

Land

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Scotland's land is a fundamental asset. We grow food and timber on it; we build our houses and roads over it; much of our water filters through and is purified by it; it stores carbon; and it supports a range of habitats and species, some of which are internationally important. Wetlands are found all over the country, with around 1,600 million tonnes of carbon stored in their peat soil.

Most of our land is used for more than one purpose. For example, 80% of our land is used for agriculture, but some of this land is rough grazing, which may also support deer and grouse populations and contain areas of water.

Almost all of our land has been shaped by human activity, over many centuries.

State

Scotland's rocks, landforms and soils are the foundation of our wildlife, landscape and cultural heritage. Due to the diversity of rock types and environmental conditions, Scotland has a wide range of soils. These are a vital natural resource, providing a range of benefits, such as growing food and trees, filtering impurities from water and storing carbon (over 3,000 million tonnes).

The condition of habitats in Scotland varies. Two-thirds of farmland habitats are in favourable or recovering condition, and many upland habitats are beginning to improve as action is taken to protect and manage them. Numbers of some farmland birds and insects are falling, and some species associated with upland habitats are also declining.

Most wetlands within protected sites are in favourable condition, except for lowland raised bogs, of which 59% are in unfavourable condition. We have little information about wetlands outside protected areas.

By 2013, 18% of Scotland was covered by woodland – an increase from only 4.5% at the beginning of the 20th century. As a result of human influence and climate change, no woodlands in Scotland can be considered truly natural. Likewise, most of the uplands have been modified through grazing, drainage, forest planting and deposition of pollutants from the atmosphere, and near-natural habitats are now rare.

Scotland's land is very important to the economy; agriculture, forestry and tourism based on the enjoyment of Scotland's landscapes and its historic environment make significant contributions. Agriculture is vital to our rural communities, providing much-needed jobs and contributing to the rural economy, although many agricultural activities are only economically viable because of external support payments.

In the last five years the biggest transformation of our landscapes has taken place through wind-farm development and gradual changes as a result of built development. Changes in farming and forestry practice are also altering our landscape.

Challenges

The main challenges relate to:

- land use – what we decide to use the land for;
- land management – how we manage, maintain and, where possible, improve the land.

Response

Our land requires careful management: ensuring it is kept in a good state is vital for the sustainability of the environment as a whole. The Land Use Strategy provides a framework to help balance the many demands on our land, and we need to involve local communities more in making decisions about how we use the land.

You can also find out about [Scotland's land](#) with our animated infographic.

What is it?

[Landscape](#) - Our landscapes provide a range of benefits. Our wild upland and coastal landscapes are internationally renowned and inspire people who live here as well as visitors. Not all of our landscape is such high quality, and it all requires careful management.

[Rocks and landforms](#) - Scotland's rocks and landforms provide a range of benefits and help us to understand how the Earth has evolved. Our protected Earth science features are almost all in good condition, but we know little about the state of rocks and landforms outside protected sites.

[Soils](#) - Scotland's soils are diverse and rich in carbon; they are a vital natural resource providing a range of essential benefits and need to be protected. We have good information about some soil properties in some parts of the country. However, there is a lack of trend data.

[Wetlands](#) - Scotland's wetlands are home to a wide range of plants and animals. They also provide important environmental functions such as storing carbon and sustaining the supply of clean water.

Benefits and uses

[Crops and livestock](#) - Scotland produces a range of crops and livestock. Our agricultural industry provides the basic ingredients for our food and drink industry, and is important for our health, environment and economy – particularly in our rural communities.

[Fossil fuels and minerals](#) - Scotland has a wide range of geological resources that make a major contribution to the economy. They are used in the energy, construction and manufacturing industries and need to be carefully managed to ensure they are available for future generations.

[Timber and forestry products](#) - Our forests and woodlands provide a range of benefits, such as wood for construction and fuel, removing CO₂ from the atmosphere, rural employment and a space for recreation.

Wildlife

[Farmland](#) - Scotland's farmland is highly varied and contains a wide range of habitats for wildlife. However, populations of some birds and insects are in decline. Intensive land management is the main challenge to farmland wildlife.

[Mountains and uplands](#) - Scotland's uplands contain our wildest places and some of our rarest plants and animals. The condition of many upland habitats is beginning to improve as action is taken to protect and manage them.

[Woodlands and forests](#) - Scotland's woodlands and forests support a wide range of important plants and animals. For wildlife, our woodlands are in a moderately good condition now and are likely to improve in the future.