

The Uplands - Time to Change

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Neglect, apathy and a lack of vision means the UK's uplands are failing to deliver for people and for wildlife, despite the efforts of landowners and policy makers.

That is the stark verdict of the RSPB, which is calling for an urgent debate on the future of the country's mountains, hills, moors and valleys and their role in a world faced with the uncertainties of climate change.

The Society has released a new document detailing the challenges – and some possible solutions – in an effort to kick-start that debate and help shape future policy towards the uplands.

RSPB Scotland will be establishing a separate dialogue with all upland stakeholders north of the border via staff at the Scottish HQ in Edinburgh.

Dr Mark Avery, the RSPB's director of conservation, said: *'The future of the uplands is too important to be left to chance. We are talking about half the area of the UK – the half that has not been ravaged by development and production.'*

'This summer's floods highlight all too clearly the relationship between mankind and nature. The RSPB has some ideas about the changes it would like to see in the uplands, but no-one has all the answers.'

'We want a national debate and we would urge everyone with a stake in and a love for the uplands to take part. It is crucial we make the right choices now.'

The document – **'The Uplands – Time to change?'** – points out that:

- * Much of the upland environment is in a degraded condition, despite the fact that vast tracts are protected by law and that almost 2 million hectares fall within our national parks**
- * Important habitats like upland hay meadows and iconic wildlife like the black grouse are in long-term decline**
- * Much of our drinking water is gathered from the uplands but is increasingly discoloured by pollution from eroding peat, while a reduction in the ability of upland soils to hold water increases the risk and severity of flooding**
- * The income of hill farms is falling while the average age of farmers is increasing.**

In addition, the document points out that the uplands face a new set of challenges due to climate change, including the loss of wetlands and the increased risk of fire on moors and in woods.

Economically important species like red grouse may be forced to retreat uphill and northwards in the face of warmer temperatures.

You can download a copy of the document from:

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/uplands>

Serious challenges

The uplands drive environmental functions that the whole country benefits from: drinking water, flood alleviation, carbon storage, spaces for wildlife, and a rich cultural heritage. In addition, they attract 100 million day visits a year. However, many of the businesses that affect or supply these assets are on the point of economic collapse.

Dr Avery said: *'The document lists some serious challenges both now and in the immediate future, but there are opportunities too.'*

'Managed properly, our upland soils can continue to store huge amounts of carbon, soaking up thousands of tonnes a year which would otherwise contribute to global warming.'

'They can store rainwater, releasing it safely and reliably. All this, while offering a physical refuge for some of our best loved plants and animals and a spiritual refuge from the pressures of modern life.'

He added: *'We have to give proper recognition to the services our uplands provide and proper reward to those who manage the land in a way that delivers them.'*

'We have to find common ground and a shared vision to give our cherished uplands, their people and their wildlife a future.'

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