

Moorland Association Strategy Document

Our purpose

To ensure driven grouse shooting continues to thrive in England and Wales, so that it can protect and maintain open heather moorland and all the communities that depend on it.

Jan 2025 – Dec 2027
moorlandassociation.org



The Moorland Association



This document presents the strategy for the Moorland Association.

The management board involved in the development of the strategy are:

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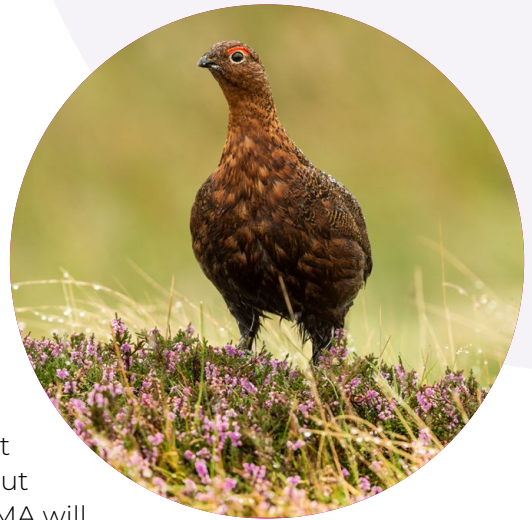


Introduction

A new government has taken the reins in Westminster. Organisations with a remit to ban or curtail driven grouse shooting are seeing opportunities to spread and deepen their influence. It is against this background that the Moorland Association (MA) must up its game to protect driven grouse shooting, those who work in it, and ultimately the other species that depend on heather moorland habitat. The evidence shows that this habitat and unique assemblage of species is best supported and maintained by driven grouse shooting. The income it generates and the incentives it provides has made driven grouse shooting one of the world's most successful conservation stories.

With much consideration, we have produced this document which sets out how we, the MA, will protect grouse shooting. The MA's membership base encompasses the largest network of moorland managers, who are best placed to protect and maintain open heather moorland, internationally recognised as one of the rarest habitats on earth. Drawing on this membership, the MA is the leading authority on moorland, and it is vital that we are acknowledged as such.

As well as continuing what we already do well, we have listed five additional tasks, which we call 'change projects'. These are ambitious and far reaching, but are within our capabilities. This document details these projects, their purpose and outcomes, timings and who will take on responsibilities for them in the MA. The document is dynamic and will be updated as time goes on.



The MA Strategy Document also sets out what the MA will (or will not) be expected to do as the leading authority on moorland, and what it will (or will not) be able to do for its members. It also details some basic beliefs that will guide our day-to-day actions and decision making.

Always in the backs of our minds are some assumptions, and our strategic plan lists ones we make about MA and other moorland interests.

Importantly, the document notes that there are changes occurring within the upland community that will impact on both what the MA can do and how it will do it over the next three years. We have assessed each of these trends according to impact and urgency, giving an overall 'score' which will guide how we prioritise and react to each trend. Top of this list is the increase in statutory regulation and lack of experience (and confidence in) those regulating. It is just one of many trends we have identified.

After reading this MA Strategy Document, we hope you will be confident that the MA is 'on the case' for grouse moors, and has developed a sensible, workable and achievable plan to get the best outcome for conservation in moorland areas.





1

Strategic Statement

Our purpose

To ensure driven grouse shooting continues to thrive in England and Wales, so that it can protect and maintain open heather moorland and all the communities that depend on it.

Our goal

To be the Government's number one advisor on moorlands.

Our source of competitive advantage

The nation's largest network of moorland managers, which has proven through driven grouse shooting to be best placed to protect and maintain open heather moorland, one of the rarest habitats on earth, and is best placed to provide jobs in some of the most economically-challenged regions of the country.





This will be delivered by

- 1 Our expert knowledge of moorland management, gained through managing it.
- 2 Working with science-based organisations to grow the evidence base.
- 3 Identify which species would benefit from the control of those currently protected.
- 4 Demonstrating conservation excellence by our members.
- 5 Providing excellent advice to our members.
- 6 Being policy makers first choice for moorland advice.
- 7 Speaking truth to those in power.
- 8 Working constructively with regulators.
- 9 Become leaders in upland best practice.
- 10 Being trusted by our members.
- 11 Staff performing with excellence in their roles.
- 12 Robust financial controls.
- 13 Following governance best practice.
- 14 Matching our team capacity to the strategic plan.
- 15 Having the confidence to take legal action when appropriate.
- 16 Maintaining high levels of service to members.
- 17 Providing a healthy and safe place to work.
- 18 Developing and growing the skills of our people.



2

Change Projects

In addition to our existing workload, the following change projects have been identified (appointments will be made and kept under review by the Board)

Activity	Outcome	Timing	Responsibility
1. Establish leading licensing department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Service of value to our members · Understand when and how to best challenge regulation · Better regulation (including any proposed licensing of grouse shooting) · Roadmap to control protected species · Build a robust reputation with regulators 	Ongoing	Andrew Gilruth and tbc
2. Increase positive media activity (online and press)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Identify and respond to all media opportunities by 11am every day · Commission case study reports of our successes and failure of others · Gamekeepers' and owners' efforts are recognised · Demonstrate the folly of spending more on counting birds rather than protecting them 	Ongoing	Andrew Gilruth
3. Establish moorland conservation project(s) to win grant funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Public profile and reputation · Secure public funds to recruit more administrative and policy staff (they can also attend conservation policy meetings) · Ensure available public funding is going to projects that deliver the best results · Benchmark our cost effectiveness against other conservation projects 	From April 2025	tbc
4. Establish an economic modelling unit to track ecological, economic and social claims and efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Secure policy maker and public support for cost effective conservation including predator control and game management techniques · Recognition of keepers' and members' work · Model the cost of 'replacing' wildlife if driven grouse shooting is lost · Track and document the expenditure and outcomes of all conservation groups and large-scale projects 	From July 2025	tbc
5. Establish an uplands research hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Create efficiencies and co-ordination of effort whilst also identifying research opportunities · Encourage those with land access for research to share primary data · Inform media messaging and content for positive press coverage 	From March 2026	tbc

3 Service and membership boundaries

Services

We will / will not offer services with the following characteristics:

Will	Will not
Offer guidance on land management (including licence applications)	Offer guidance on windfarms
Be associated with projects that embrace predator control	Be associated with projects that do not openly embrace predator control
Defend those innocent of crimes	Defend the actions of those found guilty
Challenge disproportionate regulation	Accept regulation with no benefit to society
Engage with organisations willing to listen and understand complex moorland issues	Waste time meeting with organisations repeatedly critical of driven grouse shooting in an unbalanced way
Base policies on science and evidence (and change them as and when required)	Adopt policies that conflict with the scientific literature or based on prejudice
Offer media advice to estates to promote their good work	Offer media advice to estates on land management issues beyond our remit

Members

We will / will not offer our services to members with the following characteristics:

Will	Will not
Ensure members have swift access to Directors and senior staff	Allow MA policies to be decided by the views of either small or large moor owning members
Give each Full member one vote on all members' resolutions	Allow Supporter and Associate members to vote on resolutions
Those who understand we must act in the interests of the Association	Act in the interests of an individual estate
Those with moorland interests	Those without moors
In England and Wales	In Scotland
Those endeavouring to supporting codes of best practice	Bring the upland community into disrepute





4 Operating principles & constraints – basic beliefs

The following **Operating principles** will guide day to day actions and decision making:



We will value and invest in our staff

Evidence

- Staff training and development
- IT and admin support
- Annual appraisals
- Mentoring

We actively manage grouse moors for all

Evidence

- Breeding bird numbers (Gov 2030 targets)
- Maintenance of habitat (global biodiversity)
- Employment numbers
- Delivery of public goods (Gov 25-year plan)

We will follow governance best practice

Evidence

- Quarterly board meetings
- Annual review and update of strategic plan
- Biennial audit of Board skills
- Biennial review of Articles of Association

We will be a responsible Association

Evidence

All policies will be written down and reviewed at intervals agreed by the Board



We will always have a clear direction and a formal planning process

Evidence

With developed and measured strategy, business plan and annual budgets



We will respond swiftly to all media opportunities

Evidence

Agreed responses to complex but common questions will be given to media staff



We will ensure information is provided to our members swiftly in a format they can digest

Evidence

- Bi-monthly e-newsletter opening rates and length of time they are read for
- Annual membership survey



We will provide value to our members

Evidence

- Represent their interests to regulators
- Represent them in the media
- Provide factual and practical information
- Assist with licence applications



We will continually grow and manage change to meet our strategic goals

Evidence

Change programme reviewed by the Board quarterly (and appointments approved by the Board).

We will communicate and deliver to our members in a professional way

Evidence

- Membership levels
- Annual regional members' meetings



We will ensure that our policies and positions are written and articulated logically

Evidence

Policies and positions reviewed by the MA Advisory Group before publication





5

Assumptions

In developing the strategic plan the following assumptions have been made about the Moorland Association and other stakeholders:

- Moor owners are willing to support a robust and credible strategic plan.
- We are able to recruit and retain suitably qualified staff.
- Nature reserves (including the RSPB) will fail to publish meaningful numbers on their successes or failures.
- The RSPB will continue to base policies on emotion not science.
- The RSPB will continue to lobby for the licensing of grouse shooting.
- Nature reserves (including the RSPB) will not publish bird fledging success.
- The RSPB will continue to incite hostility against gamekeepers and moor owners.
- The Charity Commission will not hold wildlife charities to account.
- The National Audit Office (NAO) will not review conservation grant expenditure.
- Rewilding will continue to be portrayed as a panacea.
- Conservation charities will continue to be driven by woke agendas and fear vocal minorities within their memberships.
- Nature bodies (including Natural England) will be biased against game shooting.
- Statutory bodies will not challenge group-think in the conservation industry.
- The echo chamber on peatland management and rewetting will continue.
- Evidence produced to the same (or better) standard as the conservation industry will be seen (and treated) as inferior by e-NGOs and statutory bodies.

Annex 1 - External Trends

This table identifies the changes that are occurring within the upland community that will impact both on what the Moorland Association can do and how it will do it over the next three years. To assess the relative priority of each trend, each has been assessed against Impact (I) and Urgency (U).

Trends	Impact	Action	I	U	Total
Increased statutory regulation and the lack of experience (and confidence in) those regulating (particularly Natural England)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not able to manage habitat for wildlife • Loss of asset value, enjoyment and jobs • Loss of global biodiversity • Demotivation of rural workers • Owners reluctant to invest (or new owners to purchase) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge proposed changes • Engage with statutory bodies • Take legal action • Political lobbying (local and national) • Media promotion of issues • Provide members with advice • Set up a licensing service • Promote best practice 	10	10	100
Public servants increasingly afraid of environmental organisations and have been captured by environmental group-thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence (including science) ignored • Loss of wildlife • Wildfire risk is increasing • Illegal killing exaggerated • Wildlife conflict is not recognised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up landscape-scale conservation projects to demonstrate success and secure grant funding • Support IUCN resolution guidelines • Work with Home Office and FRS • Challenge bird crime misreporting and importance of reporting it alongside other rural crime 	10	9	90
Greater localism in nature policy making and delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Nature Partnerships (48 councils) and National Parks receive more power and funding • Local wildlife trusts receive more influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure share of this funding • Robust staff on these committees • Encourage better national policy • Moorland visits in the Spring 	9	10	90
Increased public popularism of rewilding as a concept to such an extent that it is assumed to be successful without it needing to provide any supporting evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception that managed moorlands are 'unnatural' • Some of the rarest habitat on earth is described as a 'monoculture' • Heather is no longer being seen as 'peat forming' or of value to wildlife 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question sources of grant funding • Collect and use our own data • Challenge in the media (eg. explain that fire and grazing are natural processes too) • Demand a review of expenditure and results of these projects 	9	9	81
Growth in social media (and its use by detractors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health impact on rural staff • Shooting community risk aversion • Perception is reality for some 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support moorland group social media activity (and opportunities) • Provide lines to take 	8	7	56

Society is increasingly urbanised and detached from the countryside. Wild animals are now seen as pets, endowed with human feelings and character. Societal insecurity has become a breeding ground for fear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing aversion to the act of killing (even for conservation purposes) Small vote block - the heritage of rural communities is being destroyed Jobs evaporating because sheep farming and field sports undermined National Parks and National Landscapes have too strong a voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pressure policy makers on the cost of resulting inefficiency Use IUCN guidelines to protect heritage and indigenous people Show we are effective, not intensive Price what will be lost. Calculate cost of replacing it using other techniques 	9	8	72
Growth in green markets. Carbon sequestration, renewable energy and biodiversity net gain (BNG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential income and protection of land Loss of land to tree planting or turbines Increase in predators on adjacent moors (fragmentation of management) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor opportunities Track impacts of existing changes Challenge CSR policy to include economic, ecological and social 	7	7	49
Recognition of lead as a health hazard (human and wildlife) extending to shotgun ammunition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retailers seek lead-free game Detractors use it as a stick Shortage of alternative ammunition Health and safety issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with cartridge manufacturers Encourage members who use non-lead to share their experiences Ricochet and lethality mitigation 	6	5	30
Climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warmer drier summers – less bird food More high-pressure weather – more wildfires Wetter periods – disease 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up disease monitoring scheme(s) Work with vets Encourage best practice 	4	5	20
Managing for a recession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of income Loss of rural workers Suppliers may enter administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track market through Agents Encourage sales to overseas visitors Establish final resort donor group 	5	4	20
Increased levels of recreation and rights of public access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Antisocial activity Litter. Wildfires Trap damage Loss of wildlife 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document and record trends/ issues Secure exemptions on SSSI units 	4	4	16
The 'public goods' expected of the uplands have increased	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detractors select the issues they wish Policy making is more complex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the fact that trade-offs are required (eg trees vs open moors) 	4	4	16
Global population increase from 8.1 to 11 billion by 2100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UK 60% self-sufficient and dropping in an unstable world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shooting and sheep production deliver Naïve to allow rewilding to destroy 	4	2	8





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Designed by Fellows Media Ltd