



southern uplands partnership
living land, living community

Southern Uplands Partnership Strategy

2021 - 2025

The Southern Uplands Partnership

Registered Office: Studio 2, Lindean Mill, Galashiels, TD1 3PE. **Telephone** 01750 725154

Company No. 200827. Charity No. SC029475. Registered in Scotland.

Website www.sup.org.uk

Table of Contents

1. Who we are and the difference we seek to make
 - 1.1 Our origins, history and impact to date
 - 1.2 Our Vision, Purpose and Values
 - 1.3 Our decision-making criteria
2. The environment in which we operate
 - 2.1 The opportunities and threats in our environment
 - 2.2 The partnership environment
3. Our strategy map and pathway to resilience
 - 3.1 Strategy map
 - 3.2 Business model development
 - 3.3 The principles that govern our work
4. The deliverables and our three year plan
 - 4.1 Our three strategic goals, their priorities and key activities
 - Goal 1: **Promote integrated land use as the basis of sustainable development**
 - Goal 2: **Support communities to be both vibrant and resilient**
 - Goal 3: **Promote actions that maximise climate and biodiversity resilience**
 - 4.2 Our behaviours are critical to the successful delivery of our Goals
 - Behaviour 1: A Willing Partner and Communicator
 - Behaviour 2: Credibility through Quality
 - Behaviour 3: Open-minded, Broad-based and Apolitical
 - Behaviour 4: Sustainable Business Model
 - Behaviour 5: Passionate and Skilled Staff and Volunteers
 - 4.3 Our Key Performance Indicators
5. The risks we foresee and how we will overcome them

1. Who we are and the difference we seek to make

1.1 Our origins, history and impact to date

The Southern Uplands Partnership (SUP) was first mooted in 1998 at a time when the first significant windfarms were being proposed, upland agriculture was becoming increasingly marginal and further expansion of forestry plantations was leading to concerns about landscape change. These changes were largely supported by policy set outside the South of Scotland. Local tourism was low-profile and rural development was poorly resourced in comparison to the North where it was nurtured by Highlands and Islands Enterprise which crucially had a social remit. Many in the South foresaw a future where the landscapes and their rich natural and cultural heritage vanish under wind turbines or intensified forestry and agriculture. It was agreed that there needed to be a debate about whether a more integrated land use would better serve the needs of the South of Scotland and that a body was needed that championed that debate and channelled thinking to national decision makers.

Crucially, to be truly sustainable we needed to grasp the positive contribution that healthy and vibrant natural and cultural resources make to life in the South of Scotland. The SUP was founded as a company by guarantee with charitable status in October 1999, with three broad objectives:

- To guide and encourage a cross sectoral approach to the sustainable use and management of land and water and other relevant activities in the Southern Uplands.
This links directly to Goal 1 below.
- To promote a shared vision and understanding, of a more integrated and sustainable approach to living in the Southern Uplands.
This links directly to Goal 2 below.
- To get everyone to promote, protect and conserve the biodiversity and landscapes of the Southern Uplands of Scotland for the benefit of society.
This links directly to Goal 3 below.

Since SUP has been in existence, both Foot and Mouth Disease and more recently Covid-19 have had severe impacts and challenged our communities' resilience. Both events highlight how inter-dependent different sectors are.

The recovery from Foot and Mouth demonstrated the value of innovative approaches to rural development, exploring local assets (natural or cultural), and ways of adding value to these to sustain employment. SUP started to develop a range of projects; from exploring the need for local abattoirs and encouraging farm diversification to promoting nature-based tourism, supporting walking festivals, developing equestrian tourism, promoting small-scale renewable energy and lobbying for high-speed broadband.

The recovery from Coronavirus may follow a similar course. We need to build on the resilience and supportive networks that communities and local businesses have shown.

We need to support business recovery and growth. We need to capture the increased appreciation that people have for the restorative value of nature and landscapes and we need to grasp the determination to find new ways of living more sustainably.

On the latter point, SUP has been closely involved in the establishment of the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere (GSAB) which is a model of rural development that might better sustain the rural communities that have grown up around traditional land uses and natural resource practices (farming, mining, weaving, forestry and fishing).

We have played an active role in the exploration of possible National Parks and the survival of red squirrels and black grouse in our area. We have lobbied for more to be made of existing National Scenic Areas. We are seeking to make more of the Wild Land Areas which NatureScot has identified in our region and we currently host the popular South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project.

SUP now has a core team of three, and we work by pulling together stakeholders around key issues. Partnership projects often develop from these groupings. At April 2023, we currently employ a total of 20 people.

The value of our network and our region-wide experience is now recognised and we are regularly invited to contribute to national debates (e.g. on the Land Use Strategy, on forestry expansion, on community development) and we are increasingly approached to undertake consultation or contract work.

The need to address the climate change emergency and the biodiversity crisis have been major factors in recent years and the Covid-19 outbreak has further focused minds on the need to develop resilient communities and more sustainable businesses. The adoption of the concept of natural capital in development is increasingly seen as an approach that can improve the way we shape and influence land-use decisions and foster a healthy functioning environment across the Southern Uplands. We want to see new ideas and business opportunities grow out of the greening agenda that we need to follow if our society is to truly tackle the environmental challenges facing the planet. We aim to play an ongoing role in this with our partners.

1.2 Our Vision, Purpose and Values

SUP's **Vision** is “**The Southern Uplands is a place where communities make environmentally sustainable use of their natural and cultural resources to build an economically secure and socially resilient future for all**”. This is our ‘big picture’ of the world that we would like to see. A world where there is understanding and appreciation that to be truly sustainable we have to give equal consideration to social, economic and environmental needs at a time of rapid biodiversity loss and climate change. We share this vision with others.

SUP's contribution to our **Vision** is set out in our **Purpose**: That is to **identify and demonstrate solutions that bring greater resilience to communities and the economy through putting the environment at the heart of decision making**.

Our Purpose reflects SUP's unique contribution and strengths in:

- sharing ideas of how we can work and live more sustainably in the Southern Uplands of Scotland;
- working to bring integrated approaches to how we plan for and use land to ensure it is compatible with the needs of communities and nature;
- demonstrating the value of our natural and cultural resources to economic and social development.

SUP's **Values** are: **Passionate; Trusted; Independent; Facilitative, Inclusive**

Our values reflect who we are now and how we aspire to be in the future:

- **Passionate** - Our love and appreciation for the nature and cultures of the Southern Uplands underpins all that we do;
- **Trusted** – We aim to be honest and positive and deliver on our commitments;
- **Independent** - We are working for the benefit of all;
- **Facilitative** – we will do all we can to progress joint working;
- **Inclusive** – we want all people who live and work in the Southern Uplands to be inspired and join the work we do and we will work hard to engage with them.

1.3 Our decision-making criteria

It is useful to have criteria against which to judge our decisions to engage or not. In part this gives the Board assurance that we make commitments rationally. It also gives us resilience in the face of pressure from others to do things that we are not sure are right for SUP. We can use the criteria below as the basis for a decision to guide our thinking when we are considering something new or a change in current practice. In practice, it may be that a proposal does not meet a particular criterion, but we judge it worth pursuing nonetheless. This approach ensures that any such decision is a conscious and strategic one. The key thing is that we can record the reasoning why we commit to something against these.

Criteria	Detail
Fit with Purpose	The activity is within our scope, delivers against one of our goals and makes a contribution to our vision. It fits within our strategy map.
Financially viable	The activity is financially viable and planned sufficiently far in advance to be budgeted. If there is no budget, the task is important enough that we should seek funds / partners / use reserves to achieve it and we believe that it is realistically possible to raise the funds needed to make it viable without jeopardising the organisation's solvency.
There is a partnership or community engagement opportunity	There is an opportunity to work with others and they are willing to do so.
We have the time and capacity to manage and govern	We are able to give the activity the time and attention it needs or are able to find funding to buy in the capacity or expertise needed. Volunteers are given the steer and support they need, if needed.
We have the capability and know-how	We have the capability and expertise in-house or can buy it in or work with others to bring it in. This could include using training opportunities.
Opportunity fits with policy actions and priorities	The activity will offer useful leads or future opportunities, and safeguard SUP's established position within South Scotland.
Risks are understood	The risks attaching to the activity are understood, especially the risk to brand / reputation / integrity.
We can evaluate our contribution and promote achievements	We can evaluate our activity and demonstrate added value; that we have made a difference. We will get due credit for our contribution and would be able to flag up our achievements.

2. The environment in which we operate

2.1 The opportunities and threats in our environment

Our analysis of the trends and drivers in the external environment reveals a wide range of both generic and specific opportunities and threats which have been central to the development of this strategy including those that arise from the Covid 19 pandemic. The following trends and drivers are among those that appear to have greatest significance in relation to our Vision and Purpose:

Political:

UN Sustainable Development Goals; Brexit; UK withdrawal Bill from EU together with any change in environmental commitments ; the Land Use Strategy and Regional Land Use Partnerships and Frameworks; Declining Local Authority Budgets; Climate Emergency; Climate Change Bill; Forestry Targets

Social:

Aging population and loss of young people; Health and well-being; Inclusivity / Inequality; Climate Change Awareness; Direct Action; Community Benefit

Funds:

Economic: Creation of South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE); Borderlands; Loss of LEADER funding; Loss of CAP and its replacement; Community Benefit Funds; Forestry expansion; Windfarm expansion

Technological:

The lack of better rural broadband connectivity; Social media; Virtual reality; New sustainable energy developments

Environmental:

Climate Change Awareness; Land Use Change; Loss of Biodiversity; Flooding and Fire risks

2.2 The partnership environment

SUP is committed to working with others who either already share our Vision or who we want to bring onside. Indeed, we know that we will only be able to create the change we seek by working alongside other individuals and organisations to pool resources, share ideas and skills. We are already in partnership and/or work closely with key agencies including Local Authorities, South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE), Borderlands, Land Management Organisations, Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere, NatureScot and members of the Environmental Alliance for the South of Scotland (EASOS).

The potential partnership opportunities identified during the development of this strategy include:

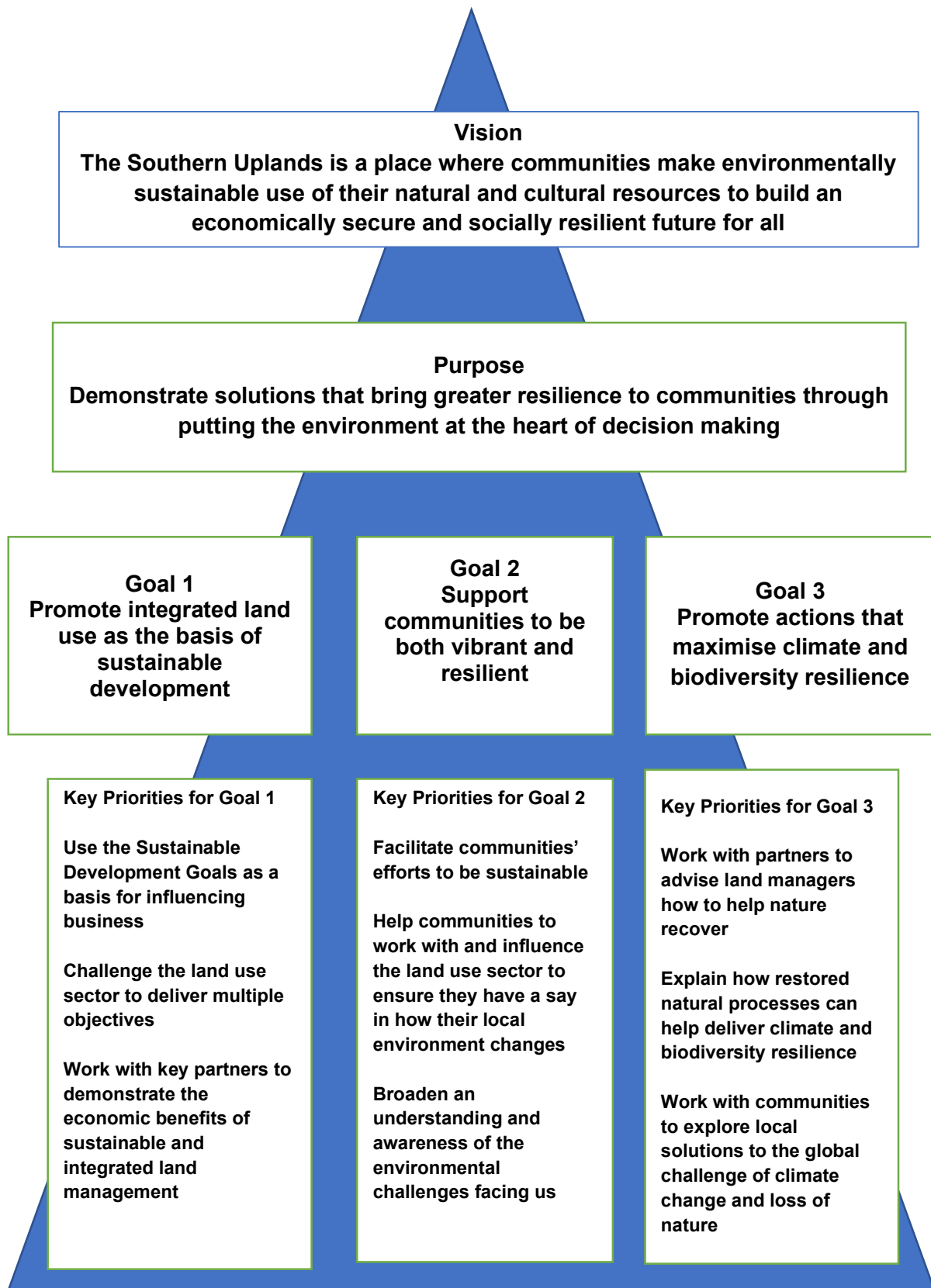
- Pilot solutions e.g. for SoSE and Borderlands;
- Provide briefings and sharing good practice on critical topics working with relevant partners;
- Commission relevant research or data gathering;
- Work with communities to increase their capacity to find sustainable solutions;
- Work with partners to create an independent natural capital advisory service;
- Enhance general understanding and education about sustainability.

3. Our strategy map and pathway to sustainability for Southern Uplands Partnership

3.1 Strategy map

Our Strategy Map starts with our Vision, which we know is shared by many. Our Purpose defines our contribution to achieving this Vision, and how we will work with others to deliver it. The three Goals then set out our ambitions and our key areas of focus.

We expect that this Vision, the statement of Purpose, and the three Goals will be the focus of our strategy for many years. The Key Priorities will be our focus for the next 3 years, and we will review these annually to make sure that they remain relevant.



3.2 Business model development

The Board will use the following indicators to help define the stages of resilience:

- Reserves within the levels agreed by the Board;
- Strong partnership arrangements in place with diverse partners;
- Sufficient diverse new projects in the approval pipeline;
- Diverse range of income sources;
- Length of contracts with key agency funders

3.3 The Principles that govern our work

These principles guide us in doing what we do:

- We are knowledgeable about the Southern Uplands;
- We are collaborative, preferring to work with others;
- We are objective and evidence based;
- We will be forward thinking in our work;
- We will be influential and work with others to create change

4. The deliverables and our three-year plan

Our three strategic goals and their priorities define our core strategy for the next three years. The key activities associated with each priority defines the agenda for all our work.

4.1 Our three strategic goals, their priorities and key activities

Goal 1:

Promote integrated land use as the basis of sustainable development

Key Priority:

Use the Sustainable Development Goals¹ as a basis for influencing business

- use targeted briefings to reach sectors we want to influence (tourism, arts/culture, landuse sectors, food, energy);
- Work closely with SoSE and Borderlands to ensure they retain a focus on the sustainable development agenda fully including the environment;
- Continue to support the delivery of the Biosphere and its objectives;
- Secure funding to continue to develop the opportunities around nature based tourism¹ such as extending the Ride Scotland's Horse Country, long distance footpath projects and the development of the Wildland project;

¹ See Annex for Definitions

- Share ideas on green opportunities with businesses and communities across southern Scotland.

Key Priority:

Challenge the land use sector to deliver multiple objectives

- Work with the renewables, farming and forestry sectors to secure better outcomes for access, recreation, climate change amelioration, landscape and nature;
- Encourage cross sectoral working as an essential to delivery of the Land Use Strategy;
- Encourage research and approaches in the timber market, silvicultural practices, disease resilience and forestry stock that have greater long-term carbon and nature benefits;
- Champion small-scale tree planting schemes.

Key Priority:

Work with key partners to demonstrate the economic benefits of sustainable and integrated land management

- reduce downstream flooding and other negative environmental impacts;
- promote the Landscape Enterprise Networks to engage business with land management in their supply chain;
- support peatland and other carbon rich soil conservation efforts and the possibility of carbon credits;
- undertake work on restoring the Uplands capacity to deliver climate and biodiversity benefits through rewilding;¹
- Deliver training and environmental data-collation through operation of South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre (SWSEIC).

Goal 2:

Support communities to be both vibrant and resilient

Key Priority:

Facilitate communities' efforts to be sustainable

- Help communities with the development of Place Plans which are embedded in NPF4;
- Seek funding to implement a Communities for Change approach to build capacity in selected communities;
- Engage in discussions on how Regional Land Use Partnerships will develop and champion sustainable communities in the Biosphere and wider Southern Uplands.

Key Priority:

Help communities to work with and influence the land use sector to ensure they have a say in how their local environment changes

¹ See Annex for Definitions

- Ensure communities can work with and influence the renewables, farming and forestry sector. Undertake mapping of the extent of community plans, community development officers and community benefit funding;
- Get more investment into strategic actions for the environment and communities;
- Support selected communities in using funding from renewables developments;
- Help empower affected communities to enable them to understand and engage in the planning process;
- Support communities through community buy outs for example through accessing the Land Fund;
- Work with the land use sector to improve community engagement and to provide benefits for communities.

Key Priority:

Broaden an understanding and awareness of the environmental challenges facing us and ways of tackling these

- Provide briefings or other appropriate communications on topical environmental issues for our communities;
- Hold events giving an opportunity for conversations to happen within and between communities;
- Promote the benefits contact with nature has for people and communities.

Goal 3:

Promote actions that maximise climate and biodiversity resilience

Key Priority:

Work with partners to advise land managers how to help nature recover

- Work with partners to ensure integrated land use advice is available to land managers where this does not exist;
- provide or signpost a wide range of advice covering habitat, natural flood management, carbon storage, renewable energy generation, water quality, access and natural and cultural heritage enhancements;
- seek opportunities to deliver agreed strategic land-use priorities.

Key Priority:

Explain how restored natural processes can help deliver climate and biodiversity resilience

- Explain and showcase how diversity of land use and ecological structure, including a carefully targeted element of rewilding, can do more for us in tackling these challenges;
- Support the development of a National Ecological Network in Scotland;
- Provide briefings and comments that inform policies for land-use changes;
- Support specific actions for wildlife and habitat e.g. by delivering the South of Scotland Golden Eagle project.

Key Priority:**Work with communities to explore local solutions to the global challenge of climate change and loss of nature**

- Champion natural flood management solutions that also give nature greater space;
- Promote the learning and progress made within the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere;
- Support projects which help wildlife and provide future opportunities for rural businesses;
- Work with a wildfire research group to ensure resilience is built into planning.

4.2 Our behaviours are critical to successful delivery of our Goals

Behaviour 1: A Willing Partner and Communicator

- Produce a partnership statement that sets out how, when and why SUP will collaborate so all elements of SUP and our partners can contribute to the delivery of our priorities and activities;
- Produce a public engagement strategy that sets out how, when and why we will communicate with and engage with various target audiences so that all within SUP can help maximise impact of the work SUP does.

Behaviour 2: Credibility through Quality

- Maintain the quality of SUP work by ensuring it is only done within the capacity of the resources available;
- Provide comment and briefings that are based on our own or the sound data of trusted partners.

Behaviour 3: Open-minded, Broad-based and Apolitical

- Work across all sectors and with all parties to adopt the SUP Goals in the work we are all engaged in;
- Ensure we broaden our reach and encourage a greater diversity of age, ethnic, gender and social members to become involved.

Behaviour 4: Sustainable Business Model

- Increase the variety of grants received and ensure core costs are covered within them;
- Establish a system for approving new projects to ensure opportunities are only progressed when all our decision-making criteria are met;
- Implement an Income Generating Strategy as a priority, which will then allow us to build our sustainability and develop new activities;
- Ensure adequate time is allocated to projects so they can be delivered smoothly and expectations met;
- Ensure a strong volunteer and staff base, from which our all our activity will be delivered;

- Show leadership in sustainable and inclusive development in taking action to reduce our carbon footprint and environmental impact in our work and projects.

Behaviour 5: Passionate and Skilled Staff and Volunteers

- Undertake thorough staff recruitment process and ensure their working environment is supportive and fair (e.g. effective probation periods, adequate support, continuing professional development opportunities, undertake salary reviews etc.);
- Produce a Code of Conduct for volunteers and staff to follow so expectations behaviour, interaction and inclusion are clear and there are processes to follow if standards slip.

4.3 Our Key Performance Indicators

Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature based tourism grows post Covid19; • Develop a process of information flow via SWSEIC to support multiple benefits from forestry decision making; • Establish a rewilding project and demonstrate the benefits of this; • Find a way to share the experience of communities managing or owning forests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support communities developing Place Plans; • Secure funding for a Communities for Change project; • Complete mapping of communities with community benefit assets as far as is possible; • Develop a process that encourages communities to contribute to strategic programmes that benefit them; • Support communities in the administration and delivery of community benefit funding where there is capacity to do so. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An advisory service established; • Briefings published on how to enhance the Southern Uplands’ natural resources; • Events and publication showing the benefit of the rewilding approach.

Annex 1

Sustainable Development Goals

These are a set of 17 Goals set out by the United Nations for all countries to aspire to by 2030. Scotland has adopted these and embedded them in its National Performance Framework.

Nature Based Tourism

This is a broad term that covers all tourism experiences centred on wild or natural environments. In SUP's use of the term, we include various related tourism activities that include:

Environmental tourism where the focus is on understanding and conserving natural resources;

Ecotourism that ensures minimum impact on natural environments while experiencing nature;

Wildlife Tourism that provides close contact with nature, and

Adventure Tourism that focuses on recreational activities in a predominantly natural setting.

Rewilding

Our definition of Rewilding for use in the Southern Uplands is a **progressive approach to conservation in certain settings**. Where it is possible, it is about letting nature take care of itself, enabling natural processes to play a greater role in shaping land and sea, repairing damaged ecosystems and restoring degraded landscapes. Through rewilding, wildlife's natural processes create wilder, more biodiverse habitats. Human intervention like burning or planting or sometimes grazing is reduced and natural regeneration and succession is allowed.