

GROWING CONFIDENCE IN WILDLIFE ESTATES SCOTLAND: Designating WES as an OECM

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Purpose

This paper is the second in the 'Growing Confidence in Wildlife Estates Scotland' series. The aim of this paper is to highlight the opportunity for Scottish Government and its agencies to endorse Wildlife Estates Scotland (WES) accredited land as 'Other Effective (Area-based) Conservation Measure' (OECMs) as defined by the IUCN:

"Other effective area-based conservation measure" means "a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and, where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socioeconomic, and other locally relevant values"

Context

In 2018, the concept of OECMs was formally defined through the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (Decision 14/8). The approach has been specifically designed to account for conservation and biodiversity outcomes which are arising from land management where the primary objective is something other than conservation and the land is not designated under a protected area. For example, OECMs may be achieved through the active conservation of an area where conservation outcomes are a secondary management objective (e.g., watershed protection) or where outcomes result as a by-product of management activities, even though biodiversity conservation is not a management objective. There are several criteria which OECMs must meet in order to qualify which are summarised below:

- they must be geographically defined;
- they must have legitimate governance including equity considerations;
- they are managed:
 - in ways that achieve positive and sustained outcomes for biodiversity conservation;
 - in a way that contributes to sustaining the in-situ conservation of biodiversity;
 - consistently with the ecosystem-based and long-term approach;
 - in a way which is informed and monitored.

In Scotland, NatureScot have been tasked with identifying OECM approaches and have convened a Working Group to achieve this.

Opportunity

There are many synergies between the WES and OECM approaches where WES assessment and outcomes align with OECM requirements. With reference to the definition of OECM, WES accredited estates have a range of activities taking place on the land, some of which prioritise conservation and biodiversity enhancement while others produce conservation and biodiversity outcomes indirectly as a result of responsible and sustainable land management. However, both are assessed on their conservation and biodiversity outcomes – including through specific project work, species richness and species and habitat monitoring. With reference to the specific criteria defining OECMs, WES can demonstrate readily how it meets individual requirements and this has been set out in full below.

Table 1

Inter-operability between WES and OECM Criteria:

OECM Criteria	HOW DOES WES MEET THIS REQUIREMENT
It should deliver the effective and enduring in-situ conservation of biodiversity, regardless of its objectives.	WES is applicable to all land managers – irrespective of the land management objectives. The continuous theme running through the accreditation scheme is the maintenance of and adherence to standards concerning biodiversity, conservation and sectoral best practice.
Size and area are described and boundaries are geographically delineated.	As part of the application process, applicants are required to specify, using a map, the land being managed by the owner or occupier.
Governance has legitimate authority and is appropriate for achieving in-situ conservation of biodiversity within the area.	Only owners or occupiers with management control may apply for accreditation. For example, tenant farmers must apply for accreditation in their own right - their landlord cannot do it on their behalf. There are no restrictions on the type of landowner or occupier whether it be, for example, a private individual, a community, a Trust, etc.
Managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained outcomes for biodiversity conservation.	Demonstration of this is a core component of the accreditation and is supported through evidence of conservation work covering the previous 5-year term and the mandatory requirement to have a forward-facing Habitat Management Plan to cover the period of accreditation (5 years).
Relevant authorities and stakeholders are identified and involved in management.	As part of the holistic approach to accreditation, applicants are required to demonstrate levels of, stakeholder engagement and outreach relevant to land management whether it be through communities (including neighbouring land managers), e-NGOs, land management organisations, local authorities, access takers, Government agencies, scientific bodies, interest bodies or others.
A management system is in place that contributes to sustaining the in-situ conservation of biodiversity.	As noted above, a Habitat Management Plan is a pre-requisite of accreditation and must be supplied at the point of assessment. The plan must include key objectives, a route plan of how they will be achieved and also how success will be measured. This requirement goes above and beyond simply sustaining what exists already and, instead, builds continuously on success.
Management is consistent with the ecosystem approach with the ability to adapt to achieve expected biodiversity conservation outcomes, including long-term outcomes, and including the ability to manage a new threat.	WES encourages accredited members to integrate commercial activities with nature by taking a dynamic, integrated approach. Nature must be recognised as an evolving quantum that is integral to adaption and resilience. The ability to maintain the health of the water environment, the soil environment and floral biodiversity is key to this, as these are the bases of primary terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems.

Table 1
Inter-operability between WES and OECM Criteria:

OECM Criteria	HOW DOES WES MEET THIS REQUIREMENT
The other effective area-based conservation measure is in place for the long term or is likely to be. “Sustained” pertains to the continuity of governance and management and “long term” pertains to the biodiversity outcome	As above, we see nature as a dynamic quantum which requires to be adaptable to build resilience. To WES, continuity means maintaining high levels of biodiversity though the species types may shift over time. While WES cannot mandate that accredited members remain accredited, it has been our experience that once on this journey, the variety of benefits speak for themselves and encourage the land managers to further enhance the environment through a nature-minded approach. We do additionally incentivise continual improvement through a Gold, Silver and Bronze structure whereby members can achieve new milestones rather than simply having accreditation.
Recognition of other effective conservation area measures is expected to include the identification of the range of biodiversity attributes for which the site is considered important	Applicants must collate species richness lists covering the following groups of organisms: mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, aquatic (fish, molluscs, crustaceans) invertebrates, trees, other plants (vascular and non-vascular) and fungi. This is a core part of the assessment and is something they build on over time. These species lists help identify where gaps in knowledge are and provide the basis to expand on their knowledge of the flora and fauna utilising the environment.
Processes should be in place to evaluate the effectiveness of governance and management, including with respect to equity.	WES applicants are assessed and audited on a 5-yearly basis by an independent ISO-accredited body which means they are audited by UKAS to ensure that their audit service is consistent, impartial and is undertaken by experienced and proficient teams. Applicants must demonstrate that their management is effective at delivering for the environment but additionally, due to the holistic, integrated nature of the accreditation, they must also demonstrate how they are approaching/achieving the following: • Community Engagement • Scientific Outreach • Access Facilitation • Collaboration Through assessment of the above, WES audits applicants on their contribution to the community including neighbouring land managers, residents, nearby settlements, tourists and wider stakeholders.

Conclusion

Given the all-encompassing and rigorous nature of accreditation process, it would be logical to explore feasibility options for integrating WES accredited landholdings into an OECM approach. Accredited membership (level 2) currently stands at 300,000ha, with a further 855,000ha within the supporter membership (level 1). WES staff, supported by SLE, are currently ramping up efforts to translate level 1 members into level 2 members, while continuously advocating the benefits of the accreditation to those not yet in either membership category. In short, the cumulative size of WES accredited land will continue to grow.

While there will be some overlap between designated sites and WES accredited land, the accreditation provides a useful starting point to grow a credible and recognised conservation measure which already has institutional buy-in from Scotland's landowning community. Indeed, integration of WES accredited land to an OECM approach is likely to further incentivise accreditation.

In light of the above, we ask that WES accredited land is designated as an Other Effective (area-based) Conservation Measure.

Questions and Queries:

Please direct any questions or queries to:

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