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*Divergent visions of wildness and naturalness in a storied landscape:  
practices and discourses of rewilding in Scotland's wild places*

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**ABSTRACT**

The public profile of rewilding has risen rapidly, and there is broad agreement within rewilding discourses about the desirability of enhancing naturalness and wildness. However, there are contrasting views about what such enhancement should comprise, both philosophically and practically. Here we investigate understandings and practices of rewilding amongst managers and owners of wild land in the Scottish uplands. The data, gathered in 2011-2013, comprise (i) semi-structured interviews with 20 stakeholders in the upland management sector, and (ii) an investigation, utilising the Delphi method, of the objectives and rationales of 17 upland estates engaged in rewilding. The results reveal some broad areas of consensus, but considerable divergence concerning the desired ends and means of rewilding, especially about (i) the place of people and cultural artefacts within wild land, and (ii) the relative merits of intervention and non-intervention. The paper presents a 'many wilds' synthesis of these contrasting perspectives in the form of a matrix with four interconnected axes (wild nature, wild places, wild experience and wildness), offering a way of conceptualising this plurality and of considering the conflicts which are the corollary of multiple goals for wild places.

Key words: rewilding; Scotland; wild land

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Rewilding is being championed internationally by NGOs, environmental campaigners and private landowners, and has caught the public imagination, as exemplified by the advocacy and demonstration work of Rewilding Europe (Helmer *et al.*, 2015) and Rewilding Britain (2017). This reflects the growing importance of ecological restoration within environmental policy and the ambitious international targets which have been set (Suding *et al.*, 2015). Partly because rewilding has been adopted rapidly and in many settings, interpretations and practices vary widely and are evolving fast. It has broadened from a narrow focus on restoring ecosystem dynamics to include 'wilder farming and forestry, educational and health-orientated projects, river restoration, wildlife corridors in cities and programmes for the deeper psychology of relationship to the land, wildness and nature' (Taylor, 2015:22). Reflecting the burgeoning enthusiasm and diversity, the literature has multiplied and fractionated in almost equal measure, incorporating not only a wealth of scientific publications (Sandom *et al.*, 2013; Lorimer *et al.*, 2015; Corlett, 2016; Svenning *et al.*, 2016) but also more popular, journalistic and practitioner-focused accounts (Taylor, 2005; Fraser, 2009; Balmford, 2012; Monbiot, 2013). There is no doubt, as Nogués-Bravo *et al.* (2016:87) put it, that 'the drumbeat for rewilding is getting faster and louder', although they caution that it might be 'the new Pandora's box in conservation'.

When the vision of rewilding was first fully expounded in the seminal paper by Soulé and Noss (1998), it seemed beguilingly simple and attractively proactive, tapping into the newly-established orthodoxy that nature conservation should get off the preservationist back foot and onto the restorationist front foot. Almost 20 years of subsequent experimentation and debate have demonstrated that it is, in fact, highly complex, intersecting with some of the most intractable debates in conservation (Table 1). So although the term 'rewilding' sounds as if its meaning should be straightforward, the prism of conservation practice has split the term into a broad spectrum of understandings. In fact, such a host of different meanings have been invested in it that Jørgensen (2015) argues that it has become a 'plastic word', encompassing so much that it lacks specific content, although this accusation is disputed (Prior and Ward, 2016; Cloyd, 2016). Many advocates of rewilding, especially in North America, emphasize trophic rewilding using species reintroductions to restore top-down trophic interactions that promote self-regulating biodiverse systems (Svenning *et al.*, 2016), whereas in Europe there is a greater focus on passive rewilding by allowing ecological succession on abandoned land (Navarro and Pereira, 2015; Corlett, 2016). One unifying thread

shared by many rewilding projects, according to Prior and Ward (2016), is the goal of enhancing non-human autonomy, but consensus remains elusive because there is too much diversity of practice and vision to be captured by one neat conceptualisation (Gillson, 2015).

The 're' in rewilding and restoration strongly implies that the objective must be to reinstate something from the past that has been lost, and this is indeed a frequent objective, but there is no agreement about what should be reinstated or about the appropriate means for doing so. Nor is there agreement about the extent to which the past should guide management for the future. Because the selection of a single 'Garden of Eden' baseline is unavoidably arbitrary (Breed *et al.*, 2016; Mehrabi, 2016), and may in practice be inappropriate or impossible (Balaguer *et al.*, 2014), some advocate the term 'wilding' (Taylor, 2005), arguing that a future orientation should be adopted. Thus Sandom *et al.* (2013:433) characterise rewilding as 'fundamentally a future-orientated proposal that seeks to learn from the past rather than recreate it', and Seddon *et al.* (2014:410) argue that the goal of rewilding should be 'to enhance ecosystem resilience, rather than [to restore] some arbitrary historical state'. It is clear, then, that the what, when and where of rewilding - in other words, the means and ends, the temporal reference points and the spatial scale - are all contested. This is perhaps unsurprising given that such choices connect directly with a range of difficult philosophical and practical debates, summarised in Table 1, which are being actively disputed within nature conservation more generally.

<b>Conservation controversies affecting rewilding</b>	<b>Exemplar references</b>
Naturalness as a guide for conservation: should natural states and processes always be preferred?	Angermeier, 2000; Cole and Yung, 2010; Marris, 2011
The relative value of pristine and novel ecosystems: is 'unspoiled nature' always more valuable?	Landres et al., 2000; Hobbs <i>et al.</i> , 2009, 2013
Landscape v. biodiversity: when aesthetic and ecological values conflict, which should prevail?	Henderson, 1992; Foreman, 1998; Cole, 2000
Natural v. wild: is protecting biodiversity more important than respecting nature's autonomy?	Ridder, 2007; Peterson, 2008
The place or role of humans in 'nature': separation or integration of nature and culture?	Plumwood, 2006; Cowley <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Pereira and Navarro, 2015
Natural means v. natural ends: is intervention acceptable/necessary or should 'hands off' approaches prevail?	Sydoriak et al., 2000; Landres, 2010; Steinwall, 2015
Past v. future - 'rewilding' or simply 'wilding/wilder': how relevant is history in the Anthropocene?	Hobbs <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Feldman, 2011; Balaguer <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Mehrabi, 2016

Table 1. Broader tensions and debates in nature conservation which are important questions within rewilding.

Scotland is an intriguing setting in which to explore rewilding ideas and practices, partly because of the range and diversity of rewilding initiatives (Mc Morran *et al.*, 2008; Brown *et al.*, 2011), and partly because large parts of the uplands consist of landscapes which, despite evoking a sense of wildness today, are the product of millennia of human management. Reflecting trends across Europe, the importance of wildness within conservation and land management policy agendas in Scotland has been steadily increasing. This is evidenced by the active debates surrounding the meanings, definition and mapping of wildness (SNH, 2002; McMorran *et al.*, 2008; Carver *et al.*, 2012), and notably by the drive to identify Wild Land Areas, an official map of which was published in 2014 by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH, the government's environmental agency) after over a decade's work (SNH, 2014). The desire to protect wild land has been given added impetus by the rapid spread of large windfarms in the uplands since the late 1990s, prompting campaigns to preserve wild places. Today, as for the last two centuries, the Scottish uplands predominantly consist of large private estates managed primarily for game sport. Recent decades, however, have seen a diversification of ownership, with increasing areas owned by environmental NGOs and local communities,

and growing interest in conservation management (Warren, 2009). Land ownership and management has been the focus of intense political debate since Scottish devolution in 1999 (Wightman, 2010; Glass *et al.*, 2013a; McKee, 2015), but rewilding initiatives have not been affected significantly by the unfolding land reform agenda, nor are they restricted to one type of ownership. Diverse initiatives are being undertaken on land in private, public, NGO and community ownership (Taylor, 2011).

Notwithstanding the identification of Wild Land Areas, at present there is no formal policy basis for rewilding in Scotland. So far, it has been a 'bottom up' phenomenon, driven by landowning organisations and individuals rather than by strategic policy direction. One consequence of this lack of government leadership and policy is that the Scottish rewilding movement is characterised by great diversity of objectives, approaches, motivations and emphases (Taylor, 2005, 2011; Deary, 2015). Nevertheless, a prominent feature of many Scottish wildland visions is the restoration of native woodland and its biodiversity (Wilson, 2015), as exemplified by the Carrifran Wildwood (Ashmole and Ashmole, 2008), Trees for Life's work in Glen Affric (Featherstone, 2004) and the current interest in adopting the 'Norwegian model' of upland land use to increase woodland cover (Wilson, 2017). The growing currency of wildness has been accompanied by an evolution of the traditional use of 'wild' as a synonym of 'remote' into a more ecologically-orientated usage encompassing ecosystem functioning, naturalness and nativeness.

The shift in emphasis within international conservation thinking from preservation to restoration (Mace, 2014) has been accompanied by a parallel shift in ambition to embrace greater spatio-temporal scales - restoration of resilient ecological networks at a landscape scale over timescales of centuries. The original definition of rewilding by Soulé and Noss (1998:5) - characterised by the 'three Cs' of Cores, Corridors and Carnivores - focused on 'restoring big wilderness based on the regulatory roles of large predators' which could restore ecosystem function and resilience through top-down trophic interactions. The more in-depth scientific presentations of the concept in Soulé and Terborgh (1999) paint it on a similarly sweeping canvas, advocating the rewilding of 30-40% of the USA and Canada in large, connected areas with reintroduced keystone species. Boldest of all is E.O. Wilson's clarion call to hand over half the earth's surface to nature (Wilson, 2016). But such large-scale visions are of limited immediate applicability in Scotland, partly because no large predators remain and also because, as Smout (2000:172) puts it, 'in this small, old country ... nothing is wilderness'. Rewilding

has been seen by many, for both environmental and political reasons, as inapplicable and irrelevant (Brown *et al.*, 2011). In contrast to North America, the wide-open spaces for creating extensive, interconnected, people-free wilderness areas do not exist, nor is there socio-political scope for doing so because - in the Highlands especially - the word 'wilderness' does not have the positive ideological resonance that it does in the USA.

On the contrary, it has strongly negative connotations, evoking the 19<sup>th</sup> century Highland Clearances when long-inhabited and extensively modified glens were forcibly 'cleared', creating today's misleading sense of 'unspoiled nature' (Warren, 2009). The Clearances still provoke powerful emotions, generating sharply critical views of rewilding, and these sensitivities were strikingly revealed during the long process of identifying Wild Land Areas. Some local people felt that using the label 'wild' for land on which generations of their ancestors had lived and worked was tantamount to airbrushing human history out of the picture (McMorran *et al.*, 2014), and they objected vociferously. Similarly, Olwig (2016) characterises rewilding in the English Lake District as a form of virtual enclosure of the commons. This illustrates and supports Jørgensen's (2015) criticism of the widespread trend within rewilding discourse of seeking (explicitly or implicitly) to erase human history, and of the valorisation of the wild without people. Another, similar, counter-current to rewilding came to the fore during debates surrounding the 2016 Land Reform Act when the Scottish Crofting Federation argued for the resettlement of the 'human deserts' created by the Clearances. Whereas rewilding often champions the reintroduction of wildlife species, local people in many 'wild' parts of Scotland want to see the reintroduction of *Homo sapiens*. It is apparent, then, that while the vision of rewilding generates optimistic enthusiasm in some quarters, inspiring people to 'set something right and ... [create] a brighter and more sustainable future' (Sandom *et al.*, 2013:446), it also generates controversy and conflict as its ecological values clash with other values - aesthetic, social justice, socio-economic and environmental preservationist (Prior and Brady, 2017).

So if 'rewilding' in Scotland cannot mean big wilderness with the 'three Cs', what does it mean? In a country in which every landscape is profoundly cultural, with a human history stretching back over nine millennia, what should the ends and means of rewilding be? Such questions have relevance far beyond Scotland because of the growing recognition that a large majority of the world's landscapes have been co-created by human and non-human processes over millennial timescales, meaning that cultural

landscapes are the norm not the exception (Marris, 2011; Marris *et al.*, 2013; Pearce, 2015). In most places, pristine is history - and ancient history at that - making the rewilding of hybrid landscapes a question of broad international relevance.

Within the broad spectrum of nature conservation, rewilding as understood in the academic literature sits firmly at the radical, ecocentric end. But rewilding itself is far from being a uniform, undifferentiated approach; it encompasses a wide spectrum of practices and perspectives. Consequently, the aim of this paper is to investigate this spectrum in the Scottish context, focusing on practitioner perspectives, in order to:

- explore the meaning(s) of rewilding as practised in Scotland
- identify areas of convergence and divergence amongst rewilding discourses

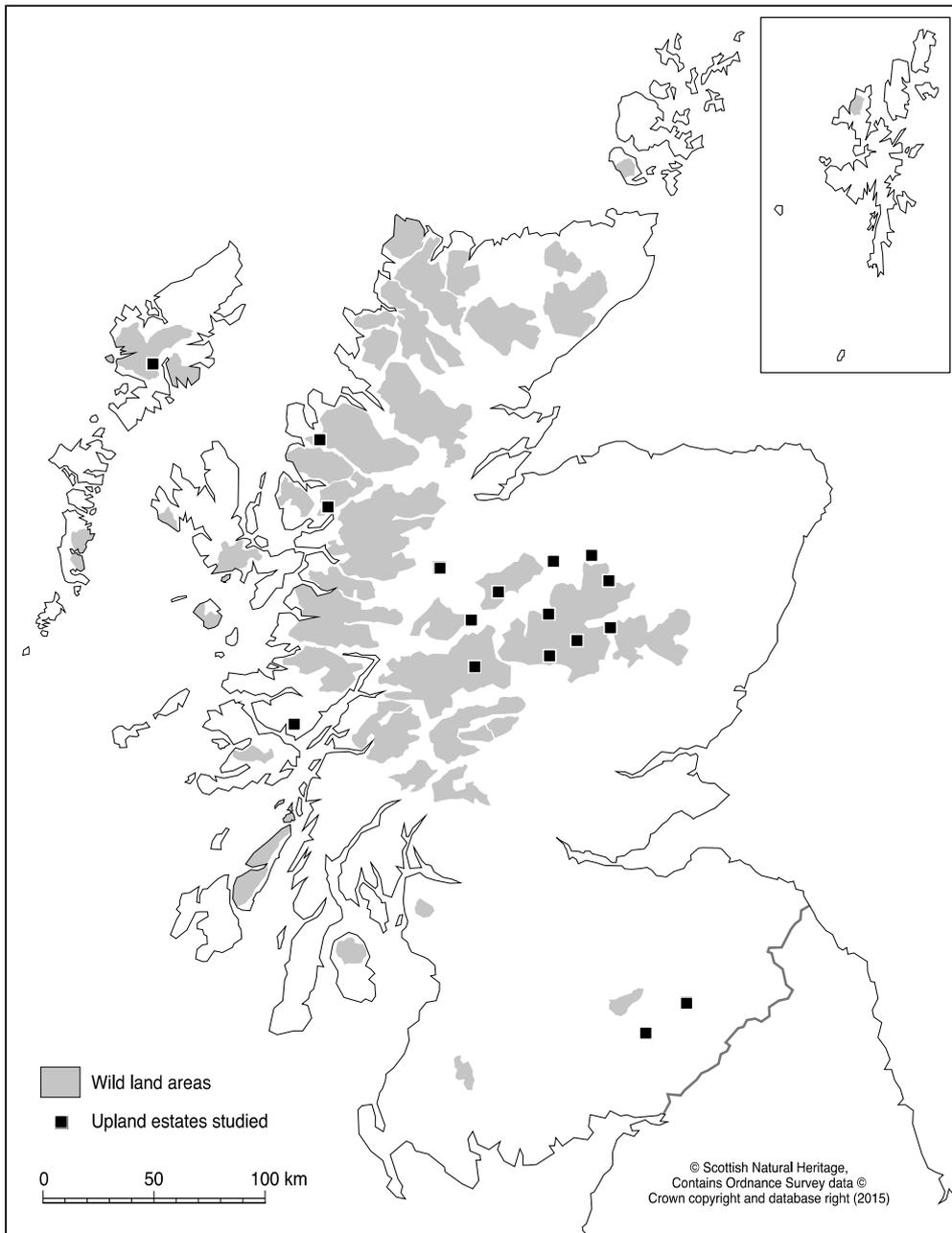
## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The research reported here formed part of a broader project investigating ideas and practices of rewilding not only in Scotland but internationally (Deary, 2015). Here we focus exclusively on the Scottish context, presenting data gathered in 2011-2013 from (i) semi-structured interviews with 20 stakeholders in the upland management sector, and (ii) an investigation, utilising the Delphi method, of the wildland visions of 17 upland estates. Respondents for the semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were selected purposively to provide an illustrative sample of organisations involved in managing 'wildland'.<sup>1</sup> The interview sample comprised interviews with quangos (8), NGOs (6), independent consultants (5) and one Scottish Government representative. The interviews explored interpretations, approaches, strategies and motivations of wildland management, aiming to identify areas of consensus and conflict. The results of this first stage of research were then used to generate discussion themes for a Delphi process undertaken with an expert panel representing 17 large rural land holdings.

The Delphi method is a structured communication technique which provides a deliberative space for investigating complex conceptual terrain (Glass *et al.*, 2013b). Through an iterative procedure it distils the anonymous judgements of a panel of experts who, during a sequence of deliberative engagements, develop their views and reasoning in the light of feedback from each successive round. A noted strength of Delphi is that it produces considered, collective wisdom developed through reflection on other expert views, rather than isolated, individual opinions (Hsu and Sandford, 2007). In this study, the panel size of 17 falls within the ideal range of 10-20 (Skulmoski *et al.*, 2007). The participants represented all the main ownership types (private (7), NGO (5), community

(2), government agency (2), environmental charity (1)), and were all professional practitioners involved in upland management. The landholdings, with an average size of 12,188 ha (range: 650 – 29,500 ha), cover a total area of 207,200 ha, and are located in the central and west Highlands, the Southern Uplands and the Outer Hebrides (Fig. 1) in areas with a high degree of relative wildness as classified by SNH (2013). They were selected because of their engagement in practices commonly associated with the concept of rewilding. The initial face-to-face interviews were, in most cases, followed by a walking or driving tour of the estate involving extended informal discussions. Table 2 summarises the themes which were explored. All recorded interviews (20 stakeholders, 17 ‘Delphi estates’) were transcribed and thematically analysed using QR Nvivo software.

In the discussion which follows, the results of both stages are integrated thematically. Quotations from respondents are presented in italics with double quotation marks and without a citation to differentiate them from quotations from published sources. The term ‘respondent’ is used throughout, undifferentiated and unqualified, to encompass individuals, organisations and estates. This is partly for brevity, but mainly because viewpoints did not cluster neatly around ownership types but crosscut participants of all types. In the remainder of the paper we discuss, in turn, the two aims specified above, before presenting a critical synthesis identifying four dimensions of Scottish rewilding discourses.



**Figure 1.** Map showing the location of the 17 estates which participated in the Delphi process, and Scotland's Wild Land Areas (SNH, 2014). The choice of field sites was also informed by SNH's map of degrees of relative wildness in Scotland (SNH, 2013).

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Key issues</b>
<b>'Wild land vision'</b> - estate characteristics; vision, ethos	Vision of the future of wild land; dominant ethos; management aims and motivations
<b>Meaning of wild land and wildness</b> - understandings; enhancers and detractors	The parameters of wild land; what compromises wild land; compatibility of wildness with other land uses; centrality of wildness to vision
<b>Meaning of rewilding</b> - definition, practices, conceptual coherence	Vision of rewilding; aesthetic quality v. ecological integrity; compatibility of rewilding with other land uses and with other 'green' agendas
<b>Nature conservation and land management</b> - natural v. cultural landscapes	Physical condition and 'naturalness' of Scotland's wild landscapes; the place of cultural features in wildland
<b>Terminology and concepts</b>	Distinguishing between rewilding, ecological restoration, enhancing wildness and wild land management; 'wild' v. 'natural'; visions of nature
<b>Conceptual soundness of 'rewilding'</b> - rewilding paradoxes	Intervention v. non-intervention; the place of people in wildland

Table 2. The themes and issues investigated with each estate through the Delphi process.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Wildness is a concept which has powerful resonance, conjuring up evocative notions of naturalness. As Whatmore (2002:9) observes, ‘the treatment of the wild as a pristine exterior, the touchstone of an original nature, sets the parameters of contemporary environmental politics’. This is certainly the case in Scotland where ‘the wild’ has considerable popular support. This advocacy has been gaining in strength despite the widespread recognition that all Scottish environments are cultural landscapes, and notwithstanding the fact that wildness and naturalness are complex, contested concepts which have long been subjected to intense critical scrutiny (Cronon, 1996; Castree, 2005, 2014; Cole and Yung, 2010). It is nevertheless the case that a *sense* of wildness can still be experienced in large tracts of Scotland’s countryside, and the desire to preserve and enhance this elusive quality is a widely-shared motivation for rewilding. But how, in practice, this should best be done, and whether the term ‘rewilding’ is fit for purpose, are hotly contested questions.

#### 3.1 Rewilding: an appropriate term in Scotland?

Despite extensive academic discussion of rewilding over two decades, and considerable media coverage, some of the respondents - all of whom are involved in wildland management - had never even heard the term. This research process was their first encounter with it. Analysis of policy documents revealed, moreover, that the term is never utilised in the policy sector, even in connection with the 2009-2014 beaver reintroduction trials. Brown *et al.* (2011) attribute this avoidance to a perception that rewilding is inapplicable in Scotland for both environmental and political reasons, despite the fact that there is a well-developed understanding of ‘wild land’ within governmental and NGO policies (Mc Morran *et al.*, 2008). Most respondents stated that they had previously spent little time considering the conceptual framing of their own wild land initiatives or what the appropriate nomenclature or terminology might be. However, a number were comfortable to adopt the ‘rewilding’ label for their own projects, interpreting it intuitively as simply the process of “*making more wild*”, a broad framing which means that it can be - and is - applied to a wide range of contrasting initiatives. By contrast, some respondents were strongly opposed to the term. “*Rewilding? I wouldn’t touch it with a bargepole!*”; another said “*the term is all wrong.*” Others were less dismissive but still sceptical, regarding it as an academic or political term with little relevance in practical land management circles. “*It’s the sort of thing that is discussed at seminars of environmental groups and that*”; “*rewilding sounds more political than practical.*”

It was clear that, in some cases, respondents' antipathy flowed not from any opposition to restoring the land but from the term's perceived association with 'wilderness'. Not only does 'wilderness' have negative connotations in the Scottish Highlands, as noted above, but it is also associated with North America and is hence seen as having little relevance to the Scottish context. Others suggested that negative perceptions of rewilding flowed from its association with carnivores, particularly with the high-profile and controversial reintroduction proposals of the Alladale Wilderness Reserve (Edward, 2008). *"People might think it's the thin end of the wedge – 'start small and then we'll get the wolves in'."* Still others expressed the view that rewilding is *"a bit too alternative"*, a *"wacky idea"* which *"only means something to a few zealots"* and which oversimplifies the complexity of managing Scotland's wild places. Though a relatively new term, 'rewilding' already seems to be freighted with negative connotations.

Recognising that it is a stigmatised word in some quarters, a broad range of alternative terms have been used and suggested, including 'enhancing wildness', 'managing for wildness', 'landscape-scale restoration' or simply 'wilding'. 'Enhancing wildness' is arguably significant in recognising the spectrum of values and open possibilities, and in removing the retrospective element (the 're' of 'rewilding'), just as the term 'wilding' does. The inherent retrospectivity of 'rewilding' has been a focus of debate and criticism, not least because the selection of a 'natural baseline' is unavoidably arbitrary and imprecise; choosing one moment in history over another is 'fundamentally normative rather than scientific' (Simberloff *et al.*, 1999:65). Although many rewilding advocates specifically reject the criticism that rewilding is a nostalgic, naïve dream of recreating the past, arguing instead that it is future-orientated, many projects do have a historical baseline or reference state (implicit or explicit) which encapsulates the 'wild' that they seek. Amongst the minority of respondents in this research who identified a specific historic period as their template for the future, the chosen era ranged from 6000 to 1000 years ago, illustrating the subjective nature of the choice of baseline. Many participants were dismissive of the idea of aiming to replicate a particular historical state, stating that *"you can't simply turn the clock back"* and arguing explicitly that rewilding is *"not about trying to recreate some past epoch."* After all, *"how far back is wild? Is that the Neolithic? The Mesolithic?"* Another believed that *"you can't drill down to actual naturalness because – which bit?"* Such stakeholder views echo academic arguments that the objective of 'self-sustaining wildlife populations within pristine landscapes untouched by human influence' is 'increasingly unobtainable' (Seddon *et al.*, 2014:411). Or, as Head (2000:4) put it, 'the pristine baseline - the 'natural landscape' - is a

mirage, receding as it is approached'. Any choice of baseline is arbitrary (Mehrabi, 2016), and the idea of restoring the imagined 'Garden of Eden' is unrealistic (Breed *et al.*, 2016). The irreversible environmental change of the Anthropocene has effectively put historical baselines beyond reach (Corlett, 2016).

The response of practitioners to such arguments was either to adopt loosely defined 'pre-settlement conditions' as the goal or to aim for an unspecified future natural state determined by natural processes. The latter approach envisages a trajectory towards greater wildness, a journey which "*will have a range of endpoints and we don't really know what they are.*" But even those who were resolutely future-orientated recognised the value of the past. "*It's important we know the history of the landscape. ... We can learn from this and it helps us to make sounder management decisions [but] that doesn't mean we're trying to recreate it.*" This implies learning from the past but not being constrained by it - using historical knowledge 'more as an inspiration than a target' (Corlett, 2016:455). Nevertheless, rewilding's 're' prefix represented a major conceptual impediment to the willingness of some respondents to describe their visions as 'rewilding'. 'Wilding' might prove less contentious because it speaks of a place for wildness within contemporary landscapes. Although the term 'rewilding' is far from universally welcomed as an appropriate or helpful term in Scotland, given its broad and growing currency both nationally and internationally, there seems little prospect of it being replaced.

### **3.2 Areas of convergence and divergence in rewilding discourses**

There was broad agreement amongst respondents that the ecology of upland Scotland has been badly degraded ("*the roof is leaking and the windows have been kicked in*") and is therefore in need of restoration. A reduction in the evidence of and control by human action was also widely supported, creating environments which are more natural and wild in both feeling and function. Also shared is the ambition of large-scale, holistic and integrated restoration of ecosystems: "*we need to focus on function at an ecosystem scale*". This was accompanied by a rejection of species-focused approaches: "*managing for iconic and charismatic species is akin to gardening.*" But beyond agreement at this very general level, consensus broke down concerning the meaning of the term itself, the desired endpoint of rewilding, and the means of getting there. Although these questions are all closely interrelated, they are now considered in turn.

### 3.2.1 Meanings

During the Delphi process, much time was devoted to exploring respondents' understandings of the meaning of rewilding. Very different understandings emerged, as analysed in detail by Deary (2015). Although respondents agreed on many of the attributes of wildness - notably the importance of naturalness - emphases and priorities differed. Unsurprisingly, understandings of naturalness also encompassed a broad spectrum, including ecological integrity and health, biodiversity, absence of (or reduced) human influence, nativity, nature's autonomy and public perceptions of naturalness. A significant bifurcation was that between composition and process - whether the primary focus should be on the biophysical characteristics of the land or on the autonomy of natural processes. The second of these understandings of naturalness was articulated by one respondent as moving *"beyond thinking of natural by managing for specific species because that isn't natural ... [to] giving nature the space to let natural processes dominate"*.

Wildness and naturalness are closely interrelated concepts, to the extent that they were widely seen as essentially synonymous and interdependent, especially by those at the purist end of the rewilding spectrum. *"If it's natural, it is generally wild too"; "anything that is natural and large is going to be wild by definition."* However, those who emphasise experiential over existential wildness are more accepting of anthropogenic influences, whether cultural artefacts or non-native species, as long as the landscape evokes a sense of wildness - a perception of 'nature in charge'. *"A landscape which is very unnatural can often have a really strong sense of being wild"; "wildness is just a perceptual state in Scotland. ... It has to be because it's certainly not wilderness so what else could it be?"* Similarly, an explicit differentiation between the two terms was offered by one respondent: *"Wildness is about the character of these places from a human perceptions perspective, while naturalness is more a ... conservation term."* This encapsulates the 'landscape v. ecology' theme which was a central thread in most discussions.

The acknowledgement that Scotland's wild places are cultural landscapes led many respondents to the view that it would be inappropriate to adopt a purist understanding of rewilding. As Taylor (1996:13) observes, 'if there is no real purity, why be purist?' A similarly pragmatic thread is clear in the following quotations: *"the vision is to try and create a habitat that is effectively as wild as you can possibly get given the fact that, arguably, there is no such thing as truly wild land in Scotland"; "personally, I think the*

*purest form of rewilding is probably unachievable, and it might even be counter-productive.*” While such pragmatism characterised a majority of responses, some participants in the Delphi process were critical of this approach, arguing that it involved too much compromise and insufficient ambition. This divergence of understandings and emphases is reflected in contrasting beliefs about the ends and means of rewilding.

### 3.2.2 Ends: rewilding goals and motivations

It is important to note, firstly, that a proactive vision of rewilding is not a primary objective for some respondents. Recognising the many threats to existing wild land, their present focus is on safeguarding what remains, rather than on turning the tide. They recognise the potential, but ‘holding the line’ currently takes precedence. But even if not embraced at present, there was agreement that rewilding is about effecting positive change. Such change is conceptualised in contrasting ways, and springs from diverse motivations. For many, enhancing ‘the wild’ is synonymous with ‘renaturalising’ the uplands. This is tempered with a widespread acceptance that, in Scotland’s profoundly cultural landscape, restoring ‘original-naturalness’ (*sensu* Peterken (1996)) is not a realistic or feasible goal, nor necessarily desirable in the context of climate change. As Whitehead (2014:163) puts it, ‘we cannot go back to nature (even if we wanted to) [because] the global environment is now an irrevocable product of society and nature’. Instead, the goal should be “*areas of semi-naturalness [in which] ecosystem health and natural processes are dominant*” [and] “*where ecological potential is fulfilled*”. Minimising visible anthropogenic impacts is central.

By contrast, many others view wildland restoration through the prism of landscape, emphasising recreational experience - the recognition that a strong *sense* of wildness can be felt even in much-altered environments, as exemplified above. The idea that people belong in wildlands was frequently stressed. From this perspective, rewilding is not about separating nature from people but about providing an opportunity for people to reconnect with wild places; it is about “*the need for humans to develop a new relationship, a different relationship with nature than the ... one of domination and exploitation.*” This can include a spiritual dimension, in terms of the wellbeing of people and of the land itself, as explored by McIntosh (2002) in *Soil and Soul* and reminiscent of Leopold’s (1949) ‘land ethic’ which envisages humans as integral members of the ecological community. “*Part of what we’re about is reconnecting people with nature*”; “*we’re concerned with the spirit and soul of the land, the wild heart.*” With only one exception, respondents stated that they had no interest in creating ‘people-less’

landscapes. On the contrary, as for Monbiot (2013:12), 'rewilding, paradoxically, should take place for the benefit of people' and should reinvigorate local communities. "We need it to be both biocentric and anthropocentric." Perhaps, then, as argued by Havlick and Doyle (2009), we should not set out to restore nature but to restore geographies - integrated social and environmental systems, or what Castree (2014) calls 'social nature'. Respondents were acutely aware of the potential for accusations of misanthropy, and stressed the need for people and traditional land uses to be part of wildland visions. "Wild land is no good if people aren't getting access to it." But those who focus on enhancing the wildness experience of recreationalists are criticised by others who believe that habitats and species should be the priority; "nature needs to be the most important of the two." From this perspective, "functional value needs to outweigh visual value to really make a difference", and a place is only truly wild if it has the full complement of native species within a naturally-functioning ecosystem.

Even the idea that rewilding should have a goal or endpoint is questioned by those who argue that it should be about "stepping back and letting nature take over ... letting nature call the shots". In similar vein are the statements that "we have no set end state for this process - we've deliberately stepped away from being prescriptive with targets," and "to rewild - the endpoint shouldn't be defined any more than that." The underlying philosophy here is about restoring nature's autonomy, focusing on the process or the journey not the destination. "Rewilding, I would say, is that process of transition ... from domination of ecosystems to one in which natural processes prevail. And rewilding is the journey to get there."

In the scientific literature on rewilding and in media coverage, the reintroduction of carnivores and other keystone species features prominently, the iconic example being the return of wolves to Yellowstone National Park, and proposals to reintroduce wolves, lynx and beavers to Scotland have long generated high-profile controversy (Warren, 2009). By contrast, reintroductions did not figure prominently in the discussions reported here. Although one respondent regarded the presence of predators as a *sine qua non* of true wildness, and a few mentioned reintroductions as a long-term ambition, most did not regard them as critical. Habitat restoration was accorded a far higher priority; "we have a long way to go with the habitat side of things before we can start talking about ... reintroduction of species."

The motivations that inspire this diverse range of objectives echo those that have been documented elsewhere (Brown *et al.*, 2011) and will not be discussed in detail here but are summarised in Table 3 with illustrative quotations.

Motivation	Explanation	Exemplar quotations
Ecological	Restoring ecosystem health	<i>“a living, enriched ecosystemic biodiversity”; “we will never have healthy, functioning ecosystems until all the species are back in place”</i>
Socio-economic	Ecosystem services from wild land	<i>“this special quality of wildness is hugely important to the economy of the National Park”; “humans won’t be able to survive because we’re undercutting our support systems everywhere”</i>
Ethical	Perceived moral need to ‘right the wrongs’	<i>“putting things back which should be there”; “humans have changed it so much that putting back what we got rid of is perfectly valid”</i>
Ecocentric	Intrinsic value of nature	<i>“nature for nature’s sake, because nature needs champions”; “we need some spaces where nature takes precedence”; “we’re concerned with the spirit and soul of the land, the wild heart”</i>
Spiritual	Human wellbeing through connection with wild nature	<i>“there is a tremendous spiritual value in wild places”; “there is an inherent spirit within nature”</i>

Table 3. Primary motivations for rewilding in Scotland, exemplified with quotations from the respondents.

The existing ecological condition of the land is clearly an important influence on the objectives which are chosen. What is possible is *“very much defined by the land that you have to play with; what you can do with something is already largely pre-defined.”* There is thus a ‘path dependency’ to rewilding trajectories determined by history. For this reason, even if there was unanimity on the ends of rewilding, the means would inevitably diverge.

### 3.2.3 Means: rewilding practices

It is clear from the above discussion of wildland objectives that respondents’ visions of ‘the wild’ span a wide spectrum. The means embraced for delivering these ends are similarly varied. In particular, participants’ views were divided over two key issues: the place of people in wildland, and the relative merits of intervention and non-intervention.

### 3.2.3.1 *People, cultural artefacts and traditional land uses: welcome or unwelcome?*

Given the emphasis on experiential wildness associated with the strong Scottish tradition of recreation and open access, it is unsurprising that some respondents advocated removing intrusive cultural artefacts as a means of enhancing wildness. *“We aim to remove human infrastructure and artefacts from the estate, especially where they interfere with or degrade the wild, natural quality of the land.”* This objective has already led to the removal of tens of kilometres of fencing and/or vehicle tracks, and to the restructuring or even removal of forestry plantations on the grounds that *“cultural artefacts would undermine our vision”*. This accords with the ‘Unna Principles’, outlined by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS, 2002), which prohibit the development of infrastructure such as accommodation and way marking, and also with the general consensus within government and NGOs that a lack of human influence - or at least a perception of this - is a key wild land attribute (Mc Morran *et al.*, 2008). But precisely the opposite view was also expressed by many, namely that certain socio-historical features can contribute to wild character and help to reconnect people with wild places. *“There’d be no question of removing historical artefacts, or indeed features that are valued by the community”; “it is wild in a sense, but also cultural ... I don’t think it has to be one or the other”; “even though it’s a cultural landscape it can still be wild.”*

Respondents who advocated removing artefacts were also typically opposed to all extractive land uses and regarded traditional land management practices such as field sports and muirburning as incompatible with wild land. But many others adopted a more inclusive view that such land uses can and should be practised in wild places. *“Stalking, grazing, fishing ... they’re all of integral importance to the future of wildland.”* Such respondents perceived grouse moors, deer stalking land and even (in one case) forestry plantations as wild. *“We can have ‘wild’ in some sense and a thriving rural economy.”* Only a small minority of respondents argued for a cessation of field sports. The defence of such land uses by respondents from a sample of ‘rewilding estates’ might seem unexpected, but it reflects the distinct socio-historical context of upland Scotland, still affected by the long shadow of the Highland Clearances. Mc Morran *et al.* (2008:185) also report that low-intensity traditional land uses are often not regarded as being incompatible with wildness, with one respondent arguing pragmatically that such pursuits must continue ‘if we are to combat the view that wild land is a product of the Clearances and implies land emptied of people’. A belief that people belong in wild

places does not simply lead to the passive acceptance of public access and recreation but, for some respondents, to organising volunteering programmes, and installing interpretive panels and even car parks, all with the aim of broadening experiential social connections with wild places.

### 3.2.3.2 *Intervention v. non-intervention*

Debates over intervention have a long history in conservation and are never simple to resolve; ‘conservation is intervention, and intervention isn’t easy’ (Low, 2002:301). But it is a particularly fraught issue for rewilding because wildness evokes freedom from human control. Indeed, divergent views about intervention explain much of the variation in how the term ‘rewilding’ is used (Nogués-Bravo *et al.*, 2016). Those whose desired goal is to restore nature’s autonomy typically believe in a ‘hands off’ approach to rewilding, with minimal or no intervention. *“If you are trying to create land that is as wild as possible, that to me implies that you would have as little intervention as possible”*; *“just let the natural processes take their course.”* This is ‘aiming without a target’ (Hodder and Bullock, 2009:40) by letting nature determine the outcome. The idea of ‘self-willed land’ is part of the etymology of ‘wilderness’ and is an important strand in rewilding thinking (Fisher, 2004), exemplified by the statement that *“if you start intervening too much then it isn’t wildland any more.”* But ‘hands off’ can mean very different things in practice, especially concerning the question of whether the ultimate goal of self-willed wild land justifies active intervention initially. Can the road to non-intervention be paved with good interventions? Does human ‘midwifery’ in the process of rebirthing wildland compromise the authenticity of the ‘nature’ that results? Contrasting answers to these questions lead to the adoption of diametrically contradictory practices: removing fences and erecting fences are both regarded as ‘rewilding practices’ in different contexts, as are the introduction and cessation of prescribed muirburning. In the Delphi process, respondents were therefore frequently perplexed by the choices of others. Highly interventionist practices like high-topping mature trees to create deadwood (with its ecological and biodiversity benefits) are anathema to those who champion natural processes. Some create fenced deer exclosures to protect tree seedlings from browsing, even if they see this as a necessary evil, while others have adopted a presumption against fencing. Fencing emerged as a pivotal issue in the interviews and Delphi discussions because it connects directly with longstanding and politically-charged debates surrounding deer management (Warren, 2009). Such controversy echoes wider debates about fencing for conservation (Somers and Hayward, 2012).

On the face of it, installing artificial and visually prominent structures like fences in order to enhance wild quality is paradoxical; *“managing for wildness just sounds like a contradiction in terms”*. Respondents reconcile this conceptual dissonance in a variety of ways. One approach was adopting a long-term perspective, justifying short-term, temporary intervention as a prerequisite of long-term restoration, an argument supported by stressing that the current environment is far from pristine. *“Does intervention compromise natural? Yes. But I suppose the naturalness was compromised a long time ago.”* Another approach to rationalising intervention made reference to ‘unnatural starting points’ - the argument that nature needs to be restored before it can function naturally and autonomously. *“In ecosystems in which change has already been manifested by the hand of man, it is inconceivable to allow nature to make sound conservation choices itself when it is already starting from a different position.”* In this view, expecting degraded nature to heal itself is unrealistic; altered nature cannot, unassisted, produce natural landscapes. *“The problem with natural processes is that they aren’t – they aren’t natural because there are processes missing.”* With pieces of the ecological jigsaw absent or damaged, the argument is that humans need to provide the lost elements, as far as possible through minimum interventions which mimic natural processes. A third justification was the argument that a ‘hands off’ approach may produce results which are socio-politically unacceptable (for instance, by failing to provide the multiple benefits which society increasingly expects from land management), or which do not comply with legal obligations concerning designated site condition. *“Taking a passive approach on this isn’t going to deliver on the multiple objectives.”* The ‘nature in charge’ philosophy is tested when nature does not deliver the ‘right’ result.

The intervention debate comes into sharp focus in the context of native woodland restoration. While there is broad consensus that such restoration is good and necessary, opinions diverge on the appropriate means of achieving it. Is deer fencing permissible? Is natural regeneration the only legitimate mechanism, or can nature be assisted by ground preparation or even planting? Some respondents are strongly committed to tree planting as a *sine qua non* of restoring degraded ecosystems, but for others *“this smacks of tinkering too much”*; *“planting would detract from our desire to make this as unmanaged as possible.”* A more trenchantly expressed view is that *“if you’re trying to improve the wildness of that place, the last thing you do is start planting trees and the like”*. The passion on both sides of this debate was revealed in the strongly-worded public exchanges in 2013-14 over plans by the Royal Society for the

Protection of Birds to plant 100,000 trees at its Abernethy Forest Reserve; planting was opposed by critics for destroying naturalness through 'landscape gardening on a massive scale', but supported by a rewilding advocate as a 'much-needed step towards restoring the full biological diversity of these iconic woodlands' (SCENES, 2014). Nevertheless, there is a measure of consensus that, while decreasing intervention is a desirable long-term goal, a degree of management is often necessary at present.

The underlying understandings of rewilding discussed above clearly influence beliefs about the appropriateness or otherwise of management interventions. *"The idea of naturalness can cope with management a bit better than the idea of wildness can."* Tensions between 'naturalness' and 'wildness' as management objectives were apparent, in that enhancing naturalness often requires manipulative restoration whereas promoting ecological wildness implies giving greater autonomy to natural processes with no prescribed endpoint. To a considerable degree, the extent to which the Delphi panellists embraced or rejected interventionist approaches depended on their view of what *detracts* from wildness. If wildness is seen as incompatible with, say, non-native species then rewilding will require intervention, whereas a more inclusive view of what wildlands can contain obviates such a requirement. This connects, too, with the 'composition v. process' divergence identified above.

Finally, there were some who argued that dichotomising intervention and non-intervention is artificial and unhelpful in the context of the Scottish cultural landscape where human influence, past and present, is pervasive. Whatever management is applied or withdrawn, the outcome will be the consequence of human choices. As one respondent argued, *"even non-intervention is a human decision to allow the landscape to evolve in a particular way."* Rewilding is a choice and *"therefore, by definition, to my mind it's still a cultural landscape because we're making choices."* Warren (2009:243) suggests that 'in an environment with as long a human history as Scotland's, 'hands on' versus 'hands off' is probably a false choice; 'hands lightly on' may be an appropriate middle way.'

### **3.3 Four dimensions of Scottish rewilding discourses**

Four distinct - but not mutually exclusive - perspectives on rewilding and wild land management within Scotland emerge from this research. These are presented graphically in Figure 2, emphasising the connections and continuities which link these outlooks. The first of these, the 'wild nature' perspective, focuses on ecological

restoration and the value of semi-natural habitats. From this perspective, ‘any future vision for Scotland’s wild places should include the aim of enhancing the diversity and quality of their vegetation cover and wildlife’ (McMorran *et al.*, 2006:6). The central aim is to enhance the resilience and coherence of Scotland’s ecological networks, in line with the strategic direction outlined by Lawton *et al.* (2010). Sometimes this means focussing on particular assemblages of species and habitats which are considered to represent ‘natural conditions’ as defined by historical benchmarks. More often, the historic focus is subsumed within a broader concern for ecological resilience. Either way, ecological communities are a key indicator of wild quality.



Figure 2. Four key perspectives which inform and inspire rewilding initiatives in Scotland.

The second distinct emphasis is ‘wildness’ in the sense of restoring self-willed land. This viewpoint sees wild land as a place where natural ecological processes predominate, aligning with Drenthen’s (2009) idea that rewilding is about setting natural forces free rather than constructing new nature. It advocates a hands-off approach (Fisher, 2004). Although ecological resilience is an anticipated result of self-willed nature, one salient value of ‘wildness’ here is its ‘self-imposed restraint in a society that

generally seeks to dominate and control all of nature' (Noss, 1991:121). Rewilding is thus a process whereby human intervention ends and the land rewilds itself. It is the 'otherness' of the non-human world that is valued. Despite its philosophical appeal, this minimal intervention approach has been branded unduly idealistic in the context of ancient cultural landscapes such as Scotland's (Woods, 2005; Rotherham, 2014).

Thirdly, the 'wild experience' perspective focuses on wild character from a recreational and experiential perspective. A key value of wildland here is the opportunity for unconfined recreation in the context of landscapes which evoke a sense of wildness. The management and restoration focus is, therefore, on the removal or modification of anything which is perceived to detract from this landscape aesthetic.

Finally, the 'wild place' outlook represents a more cultural perspective on (re)wilding. Within this framing of wild land, the modified state of Scotland's wildlands is freely acknowledged, with such areas portrayed as valuable cultural landscapes with wild character. Instead of placing pre-eminent value on naturalness, this understanding embraces the cultural history which has shaped today's sense of wildness. The ideas of a 'working wilderness' and 'sustainable conservation', premised on 'nature with people' and community involvement (Mace, 2014), are highlighted, not least because of their value in recruiting the support of local people. While this perspective maintains a strong nature conservation emphasis, the contribution of contemporary practices to maintaining living links with Scotland's past is considered significant. It therefore resonates with Toogood's (2003) thinking on 'Highland reconstructionism', in that it adopts a holistic view of people and nature, and values the indigenous links to the land through memory, language and tradition. It chimes, too, with the view that 'ignoring the human factor in landscape and the richness of the human-nature relationship ... often leads to an uneven and impoverished conception of the environment' (Arntzen and Brady, 2008:22), and therefore that cultural landscapes should not be regarded as somehow second best.

These four perspectives are far from being independent, mutually exclusive positions. Most rewilding initiatives are an idiosyncratic and pragmatic blend of several. Because there is no agreement on what the 'enhancers' and 'detractors' of wildland are, different rewilding models focus on different priorities and values. For example, while some regard wildland as an 'ideal', a broad philosophy amounting to humility in management (Noss, 1991), others champion it as a strategic land use for an upland economy in

decline (Carver, 2007). This multi-dimensional and contested character of rewilding has significant practical consequences, two of which are now briefly highlighted.

The first is the issue of ambiguous restoration targets. Ideas of 'authenticity' in wildlands are elusive where historically complex landscapes meet socially constructed discourses of 'wild' and 'natural' (Deary, 2016). The resulting plurality of socially constructed – and continually renegotiated – values attached to wildness means that there is no single, *bona fide* condition of wildland to aim for. In the absence of this, reaching consensus on restoration targets or a wildland strategy presents a significant challenge, for “how do we define the ‘wilderness’ on which (re)wilding is based?” (Naeem, 2013:437). With no agreed ‘litmus test’ for wildness, whose ‘wild’ should guide action (Katz, 1998), and which (if any) historical baseline should be selected as the reference for future visions (Hall, 2009)? An action regarded from one perspective as a wildland enhancer can be a detractor from another, as discussed above in relation to tree planting and fencing. As long as such plurality persists, ongoing conflict over future aspirations for wildlands and appropriate management options is inevitable, both in Scotland and elsewhere. Such conflict is particularly acute in cultural landscapes where a wide range of conditions can arguably be legitimised as authentic wildland targets. Cultural influences have been so significant in shaping today’s wildlands that establishing clear baselines or targets for (re)creating a more natural state is fraught with difficulty. Each of the four wildland framings in Figure 2 encapsulates a subtly different vision of rewilding.

This then leads to the second issue, which is an inevitable corollary of this plurality of values and visions, namely the co-existence of conflicting practical management objectives. Not only are wildland values elusive, but management strategies are ambiguous too. The practical renegotiation of wildland values results in dissonance between theory and praxis as management practices needed to satisfy certain values conflict with, what is for some, the core wildland aspiration of self-willed autonomy (Fisher, 2004). Such tensions over the place of deterministic interventions in delivering wildness lie close to the heart of Scotland’s wildland debate. As wildland initiatives try to satisfy many values, confusions arise, such as the oxymoronic (but widespread) practice of using tree planting to stimulate ‘natural regeneration’ of woodlands. In its strictest sense, rewilding implies letting natural systems evolve into new states, meaning that, “by definition, whatever resulted would be a success” (Tweed, 2010:9). But the actions (or non-interventions) which promote one quality of wildland may diminish another. In many instances, wildland is expected, simultaneously, to be a refuge for native nature, to

maintain a primitive aesthetic, to protect sensitive cultural heritage and to be maintained by self-willed natural processes, while also supporting traditional practices of cultural significance. In the Scottish context, the difficulties of delivering 'all the above' are revealed most acutely in the debates surrounding the interactions between deer, trees, fencing and moorland, labelled by one respondent as the "*biggest challenge in wildland currently*". As noted above, deer fencing is particularly divisive because visually it is a significant wildland detractor, but achieving natural regeneration of woodlands in its absence is challenging (Sandom *et al.*, 2011). The alternative is to reduce deer densities significantly, but this threatens the viability of the socio-economically important field sport of deer stalking, stirring local controversy (MacMillan and Leitch, 2008). This illustrates the tension between ideas of unmanaged wildlands and the cultural value of traditional practices to perceptions of wild places, together with the significant role that such practices can play in maintaining features of conservation interest.

To conclude this discussion of multi-dimensional rewilding, it is clear that Scottish rewilding initiatives face a series of difficult trade-offs. This supports an evolving body of North American literature which suggests that 'having it all' (self-willed autonomy, historical fidelity, primitivism and more) in wilderness stewardship is no longer possible (Cole and Yung, 2010; Cowley *et al.*, 2012; Hobbs *et al.*, 2013). 'Wildness' and 'naturalness' emerge from this research as highly malleable concepts at the interface between historically complex landscapes and evolving, socially constructed narratives; in the absence of a single *truth*, a range of landscapes and ecological conditions can be judged as authentic because there can be no absolute definition of 'wildland quality' (Hull *et al.*, 2001). These positions are shaped in significant ways by cultural, social and (in Scotland particularly) historic factors. It is also important not to underestimate the influence of emotional biogeographies on rewilding narratives (Trudgill, 2008). By identifying four distinct but interlinked visions of wildland (Fig. 2), this paper offers a way of conceptualising this plurality and of considering the conflicting mandates that are the inevitable corollary of multiple wildland goals. Just as the debates surrounding cultural landscapes have shown that plurality of meaning can be productive, and that efforts to define landscapes and places in a single, monolithic way are unhelpful (Arntzen and Brady, 2008; Abbott, 2011), so efforts to frame rewilding exclusively in accordance with one particular vision may result in a loss of meaning and value. Searching for a single paradigm of restoration ignores the fact that there are many different ways in which people interact with, and make meaning from, wild nature (Ehrenfeld, 2000). A continually evolving plurality of wildland meaning is arguably a more desirable way of

thinking (Arts *et al.*, 2011). Perhaps, as Taylor (2011) argues, rather than becoming embroiled in debates over formal definitions, it is 'wilder' to have none.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

'What is wild?' and 'what is natural?' are familiar and much-debated questions (Midgley, 2007; Cole and Yung, 2010; Hobbs *et al.*, 2010; Dudley, 2011). There is broad agreement about the desirability of enhancing naturalness and wildness within rewilding discourses, and also that rewilding could 'make an invaluable contribution to conservation philosophy and practice in Scotland' (Brown *et al.*, 2011:303). But this research has shown that this aspiration can animate very different visions, both philosophically and practically. Consequently, this paper presents a 'many wilds' interpretation of rewilding, eschewing any attempt to develop a single definition. As one respondent put it, "*you can't put one meaning on something which has gone off in so many directions*". Instead, we identify four overlapping and interacting framings of rewilding to reflect the empirical reality that restoring wildland is multifaceted. The fact that wildness could thus be described as a many-splintered thing is unsurprising because although some biophysical attributes of wild places can be quantified and mapped, ultimately wildness is "*just a very personal thing*". The multiplicity of visions and practices represented in Scotland's wildland initiatives reflects the diversity of personalities and perceptions involved. The 'wild' that inspires rewilding defies precise definition. It is 'neither a biophysical reality nor a conceptual abstraction but a blend of the two' (Warren, 2009:245), with the 'real world' and conceptual dimensions existing in co-dependent relationship. Although some respondents felt that it would be helpful to have an agreed meaning, especially in policy terms, others were relaxed about the fuzziness of the term, even questioning why it should "*have to mean one thing? Why can't it include a range of approaches?*"

The concept's multivalency is one reason why rewilding has such broad appeal; its imprecision allows people to appropriate it and mould it to conform to their own particular vision and values while at the same time benefitting from the concept's increasing acceptance and status. On the other hand, Jørgensen (2015:486) comments critically that although it sounds 'imperative and futuristic ... it lacks specific content'. It is in danger of becoming such a broad, catch-all term that it ends up indistinguishable from nature conservation, expanding to colonise its entire terrain. To some extent, rewilding debates are semantic because words and terminology are neither static nor always adequate to capture the meanings of complex, multifaceted concepts. As the poet

T.S.Eliot famously put it, 'Words strain, crack and sometimes break, under the burden ... Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place, will not stay still.' But as the above discussion demonstrates, the divergence of interpretation is far more than mere semantics; it results in diametrically opposite practices being claimed as rewilding. In her global review, Jørgensen (2015) identifies six uses of 'rewilding', with each definition largely confined to a particular geography. The research reported here shows that even *within* a specific geographic context a wide diversity of interpretations and practices can all be understood as rewilding.

Despite - or perhaps because of - the multiplying understandings of rewilding, some argue that its meaning should be confined to one, specific definition. Seddon *et al.* (2014), for example, advocate a return to the original 'three Cs' understanding. However, both in practice and in theory the term has expanded and morphed to include far more than this, and it seems highly unlikely that this genie can be put back into its original bottle. As rewilding takes root in a wide range of settings, it is diversifying and developing along the four axes of wild nature, wild places, wild experience and wildness. Inclusive understandings of rewilding which embrace these axes, with all their rich diversity of values, motivations and practices, may help to shape a wilder nature which facilitates human flourishing.

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## **NOTES**

1. The term 'wildland' - or sometimes 'wild land' - was left intentionally undefined in order to avoid prejudging or influencing the outcomes of the research.

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