

# Charter for the Open Hill

## A CHARTER FOR THE OPEN HILL

### Protecting the hills and moors of the Scottish uplands

- \* Recognising the contribution of the open landscape of hills and moors to the history, culture and identity of Scotland
- \* Recognising the importance to the tourist industry of the wide vistas across open landscapes, and the importance to local employment through the management of moorland
- \* Recognising the international importance and rarity of Scottish moorland habitats
- \* Recognising the natural origins of the open, unwooded hills and moors
- \* Recognising the current threats to the open hill, in particular its fragmentation through forestry and woodland planting
- \* Recognising, also, the ever-increasing infrastructure being imposed on moorland, including vehicle tracks, wind farms, dams, reservoirs, power-lines and masts

We, the undersigned, request that the Scottish Government takes steps to retain the remaining, unfragmented areas of open hill in Scotland through the identification of the key areas to be safeguarded for future generations.



## NOTES

### What is meant by ‘the open hill’?

The upland landscape of Scotland is characterised by wide tracts of unwooded moorland. There are many kinds of moorland, including heather moorland (particularly in the east), wet heath (particularly in the west), grass moor and peatlands. This Charter encompasses all types.

### Origin of moorland

There is a widespread belief that most of the Scottish moorland has been created through human action, particularly the destruction of natural forest which once covered most of the land.

However, research shows that the moorland has developed naturally, its extent increasing as woodland, which was more common thousands of years ago, naturally declined.

This decline occurred through changes in climate, through long-term loss of fertility through leaching, and through the continual presence of grazing animals, particularly red deer. Modern research has identified the importance of grazing animals in shaping the landscape of natural ecosystems, with there being nothing natural about low levels of grazing.

### Nature conservation value of moorland

Most moorland habitats, including dry heath, wet heath and peatbog, have been recognised as internationally important in the European Commission’s Habitats Directive, *i.e.* they are listed in Annex 1 of the Directive.

Unwooded, temperate moorland comprises internationally rare ecosystems, with a continuous link back to the Ice Age. Landscapes where the vegetation pattern has never been designed, the soil ploughed or the land planted, are now very rare in Europe, especially on the scale of the Scottish uplands.

Open moorland supports many important species, including red deer, breeding waders, golden eagles, hen harriers, red grouse, heather, cross-leaved heath, bog asphodel and rare liverworts.

### Importance to the climate

The soils of the uplands are rich in organic matter (humus and peat) and therefore extremely important as a carbon store.

### Historical and cultural importance of moorland

In historical times, the open hills and moors have been the backdrop to the history and culture of Scotland, including the Highland clans, Border raids, battles, castles, crofting, cattle droving, the Clearances, sporting estates, hill farming, music and song. Currently the management of moorland provides important rural jobs to the benefit of the local economy.

### Open moorland: a distinctive Scottish landscape

The open hill of lochs and glens, heather and bog has become the landscape which now epitomises Scotland. It is a draw to tourists, who enjoy the wide vistas and the easily visible hills. Many areas have been identified as National Scenic Area, and the wildness of much of the remaining open hill has been recognised by its inclusion in Wild Land Areas.

---

*Note: This Charter is not about how moorland should be managed, but concentrates on the need to retain moorland in the first place – the need to produce a Locational Strategy for Moorland.*