

13. Sustainability

The success of Wild Ennerdale, as a model that might be more broadly applied, will depend on whether the Partnership can demonstrate that it is an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable approach to management in the current climate.

For the last thousand years, Ennerdale's landscape and ecology has been shaped by human activity which in turn has been determined by the economic and cultural values of the day, and of course the availability of resources. There have been periods of sudden change – most obviously the afforestation of the valley bottom from the 1920s onwards in response to the demand for home produced timber. Although the concept of 'wildness' as a new product for Ennerdale has arisen quickly in the last 5 years, it is likely that the environmental changes it produces may be more gradual and subtle as natural processes are allowed to play a greater role in shaping the landscape and ecology of the valley.

The Economy

Today most homes and livelihoods in the area are supported by jobs outside the valley but of those that depend on the valley and its land, farming, forestry, water extraction, tourism, recreation and conservation focused land management all provide a living. Significant change has however taken place (and continues to) in the farming and timber sectors.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, environmental support payments to farmers have had a significant impact on the way farmland and open fell is managed in the Lake District. De-coupling, the introduction of the Single Farm Payment and questions over the future of the Hill Farm Allowance mean that the financial viability of many hill farms is in question. Farm products from the area cannot easily compete in a global market and farmers are coming under increasing pressure to diversify.

Similarly, timber production is no longer economical as a result of increasing competition from cheaper foreign imports and the high costs of re-planting. In the late 1990s this prompted a shift in the national strategy for forest management from timber production towards rural development, economic regeneration, conservation, tourism and access.

A clear case has been made that reducing the intensity of inputs into Ennerdale, whether through farming, forestry or conservation management, makes short term economic sense. This process was in fact already under way (both for economic and conservation reasons); Wild Ennerdale has simply given the process extra impetus and an added focus. The Wild Ennerdale approach however asks farmers to move even further away from the productive concept of farming purely for agricultural production and ever closer to conservation-led livestock management. This raises questions concerning the cultural acceptability of farming in this way and the economic sustainability of managing livestock. Without a clearer picture of what the economic prospects are likely to be, it will remain difficult to persuade farmers of the value of going down this route (to a considerable degree this issue is clouded by the endemic uncertainty that seems to exist over the future of farming in Europe).

As farming and forestry move further away from goals focused on producing conservation, landscape and public access benefits, the rationale for separating farming and forestry policy and grant aid becomes less clear. Between the support directly given to farmers and the inputs of government agencies (such as the

Forestry Commission and English Nature), alongside the inputs of the National Trust (derived from its members and others), there is a considerable amount of 'public' money directed at the management of Ennerdale. The Wild Ennerdale partnership has, to some degree, been able to overcome these divisions but current structures do not encourage this sort of integrated approach to management.

A detailed economic assessment is planned to gain a greater understanding of the aggregate of public money coming into the valley. This will help to identify how, given the political and cultural will, this money could be re-deployed to deliver greater public benefit in terms of wild land value (social, economic, landscape, ecological). We need policy and funding streams which provide greater encouragement to the development of flexible local solutions to sustainable land management, and the support for local land managers to deliver these.

Social & Cultural Factors

Resistance is not unique to the Lake District but does have a stronger embrace in such areas of wider, 'national' ownership. There is some cultural resistance towards a move to low intensity land management which partly results from wild land not being recognised as a legitimate form of land use, and a lack of understanding of how people can be part of a wild system. As a result, a move towards low intensity management can be perceived as the 'destruction' of the cultural landscape rather than an evolution towards another form of cultural landscape. Again, this partly results from our lack of knowledge about the likely outcomes and the benefits of those outcomes.

Consultation with visitors and local people carried out in the early stages of developing Wild Ennerdale has been almost exclusively positive. However, there is currently little hard information to justify the claim that a 'wilder' Ennerdale will be more valuable to those who visit, simply because there are no comparisons which can be made to other areas. Extensive research has been carried out into the physical, mental and social benefits of recreation in the countryside but as yet there is little evidence for the 'value added' that Wild Ennerdale might bring.

The Environment

The sustainability of Wild Ennerdale in environmental terms is more easily argued. Reducing the intensity of our inputs in terms of forestry and farming activity will have direct impacts on nature conservation, the protection of soils and water quality and the reduction of energy use. The monitoring programme that the partners are implementing will help to measure these gains in sustainability. The hope, also, is that by taking a landscape scale approach to management and reducing the impact of physical and management boundaries, this will enable a more robust series of ecosystems to develop which will be more adaptable in the face of external pressures such as climate change.