



## **ACCREDITATION ASSESSMENT**

## **METHODOLOGY**

**Last Updated July 2021**

## INTRODUCTION

Wildlife Estates (WE) was first promoted as a best practice concept in 2004, with the European Landowners Organisation (ELO) taking the lead on its development as a LIFE project from 2005. It gained enthusiastic support from the EC's Directorate-General Environment in Brussels, paving the way for a Scottish equivalent in 2010, with the first pilot estates gaining accreditation in 2013. Nineteen European countries now support the WE Initiative.

Despite its origins in hunting estates across Europe, the Wildlife Estates label in Scotland (WES), has evolved to recognise the holistic approach to land management and encompasses many different land management uses including agriculture, forestry, tourism, hunting and, indeed, land that is managed purely for altruistic purposes. WES has been adapted to incorporate specific Scottish legislation with respect to environmental and public interest requirements.

Much of the habitat and land management across Scotland is already carried out to a high standard, but there are acknowledged gaps and tensions with wider land use goals and interests, and there is always room for improvement. WES fundamentally recognises that land managers must rise to the challenge of demonstrating how Scotland's rich biodiversity benefits from their day-to-day practices. WES recognises that there is no one size fits all in terms of both approaches to land management and also in schools of thought around conservation. Therefore, at the heart of the assessment requirement lies biodiversity. Provided a significant level of biodiversity can be demonstrated to pass the assessment and quantifiable increases in biodiversity are observed every five years upon re-assessment, up to a point (see more detail later in this document), WES takes confidence that the land is being managed responsibly and sustainably with best practice at the heart of all of its management systems.

It is against the backdrop of land management heritage, best practice development, legislation and the growing interests of both the general public and public sector that WES has developed. The WES vision is summarised in the following 10 objectives:

WES is....

1. Able to prove quantifiably that biodiversity is being enhanced;
2. Challenging to achieve, respected all stakeholders and a publicly recognised mark of quality;
3. The default standard and accreditation scheme;
4. Promoting balance between socio, economic and ecological interests and factoring in biodiversity as an integral consideration when making land-use management decisions;
5. Evidence based wildlife and habitat management;
6. Landscape scale wildlife and habitat management;
7. Promoting and encouraging best practice;
8. Helping others reach WES standards through training and mentoring;
9. A robust source of wildlife and habitat data in Scotland; and
10. A useful tool in helping to meet climate change and biodiversity targets.

## MANAGEMENT COMPONENTS

The following section outlines the way in which Wildlife Estates Scotland is managed.



**Scottish Land & Estates (SLE)** has championed the development of WES since the initiative was first set up in 2010. It led the recruitment of members and provided the impetus to establishment of the WES Board and project steering group. Through presence on the WES Advisory Board, it continues to provide strategic advice to the Scheme.

In addition, it provides project management, accounting and membership administration services, an important outlet for marketing of the scheme through different channels and effectively underwrites the financial security of WES as part of the support funding agreement with Nature Scot.

**Nature Scot (formerly SNH)** has supported WES since its inception, providing significant impetus, including financially and at an advisory level through both the board and the technical committee. WES currently report to Nature Scot on progress at four points throughout the year and additionally provide an annual report.

**SAOS Assurance** provide independent, customer-focused, assessment, and certification of the WES initiative.

### **Advisory Board:**

- Rottal Estate (Chair and Scottish Delegate to Wildlife Estates Europe)
- Scottish Government
- Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA)
- Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT)
- Nature Scot
- Dalhousie Estates
- Mar Estate
- Ford and Etal Estate

### **Technical Committee**

- Scottish Land and Estates
- Nature Scot
- RSPB Scotland
- GWCT
- Scottish Forestry
- ITP Energised

The **Steering Group** meets bi-monthly for regular updates and to identify where resource needs to be placed for the coming month. It provides immediate support and ensures WES remains on course to achieve short-term objectives.

## **WES Membership and Accreditation Process**

The following section explains the mechanics of the WES process.

### **Level 1 Application**

WES Level 1 is known as the supporter level. At this level, landholdings become members of WES but are not accredited. To become a supporter of WES, a signature is required, to 10 commitments which stand at the core of the multi-national Wildlife Estates label, thereby committing the landholding to the following:

1. Identification of the landowner or nominated representative for the landholding concerned
2. Undertaking active wildlife and habitat management following a long-term integrated wildlife and habitat management plan
3. Maintaining records and monitoring delivery of the wildlife and habitat management plan
4. Undertaking sustainable land management activities
5. Managing for a sustainable balance of wild species, livestock and game in their shared habitats
6. Maintaining best practice standards of animal welfare
7. Compliance with all legal requirements and relevant Scottish codes of practice
8. Maintaining active engagement with local communities and undertaking education/awareness raising activities
9. To progress towards and to apply for Level 2 Accreditation.

Membership of WES at Level 1 costs £50+VAT annually.

### **Level 2 Application**

The recently revised application form is the cornerstone of WES. The basic content of the application follows the template laid down by Wildlife Estates (Europe),

however, it has evolved significantly in Scotland to account for legislation, best practice and other influences particular to Scotland. Scotland's progressive legislation on access has also had considerable bearing on the shape of the form.

It comprises five modules:

**Module A:** To be completed by all applicants. Data gathered in this section includes information pertinent to all landowners, regardless of land use activity, including: species, habitat, designated sites, climate change considerations, community engagement, outreach and employment.

**Module B:** To be completed if relevant. Data gathered in this section is relevant to all forms of agriculture, including arable and agriculture.

**Module C:** To be completed if relevant. Data gathered in this section is relevant to hunting and includes information relevant to shooting, stalking, fishing, pest/predator control and the rearing and releasing of game.

**Module D:** To be completed if relevant. Data gathered in this section is relevant to woodland and forestry including commercial and non-commercial woodland management, including amenity woodland management.

**Module E:** To be completed if relevant. Data gathered in this section is relevant to tourism, with a particular focus on wildlife tourism.

Each of modules B-E requires information to be provided around the type of land management activities, relevant best practice management procedures and techniques, relevant conservation and habitat enhancement projects, as well as longer term objectives. A habitat management plan is a compulsory part of the WES commitment, however this may be recognised as being incorporated as part of another plan such as a farm management plan, deer management plan or forestry management plan. Each case will be assessed on an individual basis.

## **Level 2 Application Procedure**

Upon committing to achieving certification, the level 2 application form can be accessed through an online portal. The portal allows the application form to be completed online. To receive login details for the portal, please contact WES project officer, Caroline Pringle at [caroline.pringle@wildlife-estates.co.uk](mailto:caroline.pringle@wildlife-estates.co.uk) or on 07436 562 227.

The Project Officer is available to provide assistance with the completion of the forms. Previously, WES have found that this assistance is most effective when undertaken face to face. The Project Officer will also review applications for completeness. Applications must be supported by further information to evidence biodiversity and management approaches. Example documentation includes but is not limited to:

- Habitat Management Plan
- Long Term Forestry plan / Woodland Management plan
- Agri Environment Climate (AEC) Scheme plan

- Farm Management Plan
- Game Management plan
- Deer Group Management plan
- Fisheries Management plan
- Species surveys and reports
- Peatland management plans
- Health & Safety / Risk Assessment plans
- Tenancy agreements
- Additional membership / accreditation certificates
- Management plans for designated sites

Once both WES and the applicant are satisfied, the application is sent to the WES Assessment body for independent assessment.

The assessment comprises two parts:

1. The application form is scored. Points are allocated to scoring questions within each of the sections (some questions are asked for information purposes only). If an applicant cannot complete a section / part section (for example, a landholding which has no designated sites), the score for the relevant questions is nil from nil and therefore does not affect the final percentage score. Applicants must achieve at least 70% of available marks to be eligible for WES accreditation. Where the pass-mark is achieved, the Assessor then arranges to undertake a site visit.
2. A site visit is undertaken in order to verify that information provided in the application form correlates with evidence 'on the ground' (the Assessor will select certain features to consider in detail) and may wish to speak to several relevant personnel.

### **Pending status**

In some cases, an application may be close to a pass, but needs improvement in certain key areas. In such cases, WES may, at its discretion, apply some additional conditions (such as implementing a key plan, organising a specific bird count, or demonstrating specific conservation initiatives) before accreditation is granted. Applicants are afforded up to 6 months to produce extra information or report progress. During this time, the application is 'pending'. Subject to the scoring of this additional work by the Assessor, WES may then offer accreditation. If a pass is still not achieved, the applicant may be barred from making an application for a period of up to five years, depending on the extent of work required to address weaknesses in the application.

The Assessor may refer a query about any aspect of an application to WES staff. If WES is unable to provide a response, it can refer the question or application content to the Expert Advisory Panel for its comments. If there are no further queries or outstanding issues, WES will then confirm certification to the member.

### **Certification**

Once a pass mark has been confirmed by the Assessor and no other information in support of an application is required, a summary of the application report is forwarded to WE delegates across the 19 countries involved in the scheme. Forty-eight hours later, WES may then notify the applicant and issue a certificate. The pass mark will dictate the level (bronze, silver or gold) at which the participant sits. The following pass mark ranges apply:

**Bronze:** 70% – 79%

**Silver:** 80% – 89%

**Gold:** 90% – 100%

Upon award, WES will issue guidelines on adherence to scheme requirements during the period of accreditation to the accredited property. WES also provides a follow-up report detailing comments made by the assessors and potential considerations for the further integration of habitat enhancement into land use activities. WES may additionally define specific actions that it wishes to see carried out by the property during the term of accreditation. Certification lasts for five years. At the end of five years, each applicant must re-apply for WES certification.