

Food & Footprint

Research-backed end-to-end sustainability solutions.

Net zero policy:
Scotland's five Regional Land Use Partnership (RLUP) Pilots receive constructive feedback

Project summary

The five Regional Land Use Partnership (RLUP) pilot regions for 2021-23 are an important step for Scottish Government in achieving Scotland's climate targets through the management of natural capital. This process evaluation analyses key issues which may impact on the delivery of the innovative RLUP pilots as they gain momentum.



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Land use is a complex system in which human and natural factors interact in unpredictable ways. Careful planning and novel approaches are needed for land use change. Long-term decisions for lasting solutions require the greatest amount of forethought and input from people with experience across a multitude of sectors. The challenge set before Scottish Government, and indeed many governments the world over, is how to reconcile existing land uses and the complex challenges therein with the need for unprecedented haste in taking climate change mitigation actions.

Scotland's Regional Land Use Partnerships (RLUPs) show great potential to help address the climate and environmental crises and support a just transition, with community engagement as the key to this. Hoping to tackle land use issues by aligning the key actors at the optimal scale, these partnerships are a core element of Scottish Government's plan to deliver the nation to net zero on schedule.

In the 2021 Programme for Government, published in September, a commitment was made to develop plans for a second phase of the RLUPs from 2023, if the pilots can demonstrate that they meet expectations relating to national outcomes on the environment and climate change, and show that they have taken a local, democratic approach.

Since March 2021, five pilots have been establishing themselves in indicative Regional Spatial Strategy areas: Northeast Region (Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City), Cairngorms National Park, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, Highland Region, and South of Scotland (Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway).

A central goal of RLUPs is to collaborate on the creation of a Regional Land Use Framework (RLUF), an integrated plan which reconciles the many interests in the region, identifying areas of opportunity to deliver multiple benefits through specific land use change projects. Driven by the experience of different sectors and using the latest data available, RLUFs are hoped to reflect the best possible use of each parcel of land within the region, contributing to tackling the twin climate and environment crises. This document would then be used to guide land use decisions within the region, as well as other regional plans cross-complying with the standards set in the RLUF. Consistent with the principles and objectives in the LUS, these RLUFs will help to deliver on national targets by leveraging changes at regional and local scales.

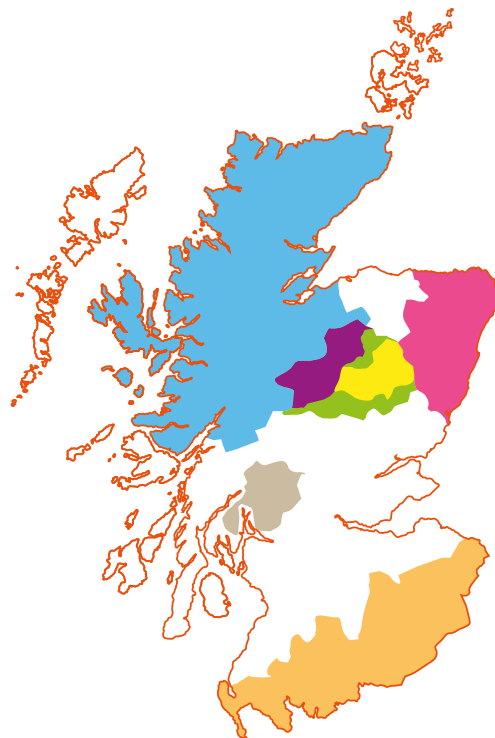
Many pressing questions surrounding RLUP implementation remain unanswered. To help address this, a multidisciplinary team of SAC Consultants, and members of the SRUC Rural Policy Centre, were brought in to evaluate the progress during Phase 1 of these pilots and collate all lessons learned from the early stages of establishing these participatory groups.

As experts in participatory governance and with deep roots in the Scottish rural context, the SAC Consulting team were trusted, independent intermediaries able to cut to the core of the barriers encountered by the nascent RLUPs.

The evaluation took a baseline before-and-after approach, to allow for the diversity in starting conditions across the different regions taking part in the pilot. Aided by a Theory of Change model, the evaluators mapped out these starting conditions and other inputs, the desired outcomes, and pathways to achieve these.

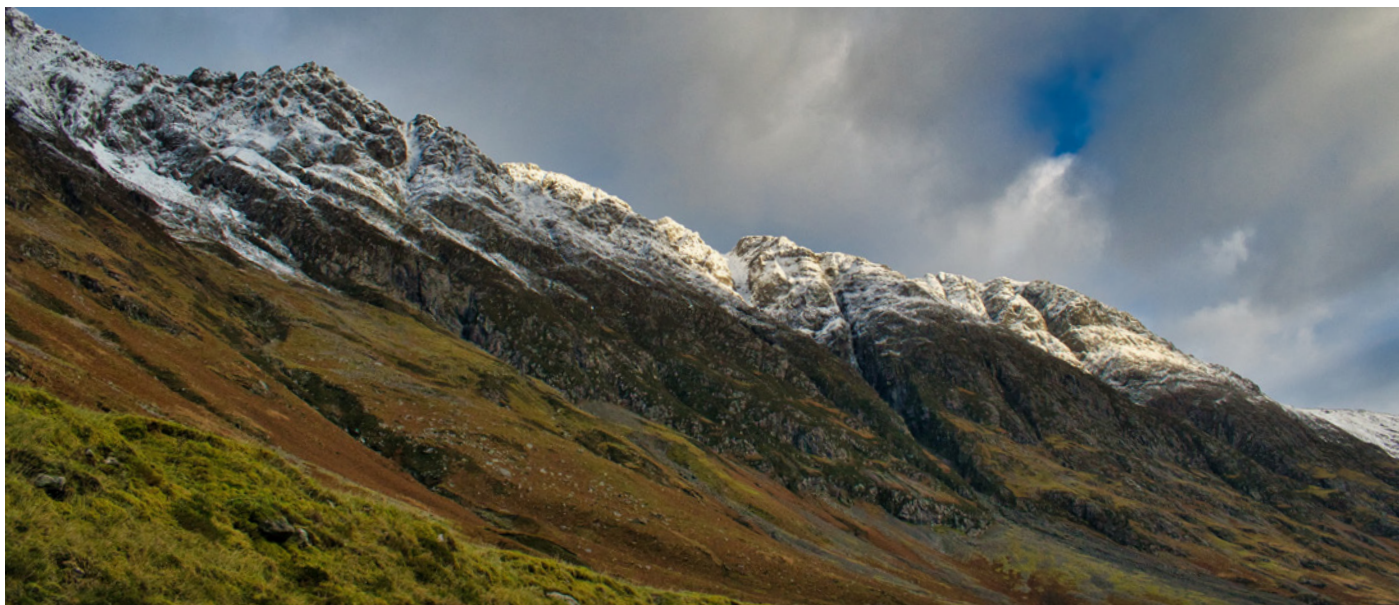
Two workshops held with pilots and the Scottish Government team ensured collaborative troubleshooting of any issues we encountered. The final report provided a clear account of the evaluation process from start to finish. The findings will build evidence to assist Scottish Ministers with future decision-making regarding RLUPs.

RLUPs and other landscape-scale partnerships are widely regarded as the key mechanism through which to take key actions to mitigate climate and nature crises. Changes in land use



The Regional Spatial Strategy areas

- Northeast Region
(Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City)
- Cairngorms National Park
- Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park
- Highland Region
- South of Scotland
(Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway)



(such as afforestation, peatland restoration, and farm practices) can be optimised to deliver multiple benefits from the vantage point of these middle scales. Regional scale working also captures the necessary breadth of stakeholder participation to ensure these changes are equitable and acceptable by local communities and economies.

Experience in establishing and facilitating these groups will become increasingly valuable and lead to further work, likely with Scotland's RLUPs themselves, as well as with the growing number of analogous groups across the UK and beyond.

SAC Consulting is eager to work with partnerships and organisations across the UK looking to restore, improve, or leverage their local natural capital. Our multi-faceted expertise and context as part of SRUC, makes us uniquely well-placed to work across policy, research, communities, and emerging markets for ecosystem services, supporting the industry as we collectively move forward together.

“Thanks again for your hard work with conducting such thorough interviews, facilitating the workshops, liaising with teams, and dealing with the numerous comments and requests from us and the pilot regions – then pulling all the info together into the various reports. It was good to work with you.”

Claire Ghee

Regional Land Use Partnership Policy Officer,
Scottish Government

Links

For more information, our service offering is detailed at [Food & Footprint](#).

If your organisation is seeking to take forward a project or initiative in the landscape, please contact Brady Stevens on our [Food & Enterprise Team](#).

A link to the full report will be provided as soon as this is fully published by Scottish Government.