A sustainable land management vision for Wales

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Cyswllt Amgylchedd Cymru
Wales Environment Link



Our vision is of a Wales that manages its land sustainably, in ways that secure benefits for people, the environment and nature as well as an economic future for land managers, recognising the direct links between the health of the environment and the health of society.

As well as products such as food and timber, we need a flourishing natural environment, rich in wildlife, to provide services like clean water, healthy soils, flood alleviation, carbon sequestration, and the benefits to our wellbeing that contact with nature brings. In turn, these ecosystem services could play a key role in supporting a prosperous rural economy, if investment is made now in nature's restoration.

Many of the rules that govern the way we manage our natural resources are derived from EU legislation, which has been good for the environment in the UK. We want to keep these laws to create a solid basis from which to build, working towards environmental standards that are stronger than they are now.

In order to ensure a sustainable future for the Welsh environment, which benefits all of the people of Wales, we believe that future land use and management must deliver wider public benefit and sustainable outcomes.

What must future land management in Wales achieve?

Restored, functioning ecosystems and thriving biodiversity
A new sustainable land management contract that provides incentives, guidance and training to enable the restoration of nature, recognises wider public benefit and delivers sustainable management of natural resources.

Sustainable diets and food equality
Better, more joined up policies on food and farming, resource management and public health, that improve access to good food, reduce food waste and safeguard the natural resources on which production depends.

Place-based approaches to celebrate and maintain our distinctive landscapes
Achieving the right balance between harnessing renewable energy and protecting our valuable landscapes and wildlife, recognising the inter-connections between people and place.

Integrated land management with strong sustainability requirements across all land management sectors
The same requirements for sustainability and the same opportunities for all land management sectors, providing fairness for land managers and resilience for both environment and society.



Provision of outstanding public access
An improved, well-maintained and accessible system of rights of way, and rights of open access, across Wales, so everyone can enjoy access to nature.

Support for a skilled and valued workforce
Sustainable land managers must have access to training to keep their knowledge and skills up to date, and become more innovative, allowing them to benefit financially from new markets that promote wider public benefit.

Protection of our natural and built heritage, and archaeological sites
Work with our heritage, from castles and archaeological sites to dry-stone walls and veteran trees, re-introducing traditional skills and crafts which work with the natural environment.

Innovative new markets, value-added commodities and co-operative supply chains
New economic approaches, market systems and mechanisms are required to ensure public benefit from sustainable management, with investment from Government, industry, communities and corporations.

Land should be managed in ways that minimise greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon sequestration, e.g. by increasing sustainable native woodland cover or restoring peatlands.

Successful rural businesses supporting sustainable tourism
A Wales that is renowned across the UK and internationally for its high-quality environment, rich wildlife, heritage assets and exceptional tourist offering.

Image credits: shrill carder bee, © Dave Goulson, wildflower meadow, © rspb-images.com

What we want the Welsh Government to do

There is increasing consensus that the principles of sustainability must apply to all land management to ensure the best future in Wales for everyone. Public money should only be made available for delivery of public benefits. We urge the Welsh Government to apply the principles of sustainable development and natural resource management, now enshrined in Welsh law, to develop a new integrated and sustainable land management policy for Wales to provide for future generations.

Working within the framework of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, any new Welsh Government policy should:

- support **a more resilient Wales** by prioritising long-term targets to halt and reverse the loss of species and habitats, and restoring functioning ecosystems that are able to adapt to the impacts of climate change
- support **a more equal Wales** by introducing requirements for sustainability equally across all land use sectors
- support **a low carbon economy and global responsibility** by encouraging and enabling all land use sectors to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions
- support **a healthier Wales** by providing outstanding public access to the countryside and promoting healthy diets
- devise incentives for land managers to deliver the aims and objectives of this policy, through training and innovation investment
- support **prosperous, resilient and cohesive communities** by using place-based policy approaches to land management, promoting sustainable rural businesses and providing financial support and training for land managers to become more innovative and transition to new societally beneficial markets
- support **Wales' rural culture** by celebrating and maintaining its distinctive landscapes, heritage assets and promoting, where appropriate, the return of traditional land management skills and crafts
- regularly monitor and report outcomes to the National Assembly for Wales

Wales Environment Link (WEL) is a network of environmental, countryside and heritage Non-Governmental Organisations in Wales, most of whom have an all-Wales remit. WEL is a respected intermediary body, connecting the government and the environmental NGO sector in Wales. Our vision is a healthy, sustainably managed environment and countryside with safeguarded heritage in which the people of Wales and future generations can prosper.

This position statement represents the consensus view of a group of WEL members working in this specialist area.