



CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

1.1 Wester Ross NSA

1.1.1 Wester Ross has long been recognised as one of the most scenic parts of Scotland and this was formally acknowledged in the early 1980s with the accolade of National Scenic Area status being applied to a large swathe of the area. Wester Ross National Scenic Area (*Sgìre Bòidhchead Nàiseanta Rois an Iar*) is the largest NSA in Scotland covering 145, 300 hectares (approximately 60km by 38km), running from Little Loch Broom in the north to Kishorn in the south, and from the coastal edge in the west to An Teallach and Glen Docherty in the east (see Map 1).

1.1.2 The area combines six of the great mountain groups of Scotland with a superbly varied and intricate coastline. It is the juxtaposition of the mountain and the coast that fully conveys the outstanding scenic beauty of Wester Ross.

1.1.3 The NSA embraces a diversity of landscapes from the soaring mass of the peaks which offer a sustained crescendo of mountain scenery, through the myriad lochs and burns that fleck the open moorland and hill to the intricate, indented coastline that twists and turns its way from sea loch to headland and back to sea loch. The scenic qualities are found throughout these outstanding landscapes from the wild rugged mountains which impressively dominate views through expansive vast views over loch, hill and sea to the coast where the scenic qualities are displayed in the detail of the beaches, small islands and headlands and in the land use and settlement pattern of the crofting settlements and sheltered fishing harbours.

1.1.4 The names of individual features, many of which remain in the Gaelic, will for many vividly evoke the magnificence and beauty of the scenery: Ben Damph, Beinn Alligin, Slioch, A' Mhaighdean, Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair, Beinn Dearg Mor, An Teallach, Beinn Eighe, Beinn Bhan, Bealach na Ba, Gruinard Bay, Loch Gairloch, Loch Maree, Loch Torridon, Fionn Loch, Loch Ewe. The list could continue, with places and views that encapsulate the splendour and scenic beauty of the Wester Ross NSA.

1.1.5 The appreciation of Wester Ross as a beautiful landscape goes back at least 200 years when tourists such as Boswell began travelling to the area. Today the area maintains its appeal, attracting visitors from far and wide to what is considered by many to be the quintessential Scottish landscape.

1.2 National Background

1.2.1 In 1998 – 1999 at the request of then Scottish Office Ministers SNH undertook a review of the National Scenic Area (NSA) designation. This considered:

- ◆ how the operation of the NSA designation could be made more effective, with proposals for re-establishing its basis in statute;
- ◆ whether the present suite of 40 NSAs should be expanded to include other kinds of landscapes not currently represented, particularly in the lowlands and coastal areas;

- ◆ the relationship between NSAs and any future National Park designation; and
- ◆ the relationship between the NSA and other, local, scenic designations.

1.2.2 SNH published its advice in October 1999, which focused on the need to improve the effectiveness of the existing series of 40 NSAs. One recommendation was the preparation of a Management Strategy by local authorities for each NSA. SNH recognised that further thinking on strategies was required and therefore proposed establishing two pilot projects, one in Wester Ross and one in Dumfries and Galloway.

1.3 Wester Ross NSA Project

1.3.1 The project was established by The Highland Council and Scottish Natural Heritage in February 2001 with the appointment of a temporary project officer.

1.3.2 The aims of the pilot project were to:

- ◆ prepare a Management Strategy in an eighteen month period;
- ◆ involve and engage the local community in the process of preparing the Management Strategy;
- ◆ raise awareness of the designation and gain a greater understanding of the landscape of the NSA;
- ◆ define the qualities of the NSA using a robust methodology; and
- ◆ enable those with an interest in the NSA to contribute to the Management Strategy.

1.4 Outline of the Process

1.4.1 A Project Officer was appointed in February 2001 and an office was established in Gairloch within the NSA. The officer reported to a Management Group that guided and supported the work on a day to day basis.

1.4.2 A Steering Group comprising a mix of local community representatives and organisations with an active interest in the Wester Ross NSA was formed and met at key points over the 19 months. This included some national bodies as well as local representatives (see Appendix 5 for membership and purpose). The Steering Group acted as an initial sounding board and discussion forum for development of the Management Strategy and

advised on priorities for the work of the project and content of the strategy.

1.4.3 To introduce the project and gain initial ideas about priorities and issues for the strategy to focus on, a series of community workshops were held at venues across the project area in the first three months. Similar workshops were held as part of the formal consultation.

1.4.4 A set of issue based Topic Working Groups were set up and run over a four month period to offer detailed input into the strategy. These groups comprised a mix of individuals from the local community along with representatives from agencies, the Highland Council and organisations with an active interest in the area. The material from these working groups formed the basis of the strategy.

1.4.5 A detailed analysis of the scenic qualities was undertaken by an external consultant.

1.4.6 Throughout the 19 months the Project Officer and chair of the Steering Group gave presentations and took part in discussions at a range of meetings both within the community of the NSA and also with key organisations and bodies with an active interest in the NSA.

1.4.7 Two periods of consultation were undertaken: first a Working Paper was circulated widely for informal comment. This was accompanied by a series of one to one meetings with key interests and discussion with most of the community councils in the area. Secondly and following this the draft Management Strategy was circulated for an eleven-week formal consultation period.

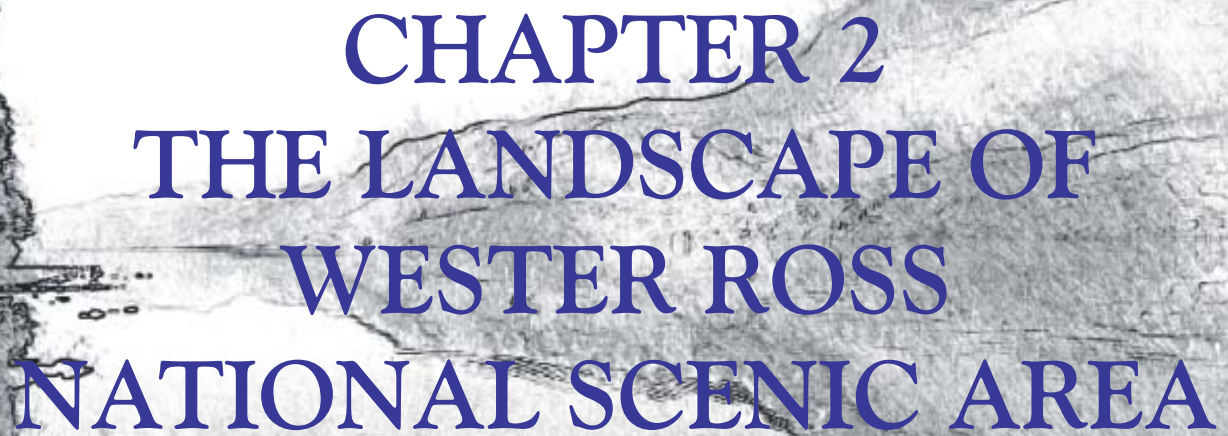
1.5 Relationship with Other Documents and Plans

1.5.1 This Management Strategy has been prepared as part of a national pilot to demonstrate the opportunities and resources required that would arise from more active management of the Wester Ross National Scenic Area. It is envisaged that the Management Strategy will in time secure the endorsement of the main partners and the local community to be used to guide effective and proactive management of the landscape and scenery of Wester Ross. It will sit alongside and inform the local plan, structure plan and community planning

process and it is hoped offer guidance to decision makers and funders active in the area as well as giving voice and shape to some strongly held community aspirations and projects.

1.5.2 Its success depends on its ability to engage and influence key organisations active in the NSA such as the newly formed Wester Ross Alliance and public bodies such as the Crofters Commission as well as individual landowners and the local community.

1.5.3 The NSA designation currently brings with it some additional national guidance in the form of planning policy guidance notes (NPPGs) and regulation under the Town and Country Planning System. This Management Strategy does not alter this existing guidance. Other statutory guidance and procedures remain unaffected.



CHAPTER 2

THE LANDSCAPE OF WESTER ROSS NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 Each individual will respond to landscapes in a different way but there are certain types of scenery (*Seallaidhean*) that are generally and profoundly recognised by most people to be of a high scenic quality.

2.1.2 The landscape (*Sealladh na Tìre*) of Wester Ross NSA is widely acknowledged to be outstanding and deserving of the accolade as a National Scenic Area. It was identified by the former Countryside Commission for Scotland through a systematic comparative process that aimed to identify “.....areas of unsurpassed attractiveness which must be conserved as part of our national heritage” (Appendix 1. Extract from Scotland’s Scenic Heritage and outline of designation history).

2.1.3 To fully understand why the landscape of Wester Ross NSA is so widely recognised for its outstanding scenery (*Seallaidhean Sònraichte*), three aspects need to be considered and described - landscape character, scenic qualities and wildness. The basic building block is the landscape’s character which has evolved over time in response to natural processes and human influence. This provides the physical fabric which we all perceive and from which the qualities of scenery and wildness are derived. Through knowledge of each of these overlapping layers an understanding of the important features in the landscape and the management needs of the area can be gained.

2.2 Landscape Character

2.2.1 The character (*Coltas na Tìre*) of Wester Ross can be described in a systematic way through the process of Landscape Character Assessment. This is a well-used methodology that identifies the distinct recognisable and consistent patterns of elements in the landscape that make one area different from another.

2.2.2 In 1999 Scottish Natural Heritage published the Ross and Cromarty Landscape Character Assessment (see Appendix 3). This identifies 14 different landscape character types in Wester Ross NSA and describes the key characteristics in each. This landscape character map and description enable us to understand better how the landscape has evolved and to identify those elements within it which contribute to individual character. This has proved to be an invaluable tool when considering changes that will affect the landscape.

2.2.3 The cultural evolution of the landscape of Wester Ross NSA and the contribution that previous land use makes to the area is described in the Historic Landuse Assessment (HLA) of Wester Ross. This assessment has been carried out during the preparation of this Management Strategy by Historic Scotland and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. Much of the findings of the HLA have been incorporated into this Management Strategy and adds to our understanding of the landscape character.

2.2.4 In comparison to other parts of the UK, archaeological fieldwork has been limited in Wester Ross and thus the recorded finds and evidence can only suggest conclusions and hint at what was there in the past. Nonetheless the landscape of Wester Ross shows evidence of a long history of settlement and previous human use over much of it, whether in the form of individual artefacts and remains or the pattern of landuse. This settlement and use has expanded and contracted as economic and social changes have occurred and with each change a different physical imprint has been left in the landscape.

2.2.5 The area contains a range of landscape types which are clearly different from each other and often extensive in their occurrence but are rarely experienced individually. It is the juxtaposition and combination of one landscape type with another that is fundamental to the appreciation of the scenery of Wester Ross.

2.2.6 Wester Ross is a strongly defined and readily identifiable landscape. Landforms are clear and bold, from rugged moorland to mountain summit, from inland loch to coast and offshore island. Vegetation is generally simple and low, revealing the structure of the landform and the construction of the geology beneath. Pattern and diversity show themselves in this landscape through the shape of landforms, variety of colours and visible geology. Apparent obvious modern human use of the land is limited and has produced small-scale and detailed landscapes set within the larger context.

2.2.7 Mountain massifs are surrounded by tracts of smooth and rocky moorland with long, deep sea lochs penetrating deep into this jigsaw of mountain and moorland. Lochs of widely varying sizes occur, from the myriad of tiny lochans sitting in hollows to the significant open water of the larger lochs such as those found in Fisherfield, Letterewe and Shildaig forests. Loch Maree dominates the centre of this area.

2.2.8 The rugged and broken coastline stretches around this mountain and fjord complex, interspersed with sheltered enclosed bays, rocky headlands and a scattering of islands. The lived-in landscapes of coast, glen and strath are set within the vastness of the mountain and moorland backdrop and the open panorama of the sea.

2.3 Scenic Qualities

2.3.1 The scenic qualities (*Seallaidhean Bòidheach*) are those aspects of the landscape that are generally considered to be beautiful or appealing. Unlike character, these qualities are not an intrinsic element of the landscape, but depend on an individual's perception. In Wester Ross it is our visual awareness of the composition of the main components of the landscape, our appreciation of the quality of light, our sense of space and interpretation of height and scale, and our ability to move through the landscape from one view to another which all combine to create recognisable and valued scenic qualities. Together these produce the scenery, that is, our aesthetic interpretation of the landscape.

2.3.2 As part of developing this Management Strategy, the scenic qualities of Wester Ross were studied and described. This involved developing a new methodology and is fundamental to our understanding of why the landscape holds special appeal (see Appendix 4 for more detail).

The qualities identified as making Wester Ross a particularly scenic landscape are:

- ◆ expansive space and distance (*Farsaingeachd 's Astaran Mòra*);
- ◆ sense of height and vertical scale (*Mothachadh air Àirde 's Scèile Dhìreach*);
- ◆ uneven shape (*Cruth Stacach*);
- ◆ indented coastline (*Oirthir Eagach*);
- ◆ sense of mass (*Mothachadh air Tomad*);
- ◆ sense of naturalness (*Mothachadh air Nàdarrachd*) and
- ◆ richness of detail (*Iomadh Seòrsa Seallaidh*).

2.3.3 The mountains give a great **sense of height and vertical scale**, especially when viewed from close quarters and have a tangible **sense of mass**.



Sense of Height and Vertical Scale



Sense of Mass

2.3.4 The moorland and open stretches of coast provide wide open views and an opportunity to experience a sense of **expansive space and distance**. The tendency of this landscape to appear as layers with multiple horizons receding into the distance often reinforced by cloud or mist, emphasises a sense of distance.



Expansive Space and Distance

2.3.5 The **uneven shapes** of mountain, ridge and rocky moorland provide a landscape and horizons that are richly varied, intricate, bold, unpredictable and exciting. The **uneven shapes** of the **indented coastline** are similarly varied, in places intricate and in places bold. Outlining the land, the coastline provides a dynamic edge and often dramatic focus in this landscape.



Uneven Shapes



Indented Coastline

2.3.6 Much of the mountain, moorland and coast of Wester Ross is dominated by landform and landcover that appears little modified by man. Here **a sense of naturalness** and natural processes can be experienced.



Sense of Naturalness

2.3.7 Within the tracts of mountain, moorland and coast there are nooks and crannies that are **rich in detail**, smaller scale landscapes overlaying the large; gully and coastal woodlands; outcrops and cliffs of rock; lochans, rivers, gorges and waterfalls; a cluster of buildings around the head of a small bay, a harbour settlement or a crofting township. These all add colour, human scale, texture, activity and interest.



Richness of Detail

2.3.8 In themselves these qualities give only the basis from which the appreciation of beauty is derived. It is the way in which these qualities combine in space as a **composition** (static viewer), or in time as a sequence of qualities and compositions (moving viewer) that the true scenic splendour of Wester Ross resides. The ever changing conditions of season, weather and light over this landscape can highlight or hide individual qualities resulting in an incredibly simple or stark contrasting experience or one of indescribable depth and complexity. A fleeting glimpse of a seasonal phenomenon experienced in the grandeur of this setting can stay with the observer for a lifetime.

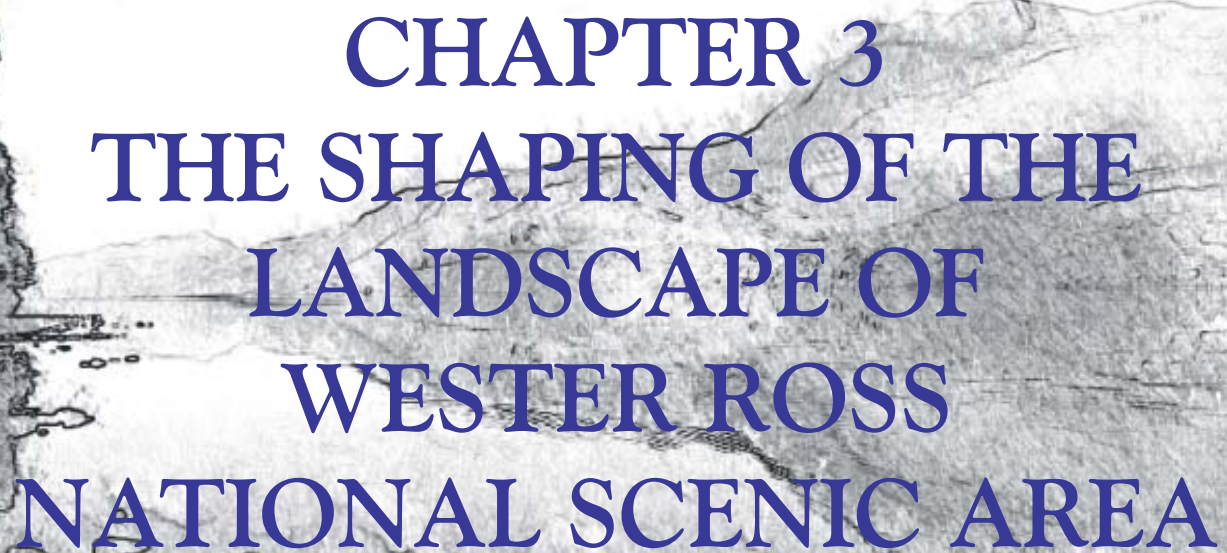
2.3.9 From this it will be appreciated that scenic qualities are complex, changing and sometimes transitory attributes. On approaching the Wester Ross NSA from the east the landscape changes with a dramatic backdrop of distinctively shaped mountains such as An Teallach appearing behind the rolling hills and moors. From the south the lower and more regularly shaped hills of Strathcarron and gravel terraces of Achnasheen give way to the dramatic and rugged peaks of the Torridons. From the sea, these individualistic mountains are seen across the sea lochs and minches that reach in between the land masses and separate Wester Ross from the island complexes of Skye and the Summer Isles.

2.3.10 Where the viewer is located within the landscape will influence the relative intensity of these qualities and affect the scenic experience. On the mountain top the sense of space, scale and distance will be uppermost, with an appreciation of sense of mass, uneven shapes and the coast and richness of detail in the distance. In the narrow through-glens the sense of vertical height, scale and mass will be uppermost. How the viewer is moving through the landscape will dictate the way these scenic qualities come together and influence the scenic experience over time. For many the appeal of Wester Ross NSA and its landscape lies in the sense of arrival felt on reaching the settlements after travelling through remote and unoccupied lands, whether coming into the area by foot or vehicle, whether seeing the area as a visitor or returning home. How the viewer is moving through the landscape will dictate the way these scenic qualities come together and influence the scenic experience over time.

2.4 Quality of Wildness

2.4.1 The sense of wildness (***Mothachadh air Fàsaich***) is separate from but complementary to the scenic qualities described above. It draws from the character of the landscape, and depends on an individual's perception of and preferences for landscapes of this kind. For most people, Wester Ross is recognised for the experience of wildness that some of the area offers and the extensive areas of wild land that it contains. The NSA designation has been recognised as a means for safeguarding and managing this quality.

2.4.2 However, the perception and understanding of wildness varies. For some it appears wholly natural, when in fact much has been modified or influenced by human uses. Although many recognise wildness as an important quality of Wester Ross, some are uncomfortable with the implications of its identification and management for those that live and work locally. The actions in this strategy aim to inform this debate and seek a resolution that satisfies both national and local interests. Further discussion and description of wildness is contained in section 3.3.



CHAPTER 3

THE SHAPING OF THE LANDSCAPE OF WESTER ROSS NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

3.1 Natural Influences

Geology

3.1.1 The geology of Wester Ross is relatively simple for the size of area covered, but represents some of the most visible and apparent geology in the British Isles, being clearly evident today in the land form and exposed rocks. It has strongly influenced the development of landforms, soil types and vegetation cover and has also influenced the character of the settled areas at the most basic level by determining their physical limits and by the use of local stone in ancient brochs, more recent drystone dykes, shielings and housing construction.

3.1.2 The description that is often used and which to a major extent typifies the geology of Wester Ross is of sedimentary Torridonian sandstone overlying Lewisian gneiss with shattered Cambrian quartzite caps on the high peaks. The Moine Thrust has also had a profound influence on the geology on the eastern part of the area. Subsequent marine and glacial erosions and depositions have modified the geology to give the present day landforms.

3.1.3 Wester Ross is renowned for its evident and obvious surface geology. The landscape on a summer's evening appears to glow pink as the sun catches the exposed sandstone and gneiss. The bedrock is readily apparent throughout the area as it appears through the thin vegetation cover as flat weathered outcrops in the moorland, or steeply terraced and still crumbling cliffs on the hills. Evidence of folding and faulting activity can be seen in the exposed faces of sea cliffs and inland faces.

Geomorphology

3.1.4 The extensive periods of glacial and marine activity on the rocks of Wester Ross have produced one of the most dramatic scenic areas of the UK. Inland the action of glaciers and weathering on the thick layer of Torridonian sediments have worn back to the gneiss leaving steep cliffs that rise almost vertically, classically shaped u-shaped glacial valleys, steep sided coires, gentle glens and flat bottomed straths. The quartzite caps have been all but eroded away and shattered to leave quartzite screes dusting the peaks and isolated pockets on the lower areas. There are numerous lochs and lochans in the area resulting from glacial activity, simple accumulation of water in hollows and the natural damming of rivers and burns. Many of these lochs have characteristic small islands within them.

3.1.5 The open hill gives way to more gently sloping glens, and where rich alluvial deposits have accumulated we see today wide farmed straths. The open hill of the area is interspersed with outcrops of gneiss and vertical outcrops and exposures, whilst glacial erratics litter many inland ridges.

3.1.6 The coastline is a highly indented "fjord-like" complex linking a series of glaciated valleys that contain deep sea lochs. The linking parts of the coast are often gently rounded headlands of sedimentary rocks that have been eroded by the action of the sea. In places where the valleys meet the sea the resulting rocks are more incised and jagged with faults and cracks. On the coastal headlands of Rubha Reidh and Greenstone Point there are stacks, caves, blowholes and arches.

Throughout the area there are small rocky islands, which lie close off-shore.

3.1.7 Raised beaches are a feature of the area, sitting as flat platforms usually adjacent to present day sandy crescent shaped beaches enclosed by chains of rocks.

Hydrology

3.1.8 The hydrology of Wester Ross is intrinsically linked to the rainfall and topography and fundamentally affects the landscape character.

3.1.9 The area is characterised by many short, steep catchments, which respond rapidly to rainfall creating significant and rapid runoff. This results in many of the water systems being highly responsive to rainfall and demonstrating rapid and dramatic variations in water levels.

3.1.10 In much of the area where there are shallow soils and surface exposure of bedrock this leads to a highly characteristic display of temporary waterfalls and streamlets running off the hills during and immediately after rain.

3.1.11 However there are also significant water bodies which buffer the effect of the rainfall, such as Loch Maree. Here the impact of the variable rainfall takes longer to manifest itself, due to the large volumes of water retained. These water systems react very slowly to rainfall and run-off.

3.1.12 The water systems of Wester Ross NSA are relatively free from artificial influences such as hydro development, canalisation and abstractions.

Climate

3.1.13 The oceanic climate of Wester Ross is characterised by high rainfall, low average temperatures, frequent strong winds and highly localised climate variation. The temperatures are relatively stable throughout the year and are higher than would be expected at such latitude due to the warming currents of the North Atlantic Drift, which sweeps up the coast.

3.1.14 The mountainous relief creates large areas of shaded land and the varying altitude creates dramatically different microclimates, from the sheltered coastal inlet to the north facing and exposed peaks. The low position of the sun in this northerly region results in short winter days; these are compensated by long summer days with extended periods of twilight at either end of the day.

3.1.15 In north facing coires the low ground temperatures will often mean that snow will linger at high altitudes until early summer.

3.1.16 A consistent stream of westerly Atlantic depressions hit the West Coast and lift over the mountains and hills of Wester Ross. They tend to be fast moving leading to rapidly changing weather conditions on the ground. It is said locally you can experience a whole year's weather conditions in one day. The exposed coasts, open moorland and outcrops and peaks provide good vantage points to watch both the changing weather coming in from the west and the stunning sunrises and sunsets which are for many characteristics hall marks of Wester Ross.

3.1.17 Prevailing cloud with a low base often shrouds the hills and coast, altering the perception of scale and distance. Peaks and hills disappear from view leaving an apparently flattened landscape, and navigation on the roads, sea and hills becomes more difficult and potentially hazardous.

3.1.18 On the west coast the unpredictable conditions of the maritime climate lead to relatively gradual seasonal changes which is most noticeably reflected in the vegetation, where colours linger, adding to the intensity of the scenic qualities.

Soils

3.1.19 The soils of Wester Ross are generally poor, containing a high proportion of inorganic material and existing as thin layers over the bedrock. Complexes of peat and bog are found where the organic component is higher. This gives rise to a highly characteristic feature of the Wester Ross landscape where the layers and outcrops of sandstone and gneiss rock show through the covering vegetation to give the land its texture.

3.1.20 In the straths and crofting areas, successive generations of people have worked to improve the soil through removal of stone, tillage, drainage and additions of organic matter. This improvement has involved intense activity and effort. In the nineteenth century soil ballast was brought over from Ireland and carted to individual crofts and holdings to provide highly productive soils. More local sources of organic material are derived from seaweed collection and mulching.

Habitats and Wildlife

3.1.21 The area has a diverse range of habitats (*Àrainn 's Fìadh-bheatha*), including moorland, heathland, blanket bog, Caledonian pinewood, oak and ash woodlands, freshwater and marine. Many of these habitats are of international importance and protected through their designation as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserves (NNR) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC).

3.1.22 The area is rich in native woodlands of many types. The most widespread type is birchwood; pinewoods such as those found at Coulin and Beinn Eighe are also well represented. The pinewoods represent the most northerly and westerly pinewood distribution in Scotland and contain a highly characteristic flora and fauna including several rare mosses and lichens. Oakwoods such as those found at Letterewe on the northern shores of Loch Maree are amongst the northernmost in Scotland and are notable for large numbers of rare mosses and liverworts. Pine martens are to be found in woodland throughout the area.

3.1.23 The high rainfall and hard rocks of the area create a landscape with many freshwater lochs and rivers. These water systems tend to be low in nutrients and free of pollution. These habitats support a diverse range of flora and fauna, a number of which are of international and national importance. The freshwater habitats of Loch Maree and the lochs within the Fisherfield Forest support internationally important concentrations of breeding black-throated divers. These are protected through SAC and Special Protection Area designation. The Little Gruinard river is a SAC for salmon whilst some of the other rivers support internationally important populations of the rare freshwater pearl mussel. Otters can sometimes be seen in rivers, lochs and sea.

3.1.24 The rivers flow into deep sea lochs which often reach far inland and beneath the water lies a wealth of life which is usually hidden to our eyes. The shallow sills of these fjordic sea lochs create tidal rapids supporting rich communities of marine life such as maerl beds and horse mussels.

3.1.25 The summits of the hills seem to consist of bare rock and scree but closer inspection reveals a low lying mat of hardy mosses, sedges and dwarf shrubs such as crowberry and juniper. The climate at these high altitudes is harsh but birds such as ptarmigan will breed on these summits.

3.1.26 Lower down the slopes a mosaic of heathlands grows, the drier areas dominated by common heather which provides a dark covering to the moors and a spectacular flowering in late summer. The poorer drained slopes support communities of cross-leaved heath, sedges and mosses. In the very wettest areas, blanket bogs full of hepatics grow over an accumulating mass of peat. The bog pools create a spectacular patterned effect, best appreciated when viewed from the hill tops or air.

3.1.27 The large areas of moorland and peatlands support birds of prey such as golden eagles and occasionally sea eagles can be seen. Within the woodlands, many common birds such as chaffinches and some rarer species such as crossbills can be found.

3.1.28 In the past, mixed cultivation of crops, hay, cattle and sheep would have created valuable habitats especially for birds such as the corncrake within crofting areas. Although the level of cultivation has declined the crofting areas still provide habitats for nesting wading birds.

3.2 Human Influences

Archaeology

3.2.1 Artefacts found in the area suggest that Wester Ross has been settled for the last 8 000 years, although the visible evidence that shows today on the ground are remains from more recent eras of settlement. Survey and field work in Wester Ross has been limited over the years and there remains much research to be carried out.

3.2.2 Although there are fewer signs of activity on the higher slopes of the hills, the lower slopes are rich in remains stretching back from the post medieval period to prehistory. Both hut circles and field systems have been found along with mesolithic rock shelters mainly in coastal locations, but further examples inland may remain to be discovered by future research.

3.2.3 Various abandoned townships are located on the coasts and glens throughout the area, with the hinterland of these townships still holding their traditional grazing potential and remains of shielings can still be seen.

3.2.4 Prehistoric settlement can be seen in the remnants of the roundhouses. These are visible today as low circles of stone about 8-13metres in

diameter. A ring of posts with rafters would have supported a conical roof. With the Viking settlers came a new style of building consisting mainly of turf. The buildings had short life spans and were recycled back into the ground, so little evidence survives in the landscape.

3.2.5 By the 18th and 19th centuries, stone was being used to build rectangular houses. Small fields were constructed for growing crops using a run rig system. This was a series of narrow strips that allowed areas of thin soil to be cultivated. Evidence of run rig systems can still be seen today and were still being used within living memory in some localised areas. Turf dykes were also used to delineate the land boundaries. To protect the crops and secure maximum benefit from the grazing available in the hills, stock was moved to summer pastures where small shielings were built for summer herders. Alongside these shielings gathering and sorting enclosures for the stock were often built. Evidence of these can be seen throughout Wester Ross in sheltered glens and in the hills.

3.2.6 The use of the run-rig system as a major land use disappeared from the area by the 1860s and over the next 20 years or so the land was divided into tenanted crofts and sheep farms.

3.2.7 The area around Loch Ewe was used extensively by the military during WW II and many remains of Nissan Huts, gun emplacements and pill boxes can be found.

Crofting

3.2.8 Crofting (*Croitearachd*) is an important part of the life and history of Wester Ross and contributes as one of the defining characteristics of the landscape and scenery. It is found primarily in the coastal strip but is also inland, for example at Kinlochewe. Many of the coastal crofting settlements were established during the Highland Clearances, although evidence suggests that many crofting settlements were laid out on top of older pre-improvement townships. Now crofting forms a distinctive land use pattern along much of the coastal strip and adjacent to the settlements and road network of the area. Today the crofts generally provide only part of the household income.

3.2.9 Two distinctive types of landscape have resulted from crofting. **Linear Crofting** is characterised by a strong regular pattern of clearly ordered crofting strips extending from the upper moorland down to the coastal edge. This pattern is

re-inforced by the repetition of certain features such as byres and field boundaries. The houses often show similar orientations to their neighbours and reflect the direction of the prevailing winds. This character type is strongly influenced by the coast and the sea.

3.2.10 **Scattered Crofting** is found throughout the area usually on irregular undulating ground slightly away from the coast. It has a complex pattern arising from a diverse mix of components such as small houses, scrub and trees, field boundaries and roads. The fields are delineated by stone walls or fences and are viewed as a series of criss-crossing lines which highlight the rolling land form.

3.2.11 Within both types there are many new houses and agricultural structures being constructed which are designed to accommodate modern living standards and land use rather than the more functional nature of the traditional crofting houses, which were designed and sited to gain maximum shelter from the prevailing weather systems. Much of this new housing contrasts in scale with the older buildings and their siting, style and design favour views and sunlight rather than shelter.

3.2.12 The crofting landscapes of Wester Ross as well as giving characteristic shape and definition to much of the coastal strip also contain many ruined or abandoned crofts, dwellings and byres along with neglected drainage and undergrazing, reduced grassland management and cropping, which all combine to give an air of neglect and abandonment in some parts of the area.

Woodlands

3.2.13 Woodlands (*Coilltean*), trees and forestry form locally important features within Wester Ross, from the individual rowan and shelter trees associated with many of the croft houses through the native Caledonian forests to the more recently established productive forest. In recent years the increase in restoration and expansion of native woodlands are becoming trademarks of the Wester Ross landscape. Importantly, there are significant remnants of older Caledonian pinewoods such as those at Shildaig, Loch Maree and Coulin as well as scattered remnants of predominately birch and willow. Some of these are associated with the pinewoods while others are often associated with coastal sea-lochs and bays, inland lochs and rivers and with steep inaccessible slopes. These are woods which have survived various land use changes largely because they were used in industrial

processes and had benefits to society, and consequently, are important features in the landscape.

3.2.14 There have been significant plantings of new native woodlands throughout the Applecross Forest area and at Shildaig and Torridon. In addition, many of the existing woods, both semi-natural and plantation, are being brought under active and positive management. Forests in Wester Ross are part of the backdrop for locals and tourists alike as well as providing specific recreational opportunities.

3.2.15 In and around crofting settlements trees are often an important visual feature as well as providing vital shelter for stock, with large sycamore, ash and groups of willow the common trees. Shelterbelts are often found immediately around croft houses.

3.2.16 Within Wester Ross there has been relatively limited conifer planting due mainly to prevailing climate and distance from markets and labour.

Settlements

3.2.17 The modern day inhabitants of Wester Ross live mainly in settlements (*Tuineachaidhean*), located within the coastal strips. Kinlochewe is an example of one of the exceptions sitting at the head of Loch Maree. One of the characteristics of settlement in Wester Ross is the crofting settlement, which in many cases string steadily along the coast. Away from the main settlements there are small pockets and collections of dwellings to be found inland along with the occasional isolated single dwelling. Large areas of Wester Ross are today uninhabited, although signs of pre-1800s settlement are evident in many areas.

3.2.18 The settlements date from Pictish times to modern day and reflect the population's reliance on earning their livelihood from the land and sea. Sheltered fishing harbours such as Shildaig have given rise to neatly packed villages focused tightly on the shoreline. Crofting settlements such as Mellon Charles straggle along the coast as each croft sought to secure maximum benefit from its allotted holding. Gairloch is an accumulation of several settlements around the inland bay of the sea loch and embraces a fishing harbour, old crofting lands and Victorian visitor development.

Fishing

3.2.19 Freshwater and inshore sea fishing (*Iasgach*) have been important in the area since the lands were first settled. Abandoned fish traps are found throughout the area in the shallow edges of the sea lochs. In the last 25 years the development of fish farming has added a new dimension to the economy and life of some of the sea lochs and water systems.

3.2.20 The freshwater systems of the area initially provided an extra source of food for the local population but since the Victorian era has played an important sporting role in game and coarse fishing. Many of the large estates continue to invest heavily in the managing of their river and loch systems to derive both enjoyment and income from sport fishing. In recent years they have also invested to help restore dwindling wild stocks of salmon.

3.2.21 Inshore fishing for fish and crustaceans is nowadays limited to a few small commercial operations. Until the middle of the last century most crofters would have relied on the produce of the sea to supplement their diets.

Estates

3.2.22 The majority of the land is owned and managed by large estates (*Oighreachdan*) and has been managed as integrated estate lands for the last 150 years. The estates vary considerably in size but most conform to a similar pattern of part mountain, part open hill, farmed strath and collection of tenanted crofts. On many of the estates land that would have originally been landscaped or designed as part of the policies has been given over to fields and grazing. However elements and relicts of the original design remain.

3.2.23 Many of the estates have impressive and highly individual main houses, often built on sites of much older occupancy and which probably relate to the spread of the sporting estate. These are scattered throughout the areas and date mainly from the 19th century.

3.2.24 Modern estate management is focussed primarily on the fragile economies of deer, fishing and forestry, with provision for visitors becoming a growing area of estate activity.

3.2.25 Management for deer stalking is a major consideration for several of the estates and this gives rise to the character of much of the open hill.

Stalking is let or offered and provides several estates with their basic income. Grazing and browsing pressure affects regeneration ability of much of the vegetation, especially trees. Bothies and paths were constructed across the estates, the paths often being well engineered and drained to accommodate stalking ponies.

3.2.26 The majority of estates are privately owned, however approximately 4% of the NSA is owned by Scottish Natural Heritage and Forest Enterprise and 5 % by the National Trust for Scotland.

3.2.27 Fishing for salmon and trout in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a popular sport and most rivers and freshwater systems would have been used to provide sport fishing. Estates erected bothies at key points and carefully managed the waterflows and physical characteristics of the rivers to provide good fishing conditions. Paths were created alongside many river routes and into the more popular fishing lochs, and boats are to be found on some of the larger and more remote lochs.

3.2.28 In recent years many of the estates have undertaken work to establish or regenerate significant areas of native woodland.

Industry and Communications

3.2.29 Industry is limited in the area with small-scale quarrying, iron and charcoal production the only industries other than fishing, forestry and agriculture ever being evident.

3.2.30 The Howard Doris yard at Kishorn was the site of oilrig construction between the early 1970s and the 1990s and gave a large economic boost to the communities of Lochcarron, Shieldaig and Kishorn. Today it sits as a little used industrial site in the south of the NSA.

3.2.31 Loch Ewe has been the focus for military activity since WW I and it played a major role in the North Atlantic convoys during WW II. Today it is an important fuel storage and military exercise area.

3.2.32 Physical communication by road is relatively poor and rail transport options are found only in the south of the area along Strathcarron to Achnasheen.

3.2.33 Roads have been much improved over the last 20 years and journey times to Inverness have been significantly reduced. Outwith the area, improvements to the A9 and the airport at Inverness have combined to make the whole Highlands more easily reached from other parts of the UK. Many of the A roads within the area remain single track. On the main headlands, roads characteristically skirt up both edges of the headland and end at the sea. Only the Applecross peninsula has a circular road.

3.2.34 Hydroelectric schemes at Garbhaig and Kerry are present within the area.

3.2.35 With the emergence of new technology, new businesses reliant on effective electronic communication systems are beginning to move and grow into the area.

3.2.36 Telecommunication masts are now evident at several points within the area.

3.2.37 During the 1970s exploratory drilling for copper, base metals and gold took place in the Kerrysdale area.

Recreation and Tourism

3.2.38 Wester Ross is an area where locals and visitors come to relax and enjoy themselves amongst some of the most beautiful scenery in Scotland. It is also an area which is renowned for its relative remoteness and abundance of opportunities to escape from the pressures and obvious signs of modern urban life. Increasingly visitors are travelling to Wester Ross attracted by the cultural heritage that the area has to offer.

3.2.39 The formal provision for recreation is limited, but the scope to quietly enjoy one of the most beautiful parts of the UK is immense. Paths and routes can be found throughout the area, the sea lochs provide sheltered waters for sailing and canoeing, and the roads provide some of the most spectacular driving to be found in the UK. The area contains several Munros and cars will be found at the start of their trails throughout the year. The area has few organised attractions but contains the opportunity to experience some awe inspiring views and challenging activities amidst a sparsely populated landscape.

3.2.40 Wester Ross has been a destination for tourists since the Victorian times when families came to the area to enjoy the scenery, shoot, fish,

stalk and paint. During the 20th century the area's popularity peaked in the 1970s when the area was visited by families from across the UK and Europe in the summer months staying on campsites or in Bed and Breakfasts. Over the past 30 years the pattern of tourism has changed to a much extended and less intensive season, more visitors coming into the area over Christmas and New Year, and a move towards use of holiday homes and away from Bed and Breakfast and camping. Walkers and climbers come to the area to enjoy the hills and remoter areas, and their numbers have continued to increase at a steady pace for the past 100 years or so.

Cultural Heritage

3.2.41 The cultural heritage (*Dualchas*) of an area is defined as including the structures and remains resulting from human activity of all periods, languages and traditions, ways of life and historic, artistic and literary associations of people, place and landscape.

3.2.42 Aside from the physical imprint that man and settlement has left on the landscape of Wester Ross the area has a rich legacy of traditions and way of life that persist and continue to evolve.

3.2.43 The cultural heritage of the NSA is intrinsically embedded in the close relationship of the people with the land. Included in this are the food and recipes that physically sustained previous generations, the traditional land rights and management that shaped the land, and the modern day songs and dances that celebrate the beauty and emotions derived from the landscape.

3.2.44 Stories of ghosts and fairies and spirits of the hills are prevalent and are often related to specific landscape features, settlements or routes. Poems and prose describe the land and the intense relationship of the people with the land.

3.2.45 The geographic isolation and the predominance of the Gaelic language until relatively recent times is reflected in the names given to places and landscape features.

3.2.46 The area has inspired many painters and photographers who attempt to capture the scenic qualities of the area and who are intrigued by the visual changes that are wrought by the changing weather and light as the day progresses.

3.2.47 The landscape and scenery are also captured and featured in songs, pieces of music and dances

and these continue to be written, sung, celebrated and danced today within the area at ceilidhs and in many people's homes.

3.3 Wildness

3.3.1 The concept of wild land and wildness has deep roots in our society and is not easily defined. Different people will experience a differing sense of wildness at different locations and factors such as weather and physical fitness can alter their perception. Physical attributes that contribute to the experience of wildness and which will commonly be found in wild land include:

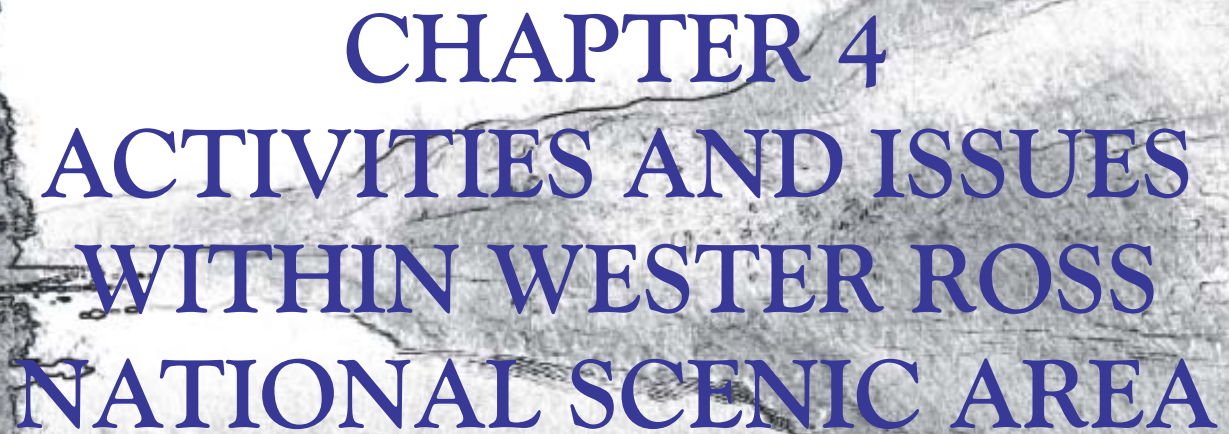
- ◆ a high degree of perceived naturalness in the setting especially in its vegetation cover and wildlife and in the natural processes affecting the land ;
- ◆ the lack of any modern or recent artefacts or structures;
- ◆ little evidence of contemporary human uses of the land;
- ◆ landform which is rugged or otherwise physically challenging; and
- ◆ remoteness and/or inaccessibility.

3.3.2 These physical attributes evoke certain responses, the most often recognised including:

- ◆ a sense of solitude or sanctuary;
- ◆ risk or for some visitors a sense of awe or anxiety, depending on the individual's response to the setting;
- ◆ perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities; and
- ◆ fulfilment from the physical challenge required penetrating into these places.

3.3.3 Much of Wester Ross, including some of the coast and mountain core, demonstrates these attributes. Fisherfield Forest is one of the most extensive and remote areas of wild land remaining in Scotland, with Shieldaig Forest, Flowerdale Forest, parts of the Applecross peninsula and the area between Coulin and Ben Damph also having smaller elements of wild land within them. Most of these wild areas are still used for an economic purpose, often grazing or deer stalking, and it should be recognised that the continuing existence of these wild areas is a result of the past and present policies of those who own or manage them. It should also be recognised that wildness in our landscape has significant economic value as one of the main attractions to visitors, whether for general tourism,

the active outdoor pursuits, for nature tourism or field sports. Much of the promotional and descriptive material for Wester Ross uses the term wild land, wilderness and wildness in promoting the area as a recreational and tourist resource.



CHAPTER 4

ACTIVITIES AND ISSUES WITHIN WESTER ROSS NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

4.1 Overview of Recent Changes affecting the Wester Ross NSA landscape

4.1.1 Over recent centuries Wester Ross has seen many changes in land use, population and economy. The last 30 years have seen acceleration to the pace of change and this looks likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

4.1.2 The decline of crofting activity has led to significant changes in the crofting landscape, with reduced cultivation, grazing and management of boundaries being the more evident signs, while the new designs and locations being chosen for houses has altered the character of much of the settled area. Invasive species such as rhododendron, bracken and knotweed are making localised and very visible appearances.

4.1.3 Changes to the management of hill areas with the reduction in sheep numbers and increased woodland regeneration and introduction of fencelines and new tracks into the hills are altering the open character of the hill.

4.1.4 Improvement to infrastructure and the erection of telecommunication masts alters views and panoramas. Road design and safety standards have led to road straightening thereby reducing the intimacy of the relationship between road and landscape.

4.1.5 The following activities have been identified as containing issues that could affect the Wester Ross NSA.

4.2 Agriculture and Crofting

4.2.1 At all levels throughout Scotland, the UK and Europe, agriculture is going through a period of fundamental reform and change. For Wester Ross this follows a period of economic and land use change in crofting and estate management.

4.2.2 The direction of land use and agricultural production in Wester Ross over the last 50 years has been heavily dependent on subsidy regimes and strong policy guidance from central government. The effect of national and international agricultural reform has yet to fully impact on Wester Ross and it is still unclear exactly how the reforms will unfold, but the changes are likely to be significant for Wester Ross and will become increasingly evident over the next 5-10 years. Thus we should be preparing for these changes in land management.

4.2.3 The Common Agricultural Policy reform is ongoing with support measures moving away from commodity support towards wider rural development and environmental measures. This shift offers opportunities for an area such as Wester Ross to benefit. Recent changes in livestock subsidy have resulted in a reduction in the number of sheep throughout the area and an intensification of cattle production on some holdings. There is an increasing trend towards planting trees as this is presently supported by an incentive scheme.

4.2.4 Many crofting areas are showing evidence of neglect and lack of management through the re-invasion of rushes, silting up of drainage ditches and collapse of drystone dykes and byres. Crofting itself

has changed with a dramatic reduction in the productive area under hay, barley and potatoes. All these changes have led to a decline in the wildlife supported by agriculture and crofting. It is often the case that only one or two crofters now actively use each common grazing and the spirit of communal management is being eroded. Crofting settlements serve increasingly as residential areas and rarely is agricultural productivity the main focus of activity. Issues such as stock on the roads and in the settlements are now raised frequently within communities. Markets and consumer preferences are changing alongside a growing awareness of animal welfare issues. The crofting system offers the potential to profit from many of these changing markets and to benefit from the increasing demand from consumers for organic and premium quality products. And despite the many changes, the crofting communities remain active and vibrant and have a critical role to play in maintaining a vital piece of the fabric of the Wester Ross landscape.

4.2.5 Within the strath areas the riverbanks are showing evidence of erosion and collapse due partly to intensive stock use but also due to natural processes and dramatic episodes of rainfall. This has implications for the health and balance of the river systems.

4.2.6 New systems and regimes for managing land within Wester Ross are beginning to emerge, ranging from horses for recreational use to the start up of small-scale intensive market gardening using polytunnels.

4.2.7 ***Key Issues for the Management Strategy***

- ◆ Level of take up of government support regimes and policy.
- ◆ Recognition of the NSA designation in agri-environmental schemes.
- ◆ Loss of crofting landscape pattern and features.

4.3 Woodlands

4.3.1 Forestry and woodland management are important and significant land uses in Wester Ross. The establishment of native woodland schemes has increased over the past few years as incentives have developed and the crofting community has sought to diversify. These native woodlands differ from productive forest and have a large environmental and relatively low economic value.

4.3.2 There are several types of woodland found in Wester Ross, from the shade and food that riparian woodlands offer to salmon rivers, the native Caledonian pine forests, to the shelterbelts that protect houses and stock and productive forestry, to the positive management and establishment of native woodlands and to the restructuring of existing forests. All have a role to play.

4.3.3 Over the last 10 years or so in Wester Ross as elsewhere there has been a trend towards native woodland establishment with few purely productive forests. Commercial objectives can still be realised with native schemes through the planting of Scots pine. Although this is on a reduced scale it is partly balanced by an increasing return to some of the traditional wood using crafts. Within the area there are a number of forests from the 1960s and 1970s which could benefit from physical and species restructuring although the economic value to owners is likely to be limited. A few plantations from the nineteenth century can still be seen.

4.3.4 For the NSA, forestry and woodland management has to take into account the potential for impact on important views, landscape character and scenic qualities. This is covered by the Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) (Scotland) Regulations 1999. There may be specific issues such as fencing, special views along tourist routes and new forest roads which require additional consideration.

4.3.5 There may also be situations where appropriately designed and located new woodlands can enhance the scenic qualities and landscape character. Woodland proposals also need to take into account the needs of the people who live and work in the area as well as those who visit through opportunities for woodland recreation and by contributing to the value of the area for tourism. In addition the management of deer numbers, other wildlife, other land uses and archaeology need to be considered.

4.3.4 ***Key Issues for the Management Strategy***

- ◆ Identifying the factors which influence woodland management within the NSA.
- ◆ Location of new woodlands.
- ◆ Potential for woodland to provide recreational opportunities and contribute to the tourist industry.
- ◆ Fencing and relationship with deer management.

- ◆ Views and sightlines.
- ◆ Access tracks.
- ◆ Relationship of woodland's contribution to the local economy.

4.4 Aquaculture and Inshore Fishing

4.4.1 Fin fish farming, principally of salmon, has become an important economic asset to the area over the last 25 years. Primarily its activity is based on the sea lochs but freshwater sites are also used to rear salmon smolts. Most sea lochs and some inland lochs in the area contain fish cages, which may be lit at night, while new, larger semi-automated feed barges are being introduced.

4.4.2 Technological advances alongside a growing understanding of how cultivated salmonid stock might be interacting with wild stocks are leading fish farmers to seek more and new sites. Increasing mechanisation and changes in the economics of fish farming are leading to enlargement of holdings and operation at a bigger scale. Organic production has yet to take place in the area. Advances in management and the decline of wild white fish stocks (e.g. cod) is likely to create a demand for sites for white fish farms in the future.

4.4.3 The Scottish Environment Protection Agency have recently reviewed the locational guidelines for fish farms and these provide a useful framework.

4.4.4 Shell fish farms (scallop and mussel) are also present and are visually evident through the lines and buoys associated with the long lines. Future demand for sites is as yet unassessed.

4.4.5 Responsibility for the allocation of seabed leases currently sits with the Crown Estate, but the Government intends to transfer the Crown Estate's planning role to the local authority, and legislation for this is awaited.

4.4.6 Commercial inshore fishing from boats has declined over the last 20 years, but it is still significant in some parts of the area. Both white fish and crustaceans are landed and shipped out of the area to markets as far afield as Spain. Some limited processing facilities are present.

4.4.7 Many local people and visitors will go out in their own boats to fish and set pots and creels to catch for their own consumption. Demand for the maintenance and improvement of local jetties is

high, and for many visitors an attraction of the area are the opportunities for recreational sea fishing in the summer. Small-scale winkle collecting occurs locally.

4.4.8 *Key Issues for the Management Strategy*

- ◆ Introduction of new structures into important views and sensitive seascapes.
- ◆ Introduction of noise/light into views.
- ◆ Harbour provision and development.

4.5 Development of Housing and Settlements

4.5.1 There is steady demand for new sites to be developed for housing in the area to serve both permanent residents and as second homes. Indications are that if demand stays steady then over the next 20 years Wester Ross will need to find sites for a further 800 houses.

4.5.2 House design and standards have altered significantly with a move away from the older style traditional croft house which was sited to gain maximum shelter from the wind and built to provide maximum warmth when heating was limited to peat and wood, to larger houses sited to offer attractive views with larger windows. New houses have been sited primarily where opportunity arose to acquire land and this has led to alteration to local settlement patterns and character.

4.5.3 The current tax regime means that it is often cheaper to build a new house than renovate an old one.

4.5.4 Demand for other types of built development is limited and is usually of a highly specific nature.

4.5.5 *Key Issues for the Management Strategy*

- ◆ Landscape and scenic integration of development sites and locations.
- ◆ Design quality of buildings.
- ◆ Derelict buildings/loss of significant features.

4.6 Infrastructure

4.6.1 The infrastructure that supports the area has seen major changes in the last 20 years and this pace of change is likely to continue.

4.6.2 The roads have seen significant improvement and demand from local communities is high to see major improvements on the Gairloch to Achnasheen road and the Lochcarron to Achnasheen road. Minor improvements are sought for many other roads in the area, but these are limited to small realignments and safety considerations. It is from the roads that most people experience the scenic qualities and landscape of the area, and it is often the detailed relationship of the road with the landscape that determines how we perceive the landscape. Much of the land is inaccessible by road.

4.6.3 Parking and facilities associated with car parking are spread throughout the area and is generally not considered a major issue. Provision of toilets is of concern to many local people as is litter management and dumping.

4.6.4 Roadside furniture and signposts are on the increase and are especially evident at junctions and appear more intrusive on the more remote stretches of road.

4.6.5 The Government is encouraging the development of renewable energy and has recently introduced a system of Renewable Obligation Certificates (ROCs) for electricity suppliers. Interest in finding sites for renewable energy production is growing and the area already has two long-standing hydro schemes. At present interest is mainly for run of river hydro schemes but there are also significant proposals for impoundment schemes. Wind energy schemes are also under limited investigation.

4.6.6 Current electricity supply is all provided on poles – there are no pylons present in the area.

4.6.7 There is continuing significant investment in improvements to water supply and sewage management. On the whole these have been sensitively located close to settlements.

4.6.8 Telecommunication masts are one of the most obvious introductions into the landscape over the last 20 years and are made more noticeable by the very nature of their function in that they generally need to sit on ridges or hilltops. Most are visible from many angles and for many miles.

4.6.9 Street lighting has come to the area only in the last 30 years and is a cause of discussion locally from both a safety point of view and a desire to preserve the quality of the night skies in the area.

4.6.10 There is continuing local demand for small scale quarrying and borrow pits for the construction of local roads and tracks as well as the potential to provide for local stone for path and house construction. There are several stonemasons working within the area and there is a perceived local demand and market for local stone.

4.6.11 *Key Issues for the Management Strategy*

- ◆ Road design and experience of the area by road.
- ◆ Car parking – design and location.
- ◆ Location of road side furniture.
- ◆ Capacity of the NSA to accommodate renewable energy production.
- ◆ Capacity of the NSA to accommodate other infrastructure.

4.7 Recreation and Tourism

4.7.1 Recreation takes many forms in Wester Ross but for both the local resident and the visitor it is focused on informal and quiet enjoyment of the stunningly beautiful scenery, the distinctive landscapes and coast and the wealth of dramatic views. Over recent years there has been a growth in the supply of organised activities primarily aimed to meet visitor demand, but still residing firmly in the category of quiet enjoyment of the countryside.

4.7.2 By far the most popular form of recreation undertaken by both residents and visitors is walking. Throughout the area there are numerous paths and routes used. These routes include those between settlements, old functional routes such as the old coffin roads, post roads, stalker's paths, pony paths, fishing tracks, forestry tracks, beach access, routes to the top of the peaks and a few specifically designed trails. The majority of these routes are not way marked and navigation can be difficult at all levels especially in poor visibility. The high and steep terrain combined with rapidly changing weather conditions means that walking in Wester Ross is some of the most challenging available in the UK. This is another attraction for visitors who come equipped for the conditions and to enjoy the challenge.

4.7.3 Demand is growing for low-level routes from both resident and visitor. However, there is a lack of definitive data for Wester Ross and so the nature of demand is not yet quantified or refined.

4.7.4 Technical climbing is an increasing activity in the area with the opening up and mapping of new routes. The foot and mouth outbreak in 2001 closed many climbing routes in England and led to an increase in climbers coming into Wester Ross in search of open climbs on crags and inland cliffs. The long-term impact needs to be assessed.

4.7.5 Wester Ross is an area where many people come to spend extended periods in the hills and will come equipped to spend several nights wild camping or using the bothies in the remoter areas. Some bothies and popular wild camping spots are showing signs of wear and tear with problems of human waste and litter.

4.7.6 The area has a few formal campsites, which are well managed, some in sensitive coastal areas and there is no apparent demand for more provision.

4.7.7 Camper vans come into the area in the summer months and their season is extending. Many take advantage of the facilities provided by the campsites. However others prefer to park up in lay bys and car parks. Problems of litter and human waste are increasing.

4.7.8 The number of holiday homes (private and for letting) is increasing, and this is having a knock on effect on the availability and affordability of housing stock for local residents.

4.7.9 Cycling both on road and off road is increasing in the area. There are a number of potential types of user from the touring groups coming through the area very rapidly to local children getting to school, from the very able and fit mountain biker to the recreational cyclist seeking a safe and gentle ride. Demand is not clearly understood, but anecdotal evidence suggests the area may lack suitable provision.

4.7.10 Sea based activity such as sailing and canoeing is popular within the coastal waters. Good quality diving is also available but provision of the necessary facilities such as decompression chambers and gas compression machines are limited. Jet and water-skiing have been noted to be an issue at localised points.

4.7.11 Horse riding and ownership is increasing across the area and owners are seeking suitable grazing and riding routes. Formal provision is currently very limited.

4.7.12 The area has much to offer in the way of activities and opportunities for study including subjects such as astronomy, painting, photography, ecology, geology and bird watching. These are likely to be growth areas for the tourism industry.

4.7.13 Cruise ships have visited the area over the last few years and there is scope to increase provision for them.

4.7.14 Most of the estates manage part of their land for stalking and game fishing, which bring significant numbers of visitors into the area. Shooting is limited and localised.

4.7.15 The area has some notable visitor attractions including Inverewe Gardens, Shildaig Trout project, Gairloch Heritage Museum, Smithy Heritage Centre and Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve.

4.7.16 Game fishing is threatened by declining salmon and sea trout stocks. Salmon are recognised as requiring special protection under the SAC designation within Wester Ross. Brown trout populations appear to be doing well.

4.7.18 ***Key Issues for the Management Strategy***

- ◆ Number of visitors coming to the area.
- ◆ Recreation provision.
- ◆ Access to land and sea.
- ◆ Information and promotion.

4.8 Cultural Heritage

4.8.1 Wester Ross is richly endowed with its own unique cultural heritage which continues to evolve as the population and lifestyles change. Much of this heritage is derived from the land and the lifestyles necessary to successfully survive here.

4.8.2 The pattern of the enclosed crofting, farm and estate landscapes of Wester Ross reflects both the historic and current land use and contributes to the present landscape character. The boundaries of these enclosures are themselves often important features in the landscape.

4.8.3 Archaeological remains are probably under-recorded in Wester Ross NSA due to relatively little field work being completed. From the lichen encrusted rock shelters stumbled upon whilst out on the hill to the fish traps found at low tides on the coast, the evidence of previous occupation and life styles contribute to the scenic quality and the appreciation of the landscape by both visitor and local resident. Evidence of previous occupation is often subtly shown in the landscape due to the time lapse, the harsh climate and growth of vegetation on the hill.

4.8.4 Many local traditional crofting practices have declined such as peat cutting, local stone and seaweed collection. There is a strong desire to see these traditions kept alive.

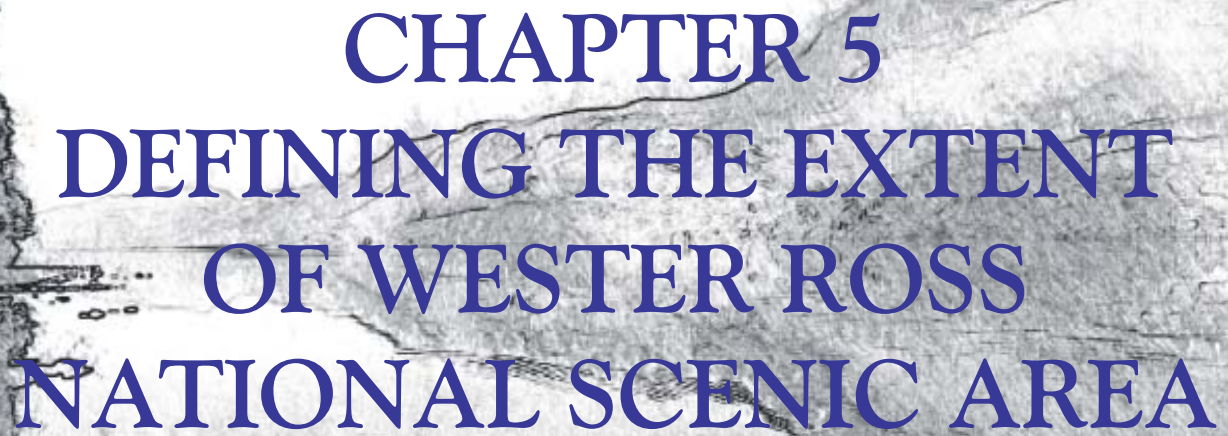
4.8.5 The Gaelic language is widely spoken and is clearly present in place names throughout the area, especially in landscape features such as loch, hills, and waterfalls.

4.8.6 Over the centuries the stories, poems, songs and dances have evolved which tell the story of the relationship between the people and the land of Wester Ross. The landscape has also been the subject of many painters and photographers as well as providing the raw material and inspiration for many crafts people. These all contribute to the local distinctiveness of Wester Ross and strengthen the sense of identity and place.

4.8.7 The area around Loch Ewe and the loch itself continues today to be a focus for military activity and contains a wealth of military remains from the 20th century. Many of the disused features are falling into disrepair and yet are a focus for many visitors to the area.

4.8.8 ***Key Issues for the Management Strategy***

- ◆ The celebration of the relationship between the people and the landscape of Wester Ross
- ◆ Lack of survey data
- ◆ Loss of authentic Gaelic names and language associated with specific features and land management practices.
- ◆ Loss of knowledge and skills about landscape and land management.
- ◆ Deterioration of military remains.



CHAPTER 5

DEFINING THE EXTENT OF WESTER ROSS NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

5.1.1 During the process of preparing this Management Strategy, the selection and rationale behind the original definition of the Wester Ross NSA boundary has been questioned. The approach taken in the original selection of NSAs was to encompass rather than precisely define the area of national scenic value. Boundaries were drawn to follow obvious physical features such as ridgelines and so reflect visual tracts, or use other identifiable features such as watercourses and roads. Where no appropriate physical feature was available straight lines between salient points were used. The approach was therefore based on capturing the scenic qualities of an area and was applied in a pragmatic way.

5.1.2 The need to review the validity of the boundaries of the existing suite of NSAs was recognised by SNH in their advice to the Scottish Executive, and it was proposed that this should be undertaken when preparing the Management Strategy. Although there is currently no mechanism for formally revising the boundary, this Management Strategy does identify and suggest boundary changes that are considered to reflect the need and purpose of the designation today (Table 1). Any decision on revising the boundary is ultimately a matter for Scottish Ministers.

5.1.3 Although there is currently no mechanism to formally review the boundary of the NSA, there is the potential to apply the Management Strategy over a management unit with different boundaries to the current NSA. Planning provisions for the additional controls in NSAs can only apply within

the actual designated NSA boundary. It is recognised that further work is needed before robust and formal recommendations can be made regarding change to the existing NSA boundary. However through preparing this Management Strategy our understanding of the NSA has increased and we can now be confident in suggesting the interim approach to the boundary issue as set out in Table 2.

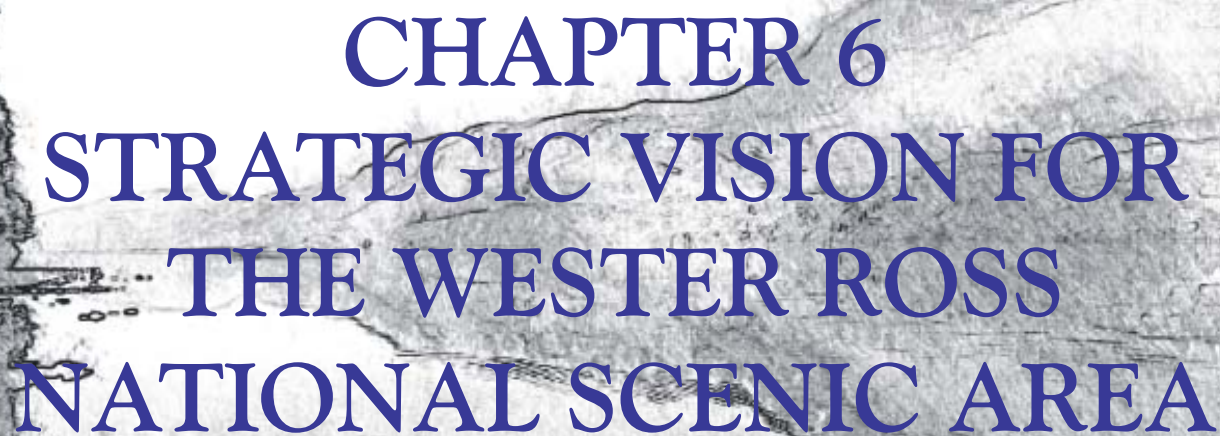
5.1.4 Regarding the relationship of the Wester Ross NSA with the Assynt-Coigach NSA to the north, it needs to be recognised that to date the more detailed work carried out in Wester Ross has not been replicated in Assynt-Coigach. Only once more detailed survey is complete in both areas can a management approach be recommended.

Table 1: Boundary Issues Raised

Boundary Question	Provisional Commentary
Should the western half of the Applecross peninsula be included in the NSA?	Area exhibits scenic qualities similar to those found further north within the NSA, and arguably of similar merit. Present NSA boundary isolates an area with strong Wester Ross character, and the application of a straight-line boundary is inappropriate when delineating scenic qualities.
Should the area around Redpoint, between Loch Torridon and Loch Gairloch, be included in the NSA?	Area exhibits scenic qualities similar to those found further north within the NSA, and arguably of similar merit. Area has strong visual relationship with the Wester Ross mountains. Present NSA boundary isolates an area with strong Wester Ross character.
Should the Wester Ross NSA encompass the southern watershed of the Scoraig and Badrallach peninsula?	Southern half of peninsula exhibits scenic qualities found throughout the Wester Ross NSA (see the Scenic Qualities map, Appendix Four). Peninsula falls between Assynt-Coigach NSA to the north and Wester Ross NSA to the south.
Should the NSA encompass Glen Carron and Strathcarron in the south east?	South eastern edge of Wester Ross NSA has been drawn to the north west above Strathcarron and Glen Carron, delineating the south eastern extent of the scenic qualities found throughout the NSA.
Does the eastern boundary fully encompass the extent of the NSA?	The eastern boundary has been tightly drawn from Corrie Hallie in the north to Carn na Garbh Lice embracing An Teallach and Sgurr Ban.
How does the boundary of the Wester Ross NSA relate to the boundary of Assynt-Coigach NSA to the north?	There are two aspects to consider: 1) the fact that the mapped boundaries and accompanying descriptions of the two NSAs vary in definition and delineation; 2) there is a small area between the two NSAs (around Ullapool and Loch Broom) which in the past has not been judged to possess the very high landscape and scenic qualities of the NSAs to the north and south.
What is the coastal extent of the NSA?	Seaward extent of the NSA appears arbitrary and has not been precisely defined.

Table 2: Interim Approach to the NSA Boundary

Boundary Area	Management Approach
Northern, eastern and southern area between the NSA designation and the study area	To keep this area under review and to continue to work with the communities in this area as they have a fundamental functional relationship with the NSA landscape to the north. Carry out more detailed landscape assessment and consider inclusion in the NSA management unit
Western half of Applecross peninsula, and Redpoint, between Loch Torridon and Loch Gairloch	Include this area as an area to fully benefit from the effect of the Management Strategy but not to be subject to statutory controls related to NSAs (i.e. inclusion of the area in landscape terms cannot extend statutory regulation. With access to the opportunities that inclusion in the management unit might bring, comes a responsibility for safeguarding the scenic qualities). If and when legislation is put in place to review NSA boundaries then to consider through due processes whether this area should be formally included in the NSA.
Coastal extent	More work is needed to define this boundary and therefore the current definition must hold (NB Applecross and Redpoint coastal areas to benefit as above)



CHAPTER 6

STRATEGIC VISION FOR THE WESTER ROSS NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

6.1 Vision

6.1.1 Here in the Wester Ross National Scenic Area we have inherited an area of such outstanding natural beauty and amenity that it has been recognised as one of 40 areas of land and water which represent the very best of Scotland's renowned scenery. Accordingly it merits protection and enhancement as part of our national heritage. It is also home to 5000 people whose well being is inextricably linked to the land and sea. Therefore the area's management must be undertaken in such a manner as to enable the people of Wester Ross to secure a sustainable future for themselves. As the environment and particularly the outstanding scenery of Wester Ross is arguably the area's greatest economic asset, these national and local interests are seen as mutually supportive.

6.1.2 The preparation of this Management Strategy and the process behind it has allowed everyone involved to take stock and reflect on the issues and opportunities facing the area and, in particular, to understand the relationship between everyday local activities, needs and aspirations and the landscape of the area.

6.1.3 Accordingly the vision for this Management Strategy and its related actions sets out to protect and enhance the outstanding landscape of the National Scenic Area on the basis that a natural environment of high quality contributes to the sustainable development of the Wester Ross economy.

6.1.4 This vision sees Wester Ross maintaining its place as one of the most beautiful areas of Scotland, which supports prosperous and self-sustaining communities.

The Vision for the Wester Ross NSA

To identify, safeguard and enhance the outstanding landscape and scenery of the Wester Ross NSA always recognising that this should go hand in hand with the support and development of the economic, environmental, social and cultural well being of the communities in the area.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

The aims within the strategy and specific actions that flow from them will seek to:

- Continue to encourage both local people's, the national and international appreciation of the landscape of the area.
- Protect and enhance the quality of the environment.
- Contribute to the promotion of the sustainable growth of the economy of the area.
- Contribute to the quality of people's lives within the area.
- Contribute to and celebrate the cultural identity and distinctiveness of the area.

6.2 Key Influencing Themes

6.2.1 In order to achieve the desired vision for the NSA, the following eight key themes and principles have guided the preparation of this strategy and will need to underpin its implementation.

Community Involvement

6.2.2 Developing community and the wider public's understanding of, involvement in and support for the special qualities of the Wester Ross NSA is one of the keys to securing the implementation and ensuring the full effectiveness of the Management Strategy.

6.2.3 The lives of people and communities living within and immediately adjacent to the NSA are inextricably linked to the landscape of Wester Ross, with many of them reliant on the physical well being of the land, the sea and the scenic qualities of the area for their income.

6.2.4 The communities of Wester Ross are widely dispersed and vary in character and opinions. In preparing this Management Strategy the Steering Group and Project Officer sought to involve and secure input through a participative approach, from as wide a range of communities and individuals as possible.

6.2.5 One of the key implementation themes will be to continue to develop the local community input and increase the effectiveness of dialogue and debate within the area, with the aim of increasing the understanding of both issues and qualities.

Partnership and Integration

6.2.6 The contribution to and subsequent strengthening of a broad partnership of the wider community interests is fundamental to securing the ongoing positive management and enhancement of the NSA.

6.2.7 In preparing the Management Strategy a wide range of organisations and groups were invited to become involved. Information was spread widely both amongst those living and working in the area but also outwith to those with interests in the area. However, there is still scope to strengthen the existing partnership and increase ownership of the Strategy, looking to key existing/emerging partnerships in the first instance. This will be one of the early implementation aims.

6.2.8 The key to the successful delivery of the Management Strategy will be its ability to work through and with existing partnerships and mechanisms such as the Wester Ross Alliance within the broader community planning framework for Wester Ross.

6.2.9 For effective fulfilment of the Strategy's aims it will need to guide and inform other agencies and organisations as they pursue their own plans and agendas. Therefore the ability of this Strategy to integrate with the aims of partner organisations both within the area and across Scotland is another key to its success.

Sustainability

6.2.10 The Strategy is underpinned by the principle of sustainability and the desire to be able to hand on the outstanding landscape of this area to future generations.

6.2.11 In an area of Scotland where the economy is fragile and the community widely dispersed and undergoing change, the needs of the NSA and the protection and management of the landscape must take full account of the needs of the economy and the community in order to be truly sustainable.

Linking management of the environment with the wellbeing of local communities

6.2.12 It is a truism that the people and the environment are the two greatest assets of Wester Ross. The Strategy must ensure that their future well being goes hand in hand, so that each benefits from the other. This needs mechanisms to be put in place for the positive management of key landscape and scenic features by local communities, so that economic opportunities provided by this national resource are available for the longer term.

6.2.13 This has implications for crofting, forestry, freshwater management, management of extensive open areas and the historical and cultural associations (including tourism links) of the landscape.

High Quality of Development

6.2.14 The Management Strategy seeks to achieve high quality in all processes, developments and decisions made by partner agencies and others and its subsequent application and implementation.

6.2.15 National planning guidance encourages development proposals in NSAs not to detract from the quality or character of the landscape. The scale, siting and design of such development should always be appropriate whilst also taking account of affordability. This should apply to built structures, forestry, aquaculture, and other forms of land and coastal management change.

The Case for Special Support

6.2.16 As the area has been identified as nationally important through the designation of the National Scenic Area and is arguably internationally renowned, the Management Strategy will seek to identify where additional resources from national sources should be sought.

6.2.17 In SNH's Advice to Government it is recommended that areas meriting designation for their national scenic value will need additional resources to enable effective management and safeguarding of the national asset, through special funding programmes, targeting of incentive schemes and grants.

The National Importance of the Wester Ross NSA

6.2.18 Wester Ross is a landscape of national importance meriting a long term commitment and special effort to ensure that its qualities are safeguarded.

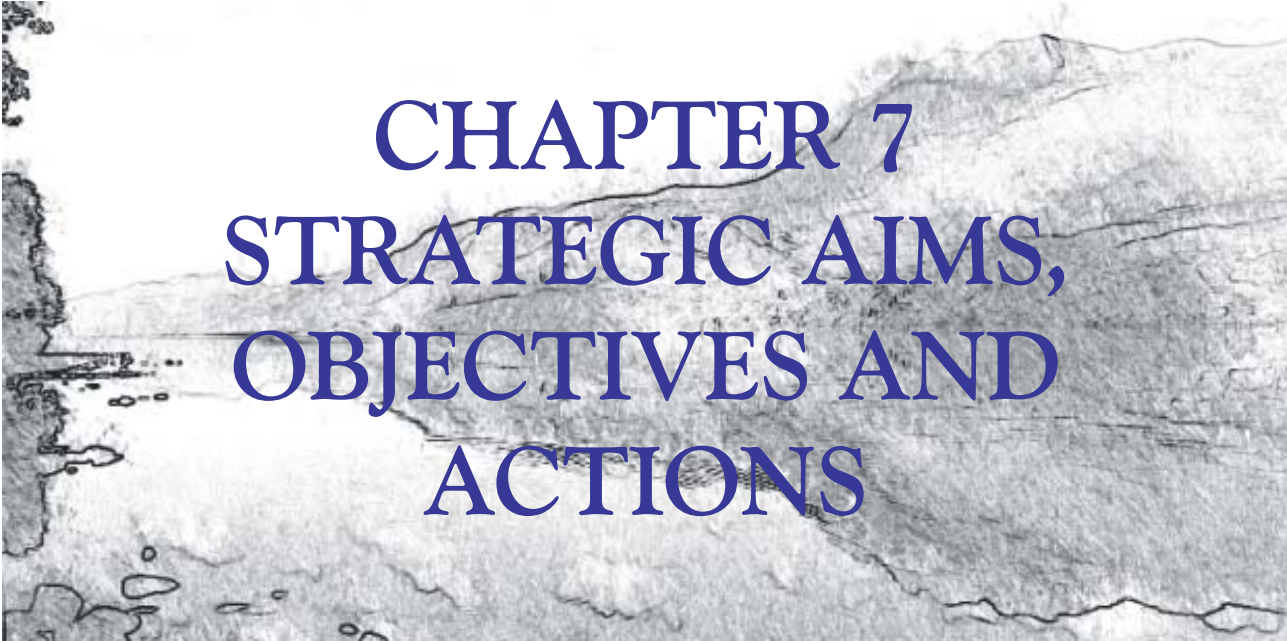
6.2.19 Part of the rationale for preparing this Management Strategy is derived from the fact that the area is a designated national resource based on preference for natural beauty and amenity. In their 'Advice to Government' SNH propose that in recognition of this national importance local authorities should be required to prepare management strategies for NSAs in their area.

6.2.20 NSAs are also acknowledged internationally by being listed as Category V Landscapes on the IUCN World List of Protected Areas.

The NSA as a Management Unit

6.2.21 This Management Strategy will be applied across the NSA although elements of the policy will be more applicable on an issue by issue basis and will lead to locally or issue focused action at times.

6.2.22 In preparing this Management Strategy the option to subdivide the NSA into different management units has been considered by the project Steering Group. At this point in time the issue of zoning or subdivision (i.e. where parts of the NSA are separately identified with accompanying differential policies being applied) will be kept under review as national policy evolves and more information becomes available.



CHAPTER 7

STRATEGIC AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

In this section a series of broad aims and objectives are offered and the actions required to achieve them set out. These proposals are focused upon the landscape and scenic qualities of the NSA and should be read in conjunction with section six which sets out the vision and key influencing themes and show the context in which these proposals will be implemented.

7.1 LANDSCAPE AND SCENIC RESOURCE (LS)

The landscape and scenery of Wester Ross are two of the key assets that the area possesses and their importance to people's lives and the economy cannot be underestimated. Local communities live alongside these assets on a day to day basis and understand how the land functions and what it can offer both productively and spiritually whilst Wester Ross is also renowned throughout Britain and Europe as an exceptionally beautiful and appealing landscape.

Aim:

To safeguard and enhance the landscape, scenic and wild land resource of the Wester Ross NSA. In particular, this will recognise:

- ★ ***the landscape character and scenic qualities arising from the close juxtaposition of mountain, coast and moorland;***
- ★ ***the superlative nature of the six mountain groups that are central to the experience of the Wester Ross landscape;***
- ★ ***the added qualities that the area gains from views across the sea and from outwith the area;***
- ★ ***the principal gateways to/from the NSA, and key views of the NSA;***
- ★ ***the character and vibrancy of the worked and lived-in landscapes;***
- ★ ***areas where the landscape character is ill defined and the scenic quality weak; and***
- ★ ***the experience of wildness derived from the remoter and relatively inaccessible areas inland and along the coast where the influence of human activity is minimal.***

7.1.1 Objective LS1 Managing landscape change

Research and prepare more detailed assessments to ensure that any changes within Wester Ross safeguard and enhance the landscape, scenic and wild land qualities of the NSA.

Actions

- ◆ Identify and describe the likely impetus for landscape change within the NSA.
- ◆ Refine the existing landscape character assessment to establish the capacity of the NSA to accommodate landscape change and establish a forum to consider the appropriateness of such change.
- ◆ Invest in measures to increase the capacity of the landscape for change where appropriate.
- ◆ Develop greater understanding and articulate the strong cultural element and associations between land management and landscape character.

7.1.2 Objective LS2 Experience of Scenic Qualities

Ensure that people's experience of the scenic qualities of the NSA are safeguarded and enhanced.

Actions

- ◆ Identify and map the key views within and gained from Wester Ross NSA.
- ◆ Identify the variety and range of experiences based on scenic qualities that the Wester Ross NSA has to offer.
- ◆ Develop guidelines to guide change within identified types of scenic experience.
- ◆ Explore the economic relationship between high scenic quality, experience and local businesses.
- ◆ Review the validity and appropriateness of the existing NSA boundary.

7.1.3 Objective LS3 Recognising/Safeguarding Wild Land

Contribute to the ongoing work in connection with wild land in order that this asset of Wester Ross is recognised in national and local policy.

Actions

- ◆ Work with both local and national interests to identify and define the essential wild land qualities of Wester Ross.
- ◆ Work with both local and national interests to consider the policy implications for wild land in Wester Ross including any positive management opportunities.

7.2 AGRICULTURE AND CROFTING (AC)

Aim:

To maintain the contribution of working crofts and agricultural land to the Wester Ross NSA landscape, and guide change so as to safeguard and enhance the landscape.

7.2.1 Objective AC1 Maintaining the Agricultural and Crofting Landscape

Identify, safeguard and enhance those features and activities of the crofting and agricultural landscape of importance to the Wester Ross NSA.

Actions

- ◆ Prepare an inventory of key landscape features (e.g. drystone dykes, stone byres, individual trees and woodlands, etc) and identify priorities for action through local consultation.
- ◆ Identify and secure the necessary skills, materials (e.g. sources of stone), and funding to safeguard and enhance key landscape features.
- ◆ Influence grants schemes and individual-holding plans to ensure long term maintenance and protection of key landscape features.
- ◆ Develop and improve access to training and advice to support the contribution of agriculture and crofting to the NSA, including the need for an agricultural/crofting advisory service for holdings in Wester Ross.
- ◆ Promote local events and training to demonstrate good practice and techniques.
- ◆ Demonstrate high quality restoration and maintenance of key landscape schemes as Wester Ross NSA partners implement schemes within the area.

7.2.2 Objective AC2 Improved Pasture and Common Grazings

Safeguard and enhance the contribution of improved pasture and common grazings to the landscape of the NSA.

Actions

- ◆ Encourage grazing committees to develop and implement management plans for their common grazings that safeguard and enhance the landscape of the NSA.
- ◆ Where promoted by management plans, support the control of invasive species (ragwort, knotweed, bracken and rhododendron), the management of improved pasture and grassland (for grazing, hay and silage production).
- ◆ Encourage high quality stock management, which contributes to the characteristic mosaic of fields and inbye and support management of effective field and stock boundaries that contribute to landscape character.

7.2.3 Objective AC3 Influencing Structural Change

Seek to influence the shaping of government policy and grant regimes to meet the needs of land managers in Wester Ross NSA that enable its landscape to be safeguarded and enhanced.

Actions

- ◆ Identify (through research and discussion) and promote new options and opportunities for economically viable land management.
- ◆ Identify incentive levels (through research and discussion) and schemes, which would meet the needs of holdings within the NSA and support the aims of the Management Strategy (such as RSS).

- ◆ Seek to ensure the national interest in the Wester Ross NSA is recognised as a priority in agricultural and crofting support schemes, e.g. through targeting of resources.
- ◆ Establish an effective dialogue between the agricultural and crofting interests in Wester Ross including the national and regional interests.

7.3 WOODLAND (W)

Aim:

To support woodland management, expansion and related activity in Wester Ross in appropriate locations which safeguards and enhances the NSA's landscape and provides opportunities for people to enjoy and benefit from it.

7.3.1 Objective W1 The Woodland Resource

Encourage the expansion and management of predominantly (but not exclusively) native woodlands by regeneration, management and planting in appropriate locations, which safeguard and enhance its contribution to the landscape of the NSA.

Actions

- ◆ Identify a priority list through consultation with local communities and landowners, for woodlands that would benefit from targeted management based on their contribution to the landscape and recreational use, and develop and implement Management Plans where appropriate.
- ◆ Prepare guidance on the appropriate siting and design of new woodland in the NSA.
- ◆ Ensure all new woodland schemes maintain and enhance scenically important views and sightlines.
- ◆ Promote opportunities for informal recreation through consultation with local and visitor users.
- ◆ Improve access, advice and training to land managers to encourage high quality environmentally sensitive woodland management.
- ◆ Support business advice to land managers seeking to derive income from woodland activity and management.

7.3.2 Objective W2 Grazing Management in Woodland

Promote the management of deer, goat and domestic stock at levels which would encourage minimal use of fencing and cattle grids.

Actions

- ◆ Work with land managers, Deer Management Groups and the regulatory bodies to promote plans that work toward minimising the use of new deer fencing.
- ◆ Promote existing guidelines and their application to new schemes and ensure that consent conditions are followed through, including the removal of fences at the earliest opportunity.
- ◆ Monitor fence line management and consider targeting resources towards securing obsolete fence and grid removal along with obsolete signage.
- ◆ Positively support and influence the work of the Deer Management Groups to take account of the aims of the NSA.

7.3.3 Objective W3 Promoting the Timber Resource

Promote local use of locally grown timber and wood that supports appropriate management of woodland.

Actions

- ◆ Evaluate the sustainable production of timber over the short, medium and long term.
- ◆ Organise in partnership, local events to demonstrate examples of good practice.
- ◆ Improve dialogue locally between fuel providers and woodland managers to increase the amount of firewood sourced locally.
- ◆ Provide advice and guidance locally on effective use of fuel wood.
- ◆ Research the options for setting up quality timber based processing within the area either for sawmill operation to produce local building material and fencing or for more specialised and finished timber goods such as furniture.

7.4 OPEN HILL (OH)

Aim:

To encourage management of open hill and freshwater systems that increase their natural biodiversity and safeguards and enhances their contribution to the NSA's landscape.

7.4.1 Objective OH1 Land Management

Encourage and support appropriate land management that maintains the important natural qualities of the NSA.

Actions

- ◆ Support the early production of a biodiversity action plan for the Wester Ross NSA and its implementation.
- ◆ Work with and support local deer management groups and estates to establish and implement deer management plans that maintain and enhance the natural diversity of habitats.
- ◆ Identify which other herbivores have a significant impact on the open hill and if necessary stimulate proactive management (e.g. wild goats).
- ◆ Work to ensure that the use of ATVs and new hill tracks minimises detrimental impacts on the landscape and is limited to management requirements, and encourage restoration where damage has occurred.

7.4.2 Objective OH2 Freshwater Management

Encourage the appropriate management of freshwater systems (on a catchment scale) to maintain and enhance their biodiversity and contribution to the landscape character and scenic qualities of the NSA.

Actions

- ◆ Identify which lochs, lochans and rivers would be compromised in their ability to contribute to the scenic qualities of the area if their water surfaces and flows were altered or man made structures were introduced.
- ◆ Support the management of riparian woodland and banks.
- ◆ Work with local partnerships to seek to achieve sustainable populations of salmon, sea trout, brown trout and coarse fish.

7.5 AQUACULTURE (AF)

Aim:

To support the sustainable development of the aquaculture industry that safeguards and enhances the landscape of the NSA.

7.5.1 Objective AF1 Fish Farms

Minimise the impact of any structures related to fin and shellfish farming on the landscape of the NSA.

Actions

- ◆ Identify and map important views and sea lochs to inform the preparation of a coastal zone or aquaculture plan that includes all or part of the NSA.
- ◆ Encourage the updating of the aquaculture framework plans for Loch Ewe and Loch Torridon and the preparation of such plans for other sea lochs in the NSA.
- ◆ Investigate the feasibility and support that would be needed for the relocation of farm structures where necessary to maintain or enhance scenic qualities or people's ability to experience scenic qualities.
- ◆ Support the passing of regulatory control from the Crown Estate to the planning authority along with appropriate revenue funding.

7.6 HOUSING, SETTLEMENTS AND DEVELOPMENT (DH)

Aim:

To see settlements develop to meet their requirements within their physical and infrastructural capacities while safeguarding and enhancing the NSA's landscape and ensuring that the individual character of each settlement is strengthened.

7.6.1 Objective DH1 New Development

Ensure that new development is appropriately sited and of a high standard of design so as to safeguard and enhance the landscape of the NSA.

Actions

- ◆ Apply the findings of the landscape capacity study for the main settlements in the area in the preparation of the local plan.
- ◆ Undertake research to identify the settlement patterns and detailed design that build to give each settlement individual and distinctive character. Prepare guidance through local consultation and into the local plan on how local communities wish to see their settlements develop.
- ◆ Prepare and promote detailed design guidance to enhance the contribution that built features can make to the landscape of the NSA.
- ◆ Identify the resources and costs needed to ensure quality and locally distinctive design in new development and secure grant aid/funding packages if appropriate.
- ◆ Develop and strengthen dialogue between the local communities and the planning authority through initiatives such as village/township appraisals.

7.6.2 Objective DH2 Renovation and Re-use of Buildings

Encourage a high standard of renovation of old and derelict buildings and their re-use.

Actions

- ◆ Compile an inventory of derelict and disused buildings within the NSA and assess those that could be realistically restored to use.
- ◆ Identify derelict buildings that contribute to local landscape character which are at risk and which could be appropriately renovated.
- ◆ Examine the use of grant incentives and VAT regimes to assess how they influence the costs of new build and renovation.

7.6.3 Objective DH3 Existing Major Sites

Ensure development and management at existing major sites is of a high standard and minimises any detrimental effects on the landscape of the NSA.

Actions

- ◆ Seek to ensure the development and management of NATO and MOD land at Loch Ewe and Mellon Charles safeguards the landscape of the NSA.
- ◆ Develop a site brief and support its implementation for the Howard Doris yard at Kishorn to ensure future development recognises the landscape of the NSA, and consider setting up a local liaison group for the site.

7.7 INFRASTRUCTURE (IN)

Aim:

To ensure necessary infrastructure development safeguards and enhances the landscape of the NSA.

7.7.1 Objective IN1 Electricity and Telecommunication Lines

Ensure that electrical supply lines and telephone poles avoid significant adverse impact on the landscape of the NSA and on important and defining views.

Actions

- ◆ Plan new lines with sensitive reference to the landscape and where possible place underground, particularly where new lines will cross important views.
- ◆ Seek removal of all redundant poles and infrastructure.
- ◆ Ensure that new lines above ground utilise non-reflective wooden poles rather than pylons.

7.7.2 Objective IN2 Renewable Energy

Ensure that proposals for renewable energy schemes avoid significant adverse impact and sit comfortably within the landscape of the NSA.

Actions

- ◆ Promote existing guidelines in environmental integration of small scale hydro and wind energy schemes.
- ◆ Require a Zone of Visual Impact analysis for any large structures.

7.7.3 Objective IN3 Water Supply and Waste Water

Ensure any infrastructure associated with water supply and waste water avoids significant adverse impact and sits comfortably within the landscape of the NSA in both siting and design of the building.

Action

- ◆ Prepare advice note and establish early dialogue with relevant partners.

7.7.4 Objective IN4 Fisheries Infrastructure

Ensure any development of in shore fisheries infrastructure safeguards the character of harbour and fishing settlements.

Action

- ◆ Promote high quality building design and siting of infrastructure that reinforces the landscape character of the area.

7.7.5 Objective IN5 Telecommunications

Ensure that any telecommunications proposals avoid significant adverse impact and sit comfortably within the NSA.

Actions

- ◆ Promote a joint approach by telecommunications operators to the establishment of a telecomms network across the NSA.
- ◆ Promote good practice guidance and Government policy to ensure the visual impact of telecommunications infrastructure is minimised, through mast sharing, sensitive siting and removal of obsolete structures.

7.7.6 Objective IN6 Roads

Ensure that the roads within the NSA avoid significant adverse impact and sit comfortably within the landscape of the NSA whilst providing opportunities for all road users to experience and appreciate the scenic qualities.

Actions

- ◆ Prepare a set of maps showing the scenic quality experience offered by each road in the NSA.
- ◆ Agree a hierarchy of roads in the area based on a combination of their function and ability to enable users to appreciate the scenic qualities of the area and use this in shaping road improvements schemes.
- ◆ Identify and assess the economic value of these scenic routes.
- ◆ Encourage use of existing design guidance for road infrastructure such as bridges, culverts, kerbs etc within the rural areas of the NSA.
- ◆ Set up and promote a signage protocol to manage commercial road and advertising signs.

7.7.7 Objective IN7 Car Parking

Ensure appropriate car parking is provided across the area and throughout the year to meet the needs of the variety of users.

Actions

- ◆ Survey existing car parking areas and identify problems such as safety, litter, dumping, intrusion into views and lack of parking space at peak times.
- ◆ Identify the main functions of each car park and seek to provide quality facilities as appropriate e.g. integrate with the path network, popular beaches.
- ◆ Prepare guidelines on design and facilities appropriate to car park location based on function and relation to the landscape.
- ◆ Set up a group to look at toilet provision and explore feasibility of composting toilets.

7.7.8 Objective IN8 Street Lighting

Ensure that high quality street lighting is restricted to within settlements and minimise its impact on the night time experience of the NSA.

Actions

- ◆ Promote use of low light pollution designs and operating regimes that would reduce upward and sideways light pollution.
- ◆ Promote and increase the available information on the quality of night skies and Northern Lights experiences.

7.7.9 Objective IN9 Minerals

Where minerals are extracted for local use, ensure that the landscape impact is minimised.

Actions

- ◆ Seek appropriate restoration of abandoned quarries and borrow pits.
- ◆ Ensure consideration is given to opportunities for revealing geomorphologic features and geological exposures in any restoration.

7.8 RECREATION AND TOURISM (RT)

Aim:

To encourage enjoyment of the area in a responsible and knowledgeable manner which provides a high quality experience for all users, supports the needs of local people, business and land managers, and maintains or enhances the quality of the NSA.

7.8.1 Objective RT1 Path Network

Ensure that there is a network of paths and routes within the area that serves a range of functions and meets the desires of a wide variety of users.

Actions

- ◆ Use the Scottish Path Record to assess the full range of walking and cycling routes within the area.
- ◆ Research demands and identify gaps in the network and secure important linkages.
- ◆ Research demand for off road cycling and horse riding.
- ◆ Categorise routes according to suitable user groups.
- ◆ Prepare differential guidelines (that complement emerging national standards) on way marking and use that will ensure people can safely enjoy the wide variety of routes without compromising their ability to experience the scenic qualities.
- ◆ Seek to ensure through the Highland Access Project that Wester Ross NSA is a priority for activity for route improvement and information on route provision.
- ◆ Secure resources necessary to maintain and improve the path network.
- ◆ Develop an access action plan and associated business plan for delivery for Wester Ross.
- ◆ As opportunity for the creation of new access routes arises (e.g. through new woodland schemes), seek to secure appropriate access for walkers such as stiles and gates.

7.8.2 Objective RT2 Promote Quiet Enjoyment

Encourage and promote the quiet and responsible enjoyment of the NSA.

Actions

- ◆ Improve and increase the availability and quality of information such as leaflets, codes of practice, advice on where/when to go.
- ◆ Achieve appropriate management and conservation of important recreational areas to ensure their responsible use.
- ◆ Prepare and promote appropriate codes of conduct and safety considerations.
- ◆ Minimise use of trail bikes in the area and restrict to working routes.
- ◆ Zone the waters of the area to identify tranquil and noise sensitive areas.
- ◆ Prepare and promote a code of conduct for flying vehicles (planes and helicopters) in the NSA.
- ◆ Support course and activity based holidays that celebrate or are based on the scenic qualities and landscape of the area and where appropriate offer a Gaelic dimension.
- ◆ Identify important recreational areas and the qualities they offer.
- ◆ Promote the Mountaineering Council of Scotland's Code of Practice on Wild Camping.
- ◆ Prepare and promote a series of leaflets e.g. on the landscape, land use, links with cultural heritage, the community, environment.
- ◆ Promote walks and talks which increase people's understanding of the NSA.
- ◆ Target information to schools in the area.
- ◆ Target information towards visitors to the area to minimise potential conflict with local need.
- ◆ Promote freshwater trout fishing in appropriate lochs at appropriate times.

7.8.3 Objective RT3 Visitor Accommodation

Ensure a network of attractive and well-managed campsites that enable people to enjoy the NSA.

Actions

- ◆ Promote the location and facilities available at the campsites in the area.
- ◆ Produce a welcome pack aimed at camper vans.
- ◆ Produce a code of practice for camper van users that promotes responsible and knowledgeable disposal of litter and human waste, and overnight parking.
- ◆ Establish dialogue with caravanning and camper van organisations to ensure promotion of both the attractions of Wester Ross and the Code of Practice.
- ◆ Promote greater understanding and awareness of the NSA through all accommodation providers.

7.8.4 Objective RT4 Marketing

Promote the NSA as a destination for tourists and develop an appropriate identity that can be used in marketing.

Actions

- ◆ Work with the local industry groups and agencies to determine the role that the Wester Ross landscape has in supporting tourism and recreational activity.
- ◆ Consider which tools would be helpful in Wester Ross to market and promote the area such as a brand identity for the area, library of images, etc.
- ◆ Encourage the take up of the Green Tourism Business Scheme.
- ◆ Consider accreditation for the area as a destination in the Green Globe programme or the European Charter for Tourism in Protected Areas.
- ◆ Discuss with tourism providers ways in which the NSA can support their businesses and promote the area as a destination.

7.9 HERITAGE AND UNDERSTANDING (HU)

Aim:

To raise awareness and increase understanding amongst local communities (especially young people) and the wider public of the special qualities and value of the NSA recognising the local culture, Gaelic language, history and traditions that relate to the maintenance, use and understanding of the landscape of Wester Ross NSA.

7.9.1 Objective HU1 Local Understanding of the NSA

By increasing the understanding of the scenic qualities of Wester Ross amongst the people of Wester Ross seek to increase wider appreciation and awareness of the need to safeguard these qualities and the many opportunities to enjoy and experience them.

Actions

- ◆ Develop an interpretation strategy in partnership with local communities, NTS and landowners.
- ◆ Set up a schools project that focuses on the special qualities of the NSA.
- ◆ Work with the Ranger Service, landowners and NTS to provide material for walks and talks.
- ◆ Establish a presence for the NSA at local events.
- ◆ Prepare an initial leaflet that explains the scenic qualities of Wester Ross.
- ◆ Prepare a series of walk/driving routes with accompanying guides that enable the scenic qualities to be experienced and explained.
- ◆ Produce posters and images that capture the spirit of Wester Ross and distribute widely.

7.9.2 Objective HU2 Visitor Understanding of the NSA

Ensure that both visitors and residents outwith the area are aware of the scenic qualities and national significance of the NSA.

Actions

- ◆ Include information on the scenic qualities in tourism and publicity material.
- ◆ Include information on the scenic qualities in all policy papers, strategies and plans that are relevant to Wester Ross such as the local plan and EU funding programmes.
- ◆ Set up a web page on the area.

7.9.3 Objective HU3 Promotion of the NSA

Promote and market the landscape and local culture of Wester Ross to celebrate the link between the people and landscape of the area and to provide economic benefit to local businesses.

Actions

- ◆ Create a database of visitor perceptions of Wester Ross.
- ◆ Use websites to collect opinion and views.
- ◆ Ensure NSA information is available on the web.
- ◆ Explore the establishment of a 'Friends of Wester Ross'.
- ◆ Promote the use and understanding of Gaelic language and culture in the NSA, in particular its links with the landscape and culture of the area, through its use in interpretation promotional material.

7.9.4 Objective HU4 Cultural Heritage

Ensure both visitors and local people are aware of and value the archaeological and historical heritage of the area.

Actions

- ◆ Support Historic Scotland and RCAHMS to carry out a historical land use assessment of the NSA.
- ◆ Encourage and support appropriate archaeological survey such as community field and hill walking.
- ◆ Support the local community in establishing WW II trail around Loch Ewe.
- ◆ Seek improved access to and interpretation of cultural heritage features in accordance with the Highland Access Project.



CHAPTER 8

IMPLEMENTATION AND NEXT STEPS

8.1 Implementation

8.1.1 This Management Strategy has been prepared as part of a national pilot to gain a better understanding of the management needs of NSAs. It flows from recommendations contained in the 'Advice to Government' on NSAs published by SNH in 1999. A response from the Scottish Executive to SNH's recommendations is still awaited and therefore at this stage the implementation of this Management Strategy can only be taken forward tentatively.

8.1.2 The Management Strategy has also been developed during a time of significant local changes in Wester Ross with the related and potentially mutually supportive mechanisms such as the Wester Ross Alliance in the early stages of evolution.

8.1.3 Taking account of this evolving framework, The Highland Council and SNH will develop proposals for delivering the Management Strategy in the immediate future. This will be guided by the following broad principles:

Council Leadership and Advocacy

8.1.4 Given its local democratic mandate and wider community well being remit, the Highland Council should take the lead in ensuring the implementation of the strategy with SNH taking a lead in developing the national agenda and securing the national resources necessary for successful implementation.

8.1.5 Successful leadership will require additional resources and commitment from other bodies and the community to work in partnership to deliver the strategy.

Integration

8.1.6 Through successful integration with existing mechanisms, plans, procedures and forums the Management Strategy will better be able to achieve its goals. Where possible it will build on, support and utilise existing partnerships and structures and will proactively seek to avoid duplication of effort, potential confusion or competition between the range of initiatives in which many of the key stakeholders are already involved. Linkages to other projects and initiatives will be made. Clear definition of roles and remits will help with this.

Broad Partnership and Joint Working

8.1.7 The local community will continue to participate in and influence the strategy alongside the various organisations and agencies with an active interest in Wester Ross. The partnership will encompass the full range of interests required for the strategy's implementation.

NSA Identity

8.1.8 The Management Strategy puts forward a clear and confident agenda for the landscape and scenery of Wester Ross NSA and articulates the linkages with the social and economic agendas within the area. These linkages will be developed whilst ensuring that a strong identity for the NSA is maintained.

National Support

8.1.9 The national interest in Wester Ross NSA justifies national resources to support the implementation of the strategy. This needs to be clearly quantified along with associated outcomes in the implementation of the Management Strategy.

8.2 Next Steps

8.2.1 The Highland Council and SNH North Areas Board will be invited to endorse this strategy as providing the basis by which they in partnership with others can safeguard and promote the Wester Ross NSA. It is hoped that the Management Strategy will be endorsed by others and resources secured to begin implementation.

8.2.2 The first step will be to translate the draft action plan into a series of prioritised projects with associated business plans that will clearly identify stakeholders, resources and targeted outcomes. These projects will accumulate a number of actions from across the topic objectives in order to build practical on the ground projects.