds are available for the general purposes of the Group.

For and on behalf of the Steering Committee

Beryl Leatherland – Co-ordinator

21 November 2020

Report of the Independent Examiner to the Trustees of the Scottish Wild Land Group

I report on the Accounts of the Scottish Wild Land Group for the year ended 31 March 2020 in accordance with the terms of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005, "the Act", and the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 – "the Regulations". The Trustees consider that the audit requirement of Regulation 10(1)(d) does not apply.

Respective responsibilities of Trustees and Independent Examiner

As the trustees of the Charity, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. It is my responsibility under S 44(1)(c) of the Act to examine these accounts, and to report whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of Independent Examiner's Report

My examination is carried out in accordance with Regulation 11, and includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity, and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeks explanations from the trustees concerning such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently I do not express an audit opinion on the view given by the accounts.

Independent Examiner's statement

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:-

(1) which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements to keep accounting records in accordance with Section 44 of the Act and Regulation 4; and to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records; and to comply with the accounting requirements of the Act and Regulation 9, have not been met; or,

(2) to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Martin RW George, ACA

21 November 2020

47 Rhodfa'r Morwydd, Penarth, CF64 2UD

	Year ended 31 March 2020	Year ended 31 March 2019
INCOME	£	£
Membership subscriptions and donations	3,992	4,051
Advertising in Wild Land News	<u>183</u>	<u>183</u>
Total Income	<u>4,175</u>	<u>4,234</u>
 EXPENDITURE		
Expenditure on charitable activities		
Printing Wild Land News - 2 (2) issues	935	1,008

Postage - WLN and general	403	616
Stationery and Website costs	117	233
GDPR compliance	0	205
Donations relating to charitable activities		
Scottish Environment LINK subscription	150	125
LINK Nature Network film contribution	500	0
LINK Hilltracks research	0	250
Governance and administration expenses		
AGM and meeting expenses	120	188
PayPal and Bank charges	9	12
Total Expenditure	<u>2,234</u>	<u>2,637</u>
Surplus of Income over Expenditure	<u>1,941</u>	<u>1,597</u>

**STATEMENT OF BALANCES AT 31 MARCH
2020 and 2019**

	31 March 2020	31 March 2019
	£	£
Opening Unrestricted Group Funds	16,080	14,483
Surplus for the year	<u>1,941</u>	<u>1,597</u>
Unrestricted Group funds at the year end	<u>18,021</u>	<u>16,080</u>

Represented by balances at the year end

RBS Current Account	18,184	16,385
PayPal account	154	209
Receivables	183	385
Less: Liabilities and Accruals	<u>-500</u>	<u>-899</u>
	<u>18,021</u>	<u>16,080</u>

Approved by the trustees and signed on their behalf
by
JMT Ambrose MA FCA CTA(Fellow) - Treasurer

21 November 2020

Notes to the Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2020

Basis of preparation of the Accounts

The accounts comprise an Income and Expenditure Account, recording receipts and payments including receivables and accruals, and a Statement of Balances at the year end, in accordance with the requirements of The Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006, “the Regulations”.

Accounts – Independent Examination

As the Group has gross income less than £100,000 pa, it has prepared this statement of account in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 9. As required by Regulation 11, the trustees have appointed an independent examiner to examine the accounts, and to report to them. His report is attached.

Unrestricted General Funds

The Group’s funds are held without restriction, to be applied for the general purposes of the Group.

Charity Trustees

No remuneration or other benefit was paid or provided to any of the trustees. Direct out of pocket expenses, such as postage costs incurred on the Group’s activities, were reimbursed, but no reimbursement of travel costs to Steering committee meetings was made. There were no transactions between the Group and the trustees or any persons connected with them.

The Independent Examiner received no remuneration for his services to the Group. The Group is extremely grateful to the Independent Examiner for his work and report.