

Is peatland restoration in Scotland good value for money?



The Challenge

Peatland is approximately 20% of Scotland's land cover. Historic ecological degradation by agricultural and forestry activities raise concerns about the ecological condition of this natural capital. The benefits of peatland restoration have been recognised by policy makers and the Scottish Government has committed to fund restoration activities. Information about the costs and benefits of peatland restoration are necessary to ensure value for money.

Policy Implication

The findings can be used as a benchmark for national level policy appraisals of peatland restoration, and as a starting point for more detailed assessments of projects on a case by case basis. Such assessments should integrate more detailed information on peatland baseline condition and more refined data on restoration costs than in the illustrative cost benefit appraisals conducted in this study.

Overall, benefit estimates of restoration exceed its cost. This makes investment in peatland restoration socially desirable and underscores the important role that peatland restoration can play in contributing to climate change mitigation as well as providing numerous ecosystem services to society.

Research

The Scottish public was surveyed in 2016 to investigate their support for peatland restoration, and to estimate the benefits that restoration may generate for society. This survey questioned perceptions of peatlands and their attitudes towards restoration. Respondents were asked to chose between two types of improvement: shifts from poor to good condition, and shifts from intermediate to good condition.

Results

80% of those surveyed expressed support for peatland restoration. The greatest value was found for restoring peatlands from intermediate to good condition, in relatively remote and inaccessible areas, where peatlands make up a large proportion of the land cover. Average annual benefits of peatland restoration across preferred locations are £273 per hectare for a shift from poor to good condition and £190 for a shift from intermediate to good condition.

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Good ecological condition



Intermediate ecological condition



Bad ecological condition

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About

The Land Economy, Environment and Society (LEES) Research Group is one of the largest groupings of economists and social scientists working in the rural, agricultural and land based sectors in the UK. Our vision is to be recognised as one of the leading centres for agricultural and wider rural economic and social research globally, benefiting the land use sector, the environment and rural communities.

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