



Scottish Forum on Natural Capital

Land management & natural capital



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A new focus

Land managers are among the most important stewards of natural capital. It's a topic of growing importance globally and one in which Scotland has **played a leading international role** in recent years. In 2015 the Scottish Government highlighted the importance of natural capital in *Scotland's Economic Strategy*, which states that: "Protecting and enhancing natural capital is **fundamental to a healthy and resilient economy**. It also supports sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, tourism and renewables."

Scottish Forum on Natural Capital

Launched in 2013 at the inaugural World Forum on Natural Capital in Edinburgh, the Scottish Forum on Natural Capital, brings **together public, private and voluntary sector organisations to protect and rebuild Scotland's natural capital**.

Scottish Forum Founding partners:



Scottish Wildlife Trust



ICAS



Natural capital defined

Natural capital can be defined as: "the stocks of natural assets which include geology, soil, air, water and all living things".

It is from this natural capital that humans derive a wide range of services, often called ecosystem services, which **make human life possible**.

The huge variety of ecosystem services include

- Provision of the food we eat and the water we drink
- Plant materials we use for fuel, building materials and medicine
- Regulation of the climate through the billions of tonnes of carbon stored by peatlands
- Natural flood defences provided by forests and wetlands.
- The pollination of crops by insects
- Natural pest management by birds and insects
- Inspiration from iconic landscapes and wildlife.
- Health benefits from visits to greenspaces

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Why take note

With natural capital, like with financial capital, when we draw down too much from our stock we run up a debt which needs to be repaid.

Scotland's Natural Capital Asset Index shows a **significant relative decline in our stocks of natural capital since the 1950s** whilst GDP has risen substantially. It could be surmised that we have focused on short-term financial success without significant re-investment in the natural capital assets that make this success possible.

Land management can both protect and enhance natural capital. However, it also has the potential to significantly degrade natural capital. Poorly managed natural capital is not only environmental liability, but a social and economic liability too.

There are **increasing signs of strain** directly associated with the management of natural capital, for example **flood impacts** and siltation associated with changes in tree cover and simplification of watercourses, **fish death from eutrophication** from the use of fertilisers on **degraded soils** and water discoloration and sediment load from peatland erosion leading to **higher water management costs**.

The future

If we take a more holistic management based approach in Scotland it is possible to achieve benefits such as alleviation of flood impact, improved soil quality and restored peatlands, leading to better economic, social and environmental outcomes.

There is increasing recognition of the need to align all aspects of public policy to protect and enhance natural capital. For land managers this will mean greater emphasis on delivering environmental outcomes in connection with all policy areas: economic, planning, agricultural, forestry, historic environment, tourism and landscape-scale management.

Key to making the alignment of these policies work practically is Scotland's Land Use Strategy, which aims to drive action at the landscape scale by identifying land use patterns that can deliver multiple objectives. Cooperation and dialogue across sectors will be increasingly important and we invite you to join us in our collective effort.

Membership of the Scottish Forum is free.

To find out more, please contact:

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