

## Executive Summary

Perceptions of Land Use Change in the Lake District National Park: Threats and Opportunities.

Dominic Hall. Imperial College London - Centre for Environmental Policy. September 2014.

## Introduction

Upland areas cover a third of the UK's land surface (Reed *et al.* 2009a). They support important industries such as hill farming, forestry and tourism, have 419,000 ha designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (Crowle and McCormack in Bonn *et al.*, 2009) and are highly valued for their landscape and cultural heritage as well as being an important source of ecosystem services, for example providing 60% of the UK's drinking water (Allott in Bonn *et al.*, 2009).

Many commentators agree that the UK uplands face an 'uncertain future' (Reed *et al.*, 2009a) with possible future land uses including, 'business-as-usual, management for biodiversity and re-wilding' (Whyte, 2005). This different range of land uses creates imminent threats and opportunities for the uplands (Bonn *et al.*, 2009) with trade-offs required between a range of complex drivers including food production, biodiversity, recreation, cultural tradition and the provision of broader ecosystem services (Winter and Lobley, 2009).

The difficulties of these trade-offs can be exacerbated within National Parks, in particular in the UK, where National Parks are populated areas and a balance is therefore required between the needs of residents, resource management, visitors, the protection of ecological services and wildlife (MacEwen, 1982). This project considered future land use in the uplands through a case study of the Lake District National Park (LDNP).

The perception of the general public is likely to become an increasingly important influence on land use policy (Swanwick, 2009). The debate, however, remains dominated by large stakeholder organisations with limited information available about the opinion of the public. Whilst some would challenge the dominance of public opinion over other stakeholders such as landowners and residents of the park (Redbanks, 2014, pers. comm.) the public who, as tax payers fund many of the schemes affecting management of the park, seem set to have considerable influence.

The importance of public perception is increased considerably by the key role of tourism in the LDNP (Lupp *et al.*, 2013) and its role as a national park, designated both for protection and to provide recreational space for the public (Suckall *et al.*, 2009). This gives rise to strong opinions regarding the history, cultural significance and aesthetic values of the Park (Scott, 2002).

Despite the importance of public perception, it is often little understood. This project therefore investigated the perceptions of both key stakeholder organisations and the general public. It then compared how closely aligned the perceptions of these two groups are and, in turn, explored the potential threats and opportunities posed for future land use scenarios in the LDNP.

### The Lake District National Park



- England's largest National Park, covering 2292 square kilometres.
- Designated in 1951 - long history of influence by those who live and work in the park.
- Home to 40,800 people.
- Ongoing history of mining, forestry and farming.
- 74% of the National Park remains in Natural England land management schemes and over 17,000 hectares in Woodland Grant Schemes (LDNPA, 2012).
- 41,947 ha under SSSI protection and is home to iconic species such as natterjack toads and red squirrels.

- Stores of carbon in peat bogs and water catchments including Haweswater – the largest reservoir in North-West England (RSPB, 2014).
- Major tourist attraction with 14.8 million visitors a year (LDNPA, 2012).

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## Methodology

### Use of scenarios

There is an increasing use of scenarios in the context of upland futures to 'help decision-makers better understand, anticipate and respond to the sorts of dynamic and uncertain futures that uplands face' (Reed *et al.*, 2009b).

This project therefore used scenario methodology to investigate the perceptions of stakeholders and the public regarding four possible scenarios for the Lake District in 2060.

### Overall Aim:

**To investigate the perceptions of stakeholder organisations and members of the public towards alternative land use visions for the future of the Lake District National Park.**

### Phase 1 - Stakeholder Organisations – Visions for the Future

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 17 individuals, representing major organisational stakeholders in the National Park. The aim of this exercise was to assess the validity of the scenarios as well as the perceptions of key stakeholder organisations regarding the four scenarios.

### Phase 2 - Perceptions of the Public

A questionnaire was distributed online and during field visits to the Lake District in June and July 2014. A total of 1044 responses were received in total, with 313 (31% of the total) handed out during fieldtrips to the Lake District and the remainder coming online.

Qualitative and quantitative analysis was carried out of the questionnaire data, including two statistical reviews to investigate influences on scenario selection (chi squared comparison of actual and expected values for particular groupings of respondents and multivariate regression analysis).

## Results

### Questionnaire respondents...

#### Perceive the Lakes as...

- A managed environment (60%)
- Having main purposes\* related to protection and natural features: (conservation and preservation, 60%; nature and wildlife 53%; landscape, scenery and views, 45%)
- Having ecological features and wildlife in a state which is 'good' or 'very good' (ecological, 'good' or 'very good' 51% vs 12% 'poor' or 'very poor'; wildlife 49% vs 7%)

#### Would change how often they come to the Lakes...

... if there was:

	come MORE	come LESS	no difference
more wildlife	48%	1%	51%
less sheep farming	9%	11%	79%
more trees	20%	9%	71%
more varied vegetation	18%	10%	72%

\*Respondents selected their top three answers

### Scenario A:

- The lake district is dominated by farmland
- Traditional communities and ways of life continue
- This supports food production and contributes to national food self-sufficiency
- Ongoing tax payer support is used to support farming through subsidies
- The fells retain their popularity with walkers and tourists
- The historic landscape is maintained

The Lake District is a devastated landscape; the high fells in particular are almost devoid of wildlife, with a severely limited biodiversity. This has resulted from chronic overgrazing by sheep... Few visitors appreciate this, or what the fells could become if managed for wildlife. Heavily subsidised sheep farming makes no sense either environmentally or economically.

For Monbiot this may be bowling greens with contours... for other people it gives them an enormous sense of liberation, of spiritual refreshment, wonderful views, highly complex sheep farming systems... they come to see lambs skipping in the fields, and pretty houses and the mountains.

#### Interviewees: Opinion was split:

5 preferred, 5 least preferred

#### Public survey: Most popular:

51% preferred, 16% least preferred

#### Preferred by questionnaire respondents who:

- believe state of wildlife / ecology is good
- believe that farmers are important to food security and for wildlife
- perceived that the Lakes has changed little (over the past 200 years)
- go to the Lakes more regularly

### Scenario B:

- Rural subsidies are focused on encouraging diversification and developing new industries
- The Lake District develops with an increased emphasis on tourism
- Some areas focus on more facilities such as hotels and visitor activities, others focus on high end exclusive, tranquillity and others on adventure – (eg more bridleways for mountain bikers, and other adventure activities eg kayaking, ropes courses, zipwires)
- Farming reduces
- There is a spread of scrub and tree cover on lower fells
- This benefits wildlife
- But the traditional landscapes of the lakes changes

**Interviewees:** *Well accepted:*

5 preferred, 1 least preferred

**Public survey:** *Least popular:*

8% preferred, 38% least preferred

**Preferred by questionnaire respondents who:**

- *use the countryside for recreation more*
- *would like to see less sheep and more trees*

The impact of tourism can turn the Lakes into a giant attraction free from local inhabitants, old ways of life will vanish and the whole thing become centred on money generation.

People should be able to come here and see white tailed eagles and... have that sense that they are coming to a special place and not just... another slightly nobbler version of the countryside.

**Interviewees:** *Least popular:* Preferred, 1; least preferred, 5

**Public survey:** *Less, but not least popular:* 12% preferred, 30% least

**Preferred by questionnaire respondents who:**

- *use the countryside for recreation more*
- *would like to see less sheep and more trees*
- *strongly disagree that farmers support wildlife and landscape*

I thought George Monbiot was very unconvincing about these new employment opportunities coming out of rewilding. The only example he could give was people paying to come and see someone feed red kites – it's very weak I think.

### Scenario D:

- Schemes to pay land owners for ecosystem services result in large areas of the Lakes managed to maximise benefits such as carbon storage, water quality, biodiversity and flood management
- This involves things such as tree-planting, fencing off water courses, re-naturalising rivers, restoring peat bogs, reducing livestock numbers
- This benefits wildlife and increases biodiversity
- Tourism is still important but environmental protection takes centre stage – access is limited in some areas but many tourists continue to come to enjoy the landscape and the increased biodiversity
- Traditional landscapes change
- Agricultural livelihoods are reduced

I believe that more of the land should be managed with water quality as the key driver, which draws down all these other benefits for biodiversity, carbon and I would suggest improved tourism as well, because there would be something for people to come up and see rather than just sheep and hills.

### Scenario C:

- Farmland is increasingly abandoned as it becomes economically unviable
- The lake district is 'rewilded' - nature left to 'do its own thing'
- Some wildlife benefits but others suffer from the lack of management
- The traditional landscape changes as scrub and forest spreads over the fells
- Local farming employment and traditional livelihoods reduce
- But new employment opportunities develop
- Examples could include species reintroductions
- And wildlife tourism
- Or payment schemes to land owners who leave the land wild increasing carbon capture and improving water quality

**Interviewees:** *Most popular:* 8 preferred, 1 least preferred

**Public survey:** *Second most popular:*

28% preferred, 16% least preferred

**Preferred by questionnaire respondents who:**

- *use the countryside for recreation more*
- *would like to see less sheep and more trees*
- *are employed in conservation*
- *are members of conservation organisations*
- *believe the state of the ecology and wildlife is poor*

Should scenarios B, C and D have greater influence over the national park in the future they will destroy completely the whole concept of the park. Something which has been built up by generations of farmers and country people on top of what nature has provided.

## Conclusions

In simple terms, this study has revealed a strong preference for continuation of the current status quo in LDNP land use (scenario A). This is consistent with support for traditional farmed landscapes and aesthetic and cultural preferences recorded in the literature (Willis and Garrod, 1991; Soliva and Hunziker, 2009) as well as a potential interpretation of status quo bias (Reed *et al.*, 2009b).

However, comparison of the views of the key stakeholder interview group and the questionnaire respondents shows evidence of a disconnect between the perceptions of these two key groups. It is therefore important to return to the aim of this project, to consider the underlying perceptions which affect these opinions regarding land use change and consider threats and opportunities posed to the different visions put forward:

**Scenario A:** Scenario A envisages a continuation of the status quo of current LDNP land use. The major opportunity for this vision is a continued high level of support amongst questionnaire respondents with 51% selecting it as their favoured scenario. The position of organisations in favour of this scenario was well understood by other stakeholder groups. There also remains a strong public perception supporting farmers, in spite of high understanding of dependence on public money, believing them to be important for food security, support of landscape, wildlife and culture.

However, considerable threats are seen for this vision of the future in terms of a high level of opposition amongst other key stakeholder groups who are increasingly seeking wider environmental benefits and a reduced focus on production based agriculture. There was a strong perception amongst stakeholders that funding and policy influences made this an unlikely scenario for the future.

**Scenario C:** There was clearly a growing awareness of the concept and influence of rewilding amongst both the stakeholders groups and the public. However the majority opinion was that it was not a preferred scenario for the LDNP. Nevertheless, there was equally a growing sense of philosophical support amongst some of the stakeholders and with 12% in favour and 30% against it, it proved a more popular scenario amongst the public than scenario B. Support was also seen for elements of rewilding with stakeholders talking about employing elements of it selectively in some areas. Similarly, amongst the questionnaire respondents, support was seen for more trees and vegetation. However it was clear that the success of the notion of rewilding depends on giving people a clearer vision of its benefits and avoiding negative perceptions such as abandonment and lack of viable support for local communities.

**Scenario B:** Scenario B envisaged a more tourism focused LDNP. Though it was generally accepted as an important and likely scenario by stakeholder organisations it was, conversely, the least popular option with the questionnaire respondents amongst whom there was a strong sense that the Lakes were saturated and that any increase in tourism may damage what was valued about the park. Therefore whilst the popularity of the Lakes as a tourist destination and the acceptance of the role of tourism amongst all stakeholder organisations suggests considerable opportunities for future tourism focused scenarios, it is clear that it will have to be managed carefully to avoid a perception of over commercialisation and loss of the character valued by its current visitors and residents.

**Scenario D:** As seen in the literature (Arblaster, 2010) there was a growing acceptance and support for the concept of Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) amongst the stakeholder groups and this also appeared to be translating into the public with it being selected as the second most popular scenario (28%) and, perhaps as importantly, jointly least unpopular (16%) amongst the questionnaire respondents.

However, difficulties in communicating some of the benefits of this approach were clear. It was notable that stakeholder organisations supporting this approach were often misunderstood by other stakeholders and perceived to be supportive of rewilding instead. There is also strong evidence that questionnaire respondent's scenario selection was influenced very much by cognitive perceptions, such as their perception of the quality of present LDNP wildlife or the level of change in the LDNP over the last 200 years. The strong support for wildlife and nature as a key purpose of the park, a perception that many people would come to the Lakes more if there were more wildlife, and some support for more trees and vegetation would all suggest strong opportunities for a PES based vision of the future of the park. However, this would require stakeholder groups who believe the state of the LDNP wildlife and ecology is that this is related to current farming practice, to communicate that fact to the general public more clearly and convincingly.

The future of the park will not be one template scenario applied across the park, but a patchwork of compromise and blended solutions to meet the complex range of needs of residents, stakeholder organisations and the wider public. There was strong support for the concept of compromised, blended solutions, and furthermore evidence that if the messages of stakeholders can be more clearly communicated to other groups there may be even greater scope to make these compromises work.

However, all stakeholders will seek to influence the balance of that compromised solution and ensure elements of their preferred scenarios are well represented in the LDNP of the future. If, as Lupp (2013) suggests, land use preferences can be influenced by providing more information regarding the landscape, then perhaps the major opportunity and threat for all the scenarios is the ability of stakeholders to communicate their perceptions clearly and convincingly both to each other and to a wider public. As one questionnaire respondent put it:

I love the Lakes as they are, respect the people who live and work there and want the place and the people to thrive. The survey suggests that the Lakes could help 'save the planet' by doing things differently. Maybe if I understood more about how this would work my first instinct to leave things as they are might need rethinking.