



## The National Trust for Scotland

### WILD LAND POLICY

#### INTRODUCTION

1. The policy expresses the Trust's understanding of wild land. It is intended to give clear guidance for the management of all of the Trust's properties considered to contain wild land areas or to have wild qualities. These include mountains, islands and coastlines, but it is also recognised that qualities of wildness may be appreciated in less obvious areas. The policy will also be used to allow the Trust to promote the conservation of wild land more widely.
2. The Trust's statutory purposes applicable to the concept of wild land include the conservation of areas of natural beauty and the provision of access and enjoyment. In order to fulfil this area of the Trust's remit its Corporate Plan 1999-2004 highlighted the need to develop a policy on wild land.

#### BACKGROUND

3. Since its creation in the 1930s the National Trust for Scotland has promoted the cause of wild land conservation. Its contributions have been in part through the acquisition and management of some of Scotland's remote and wild land, including the adoption of the Unna Principles to guide management of mountainous areas (see Appendix 1). Other more indirect actions have also been influential, such as commissioning Mr Bill Murray to describe and assess the most important landscapes of Scotland in the 1962 report entitled 'Highland Landscapes'. This piece of work ultimately guided the Countryside Commission for Scotland when it developed the list of National Scenic Areas in 1978-80.

#### Relationship between this policy and the Unna Principles

4. The Unna Principles are still the key reference point when the Trust is considering management of mountainous properties. However, while still valuable they are in many ways a 'period piece'. Written by Percy Unna in 1937 in a letter to the Trust, they represent what was then the consensus view of the mountaineering community, of which Unna was a leading light and driving force. At the time the Principles were part of ongoing free debate and not necessarily considered sacrosanct. While somewhat overlooked by the Trust from about 1970 to 1990, the relevance of the Principles re-emerged in the 1990s and played a key part in shaping thinking about management of properties such as West Affric and Mar Lodge Estate. ***Hence, the Wild Land Policy complements rather than replaces the Unna Principles.***

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF SCOTLAND'S WILD LAND

5. Relative to less industrialised parts of the world the extent of countryside in the UK which is unaffected or seemingly unaffected from overt human influence is very limited. Most such areas are in Scotland and are significant at the UK level, but also have some value in European terms. Outwith Scandinavia there are few large areas of wild land in Europe, particularly close to the industrial heartlands of mainland Europe<sup>1</sup>. Hence Scotland's wild land is valued both by its own people and by visitors from elsewhere in the UK and abroad. It is valued both as a distinctive part of Scotland's heritage and identity and for the opportunities it provides for outdoor recreational experiences. Wild land is valued both by those who visit it and by many who have never experienced it first hand but still value its existence.
6. The economic value of the recreational opportunities offered by places with wild land quality has been documented in previous research (eg Highlands and Islands Enterprise 1996<sup>2</sup>) but has been given new emphasis by the far-reaching impact of the 2001 Foot and Mouth outbreak on tourism in Scotland. This brought home the fact that Scotland's countryside and public access to it, both for aesthetic appreciation and for more physical engagement with its elements, is a tremendous draw for visitors. The importance of potential visitors perceiving Scotland as having a high quality environment and being a good place for outdoor activities is emphasised in the 2001 Audit of Tourism and the Natural Environment by Scottish Environment LINK<sup>3</sup>. Alongside this is a growing awareness that tourism based on environmental attraction must be developed and managed sustainably, in a manner that does not damage the very resource upon which it depends.

## WIDER POLICY CONTEXT

### Public interest

7. The definition of wild land in Scotland has been the subject of much debate between conservationists and recreationists over the years. As yet the ongoing debate has not led to many clear benefits for Scotland's wild places in terms of protection, policy development or designation. There has been a similar failure to provide a lead to the growing number of people who though not involved in the public debate, nevertheless are passionately concerned about wild land. The large number of such people and the extent of their enthusiasm are indicated, for example, by the large volume of objections to proposed tourist helicopter flights over the Cuillins, and the relative ease of fund-raising for wild land purchases by NTS and the John Muir Trust.

### National

---

<sup>1</sup> SNH (2001) 'Wildness in Scotland's Countryside' (draft) Policy Statement.

<sup>2</sup> Highlands and Islands Enterprise (1996) The economic impacts of hillwalking, mountaineering and associated activities in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Inverness.

<sup>3</sup> Rory MacLellan (2001) Scottish Environment Audits, 5: Tourism and the Natural Environment. Scottish Environment LINK.

8. Recognition of the value of wild land is gradually increasing in national policy and planning guidance. One of the clearest indicators of this came in the publication of National Planning Policy Guidelines on Natural Heritage (NPPG 14) by the Scottish Office in 1998. This sets out national planning policy consideration in relation to Scotland's natural heritage and refers to the wild land character of some landscapes and the sensitivity of such areas to any form of development or intrusive human activity<sup>4</sup>. The Highland Structure Plan approved in March 2001 makes reference<sup>5</sup> to NPPG 14 and states that 'the qualities of wild land are a material consideration in evaluating development proposals on or affecting it'. The identification and classification of these areas will be taken forward as part of a Council review of landscape and coastal designations. Scottish Natural Heritage is developing a policy statement on 'Wildness in Scotland's Countryside' which should give national guidance on designations and management. A draft for consultation was issued in 2001.

### International

9. Many parts of the world have developed designations or legislation which reflect the value of wild land qualities. Some examples such as the USA's Wilderness Act are in many ways only of moderate relevance here due to difference in cultures, landscape and scale of landmass. More relevant examples include the remote land designations and presumptions against intrusion found in some Scandinavian countries. The promotion of sustainable objectives for wild land management has also been highlighted by the designation of 2002 as 'International Year of Mountains'. In Scotland it is not feasible to designate large areas of 'wilderness' as in the USA; instead it is more appropriate to regard 'wild land quality' as one attribute of a landscape, for which objectives may be set alongside those for other attributes. In areas where wild land quality is highest, these objectives should be given highest priority.

### DEFINING WILD LAND IN SCOTLAND

10. On the whole the drive for the recognition and conservation of wild places in Scotland (rather than specific habitats or historic sites) has come from recreationists. Therefore in developing its definition of wild land, the Trust has proceeded primarily from a recreational view of wild land rather than striving to encompass all possible arguments. This approach is not intended to be divisive, but reflects in part the Trust's management planning approach whereby landscape, ecological and cultural values as well as the values held by visitors and the local community are highlighted separately before holistic decisions regarding overall objectives are made<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> NPPG14, para 16. 'The most sensitive landscapes may have little or no capacity to accept new development. Some of Scotland's remoter mountain and coastal areas possess an elemental quality from which many people derive psychological and spiritual benefits. Such areas are very sensitive to any form of development or intrusive human activity and planning authorities should take great care to safeguard their wild land character. This care should extend to the assessment of proposals for development outwith these areas which might adversely affect their wild land character.'

<sup>5</sup> Paragraphs 2.5.21 and 2.5.22.

<sup>6</sup> In the management of any piece of land there are invariably conflicting objectives (eg restoration of an area of native woodland may directly threaten an important archaeological site). The resolution of such conflict is best achieved by comparative evaluation, discussion, and ultimate consensus building on the way ahead - this is the core purpose of management planning. However, this can only be achieved by clear expression of the value of individual objectives. A fudging of objectives obscures values and hinders decision-making.

11. The multiplicity of distinctive perspectives on wild places within Scotland is recognised including those of ecologists, historians, local people and recreationists. The ecologist looks for areas where ecological processes dominate - though relatively few habitats remain unmodified by human intervention in one form or another. The historian may look on empty land as evidence of past management of land and people - a land unnaturally cleared of its population. The recreationist seeks out remote areas with challenging rugged terrain and an often hostile climate. For many such individuals the motivation for visiting the countryside is to get away from urban pressures and humdrum routines, to meet the environment on its own terms, to refresh and renew the spirit and the soul, in other words to "re-create" in its fullest sense. Local people's views on an area will be particular to their own background but may be influenced by history, a sense of place, and economic values relating to their own livelihoods or the wellbeing of local communities. However, these varying viewpoints are often not mutually exclusive in terms of how such places might be managed.

12. While appreciating that human activity has left impacts in almost every part of the country the Trust believes that one of Scotland's finest but most neglected assets is its remote and wild landscape. ***The Trust's broad working definition of wild land in Scotland is:***

***"Wild land in Scotland is relatively remote and inaccessible, not noticeably affected by contemporary human activity, and offers high-quality opportunities to escape from the pressures of everyday living and to find physical and spiritual refreshment."***

13. While no specific mention of the historic environment is made in the definition, the presence of ruins or old structures is not necessarily considered to diminish wild land quality. In some cases they may enhance it by giving a sense of scale to the landscape, or an impression that nature has claimed back an area from man's influence, or by emphasising an atmosphere of solitude. In addition wild land, in the Trust's view, is not necessarily the same thing as natural land, or areas where 'nature is in control'. However, an apparently natural environment will increase wild land quality, and highly visible or audible human activity is likely to diminish it.

#### WILD LAND INDICATORS

14. A list of indicators that can critically affect the character and quality of wild land and the experience of those enjoying it is given in Table 1. These include both physical aspects of a place and factors such as climate that will affect a person's experience of it. Some are beyond the control of management, while others relate to the presence of man-made structures or levels of activity.

15. The list in Table 1 is clearly not exhaustive and could be extended. The enhancers and detractors listed are not in a specific order and none are prerequisites of 'wild land quality' or 'wildness'. Some relate to physical features and the reactions they provoke others purely to the potential experience of a place. However, enhancers will generally produce a positive emotional response while detractors a generally negative one. The presence of the indicators listed as neutral is considered unlikely to affect wild land quality. The more enhancers that apply to an area the more likely it is to give a sense of wildness. If large scale and high impact, one detractor may reduce the wild land quality very significantly despite the presence of many enhancers. The overall assessment therefore is not an adding up of the 'number of criteria met', but must be based on experience and judgement.

## INTERNAL APPLICATION

16. The Trust will identify areas with wild land quality which it owns and other parts of its properties where the quality of wildness is apparent to a lesser degree, and will manage them appropriately so as to safeguard, or in some cases enhance, these qualities. Wild land quality will also be considered as part of any acquisition appraisal.

### Evaluation and Identification

17. *The enhancers and detractors listed in Table 1 will be used as part of the Property Statement evaluation process to identify properties and parts of properties with wild land quality or some qualities of wildness. These will be identified in the Key Features Table and Statement of Significance.*
18. Evaluation through the Property Statement process<sup>7</sup> will ensure that wild land is considered as one of the potential attributes of a property. Defining significance in terms of wild land quality will normally involve zonation of properties to identify areas to which the policy would apply. The method envisaged is to include an assessment of wild land quality in the Key Features Table for a property – usually under the Landscape section. The indicators given in Table 1 can be used to assess the wild land quality or potential quality (and hence its significance) of the whole property or of different zones of a property. Similar methodology will be used as part of the acquisition appraisal of potential new properties<sup>8</sup>. *The list of indicators will be amended if experience of implementation suggests improvements.*
19. It is hoped that the indicators can be used both to confirm the relatively few, large, remote areas of 'high wild land quality' present on Trust property and to identify smaller pockets of less remote but relatively wild land. In areas where these qualities are significant, any potential impacts upon wild land quality must be taken into consideration when planning and implementing all aspects of management.

---

<sup>7</sup> The Property Statement process is fully explained in the separate documents available from the Management Planning Team, Countryside Division: Guidelines for Property Statements (2001) and NTS Management Planning Manual (Working draft 2000).

<sup>8</sup> See NTS Acquisition Policy (draft) for full details.

**TABLE 1. INDICATORS OF WILD LAND QUALITY**

Enhancers

- Sense of remoteness (linked to distance from roads, tracks and transport)
- Size of area and scale of landscape
- Scenic grandeur
- Surrounded by sea (islands)
- Solitude
- Roughness of terrain
- Peacefulness, quietness
- Absence of contemporary human activity or development
- Seemingly natural environment
- Evokes emotional experience whether first hand or at a distance
- Absence of re-assurance in a hazardous and challenging environment
- Physically demanding experience resulting in a sense of achievement, eg long walk in
- Scotland's climate
- Ruins and disused structures – where they add scale and fit the landscape

Neutral

- Deer stalking
- Sites of ancient habitation (see also Enhancers list)

Detractors

- Recent signs of human activity, particularly 'man in charge of nature' including intensive agriculture and insensitive forestry
- Recent human artefacts (including litter)
- Presence of crowds or group activity
- Unsympathetic recreation activities
- Man-made noise
- Facilities to make recreation easier or safer
- Ecological imbalance
- Visual intrusions eg roads, pylons, fences
- Mechanical transport
- Low flying jets & helicopters

## INTERNAL APPLICATION (cont)

### Management Approach

20. ***The identification of areas of ‘wild land’ does not imply that a set of management objectives will automatically be imposed. There will be a range of options for management, the choice from which will depend on the other features of the area as well as its wild land quality.***
21. The specific objectives for wild land at a particular property will depend on the complete suite of features at a property determined through the Property Statement process, in particular the Vision Statement and Statement of Intent. However, at a general level the Trust’s management approach to wild land will be based on the list of enhancers and detractors in Table 1 and on the Unna Principles. ***The general principle of management is to avoid any reduction in wild land quality*** and, where possible and deemed appropriate<sup>9</sup> to enhance these qualities or extend the areas which exhibit them.
22. Management for wild land quality will be part of the holistic management process, with the emphasis and resources given to it dependent on the overall significance of the different features of a property and the resultant overall priorities, or priorities in particular zones of a property.
23. Management of areas with wild land quality may involve several aspects including management to influence physical features, visitor management (including education and interpretation) and managing impacts on the landscape. The manner in which any management activity is carried out is vital to conserving wild land quality – it should be unobtrusive and sensitive and the standard of work must be appropriate. While it would be unlikely for there to be a complete absence of ‘human footprint’, that footprint should be very light.
24. Where possible positive management designed to enhance wild land quality will be pursued. It is recognised that wild land quality can be enhanced, in some cases fairly easily, if there is the will to do so. Previous examples of such approaches on Trust property include the promotion of ‘the long walk in’ to mountainous areas and the removal of intrusive high altitude tracks.

## EXTERNAL APPLICATION

### Advocacy

25. In order to engender the political will to preserve wild places, it is important to engage people at all levels throughout Scotland. There must be a national constituency speaking clearly on behalf of the relatively few, large, remote areas of best wild land still remaining. It is unlikely that most people will actually be able to experience their special qualities directly; visiting remote wild land will always tend to be primarily for the relatively fit and able and those prepared to develop the necessary skills. Almost everyone can, however, experience a flavour of their special character through exposure to relatively wild areas nearer to home, or through enjoying the sense of wild land as an element in

---

<sup>9</sup> ie appropriate in relation to other priorities and objectives. This would be determined by the Property Statement process.

landscape seen from the road, railway or path network. However, within Scotland there are already places where access to relatively wild land is facilitated offering opportunities for the less able or less experienced to have a wild land experience or sample a more extreme climate.

26. The Trust's position as a manager of areas of wild land gives weight to its work in advocating such an approach on areas outwith its ownership. Its advocacy on wild land protection and management will be aimed at the public in general, at its membership, at commercial and user interests and directly at policy makers. This may be undertaken by the organisation itself or through partnerships with other organisations, such as Scottish Environment LINK.
27. The main aim of such advocacy will be the development of a **National Strategy for the Conservation and Enhancement of Wild Land**. Four key elements have been identified.

#### Core wild land

28. The primary purpose will be to identify, protect and enhance the 'core wild land' areas of Scotland. Current initiatives offer the opportunity for this task to be taken on without generating unacceptable levels of new work or new designations. SNH is currently refining its own 'wildness policy'. Using this in conjunction with its landscape character survey of Scotland and existing information on remoteness prepared for the Shieldaig Hydro Scheme Public Local Inquiry (1997), it should be possible to draw up tentative lists of core wild land areas for consideration.
29. Current thinking in both SNH and NTS is that a new designation for wild land is not required so long as the National Scenic Area (NSA) designation can encompass all core wild land areas identified and afford them adequate protection. This will entail amending the criteria for designation, the designation of new NSAs or extension of existing ones and possibly changes to the classes of development that can be controlled by the NSA designation.
30. *Concerted action will be taken to influence SNH to draw up a list of core wild land areas and to ensure that these are protected by an adequate designation incorporating wild land quality criteria.*

#### Wildness and smaller areas of wild land

31. Wild land quality is generally most strongly felt in large upland areas, or uninhabited islands or remote coastlines. However, the quality of wildness can be found much more widely in the countryside, sometimes as pockets within what is overall a cultivated landscape, or close to settlements. Within a potential spectrum of areas controlled by nature to those under human control they may sit nearer the latter end than large remote wild land areas. While such smaller areas are not 'core wild land' they may have great value locally in terms of landscape and wildlife and in value to the community as accessible areas where a sense of wildness can be experienced.
32. *Smaller pockets of wild land (or areas with some qualities of wildness) will be considered for protection, as well as the larger core wild land areas. A National Planning Policy Guideline should be developed to stimulate debate and action at the local level and its production will be promoted.*



Principles of wild land management

33. It would be useful to agree more widely the principles of management that should protect wild land. As a minimum these should stop the encroachment of detractors onto wild land. The list of indicators given in Table 1 relating to wild land management of Trust properties could be used as a starting point. The principles developed must address the management of both physical features and recreational activity, promote the sustainable use of wild land and recognise the fragility of wild land quality.
34. ***The Trust will work with others, including NGOs and agencies, towards a common approach to wild land management.***

Examples of Best Practice

35. It is important for the future recognition and acceptance of wild land value that there are clear examples of wild land management in Scotland, carried out to the highest standards and demonstrated to as wide an audience as possible, but without over-promoting the sites involved. The major land-owning NGOs already have some key sites in their care, and in some cases have made positive statements regarding the enhancement of wild land quality. However, translation into solid achievement on the ground has so far been limited and slow. To promote a policy of wild land conservation and enhancement to the wider community, it is vital that best management practice is agreed and demonstration sites established.
36. ***The Trust will promote the establishment of demonstration projects for wild land management which should be monitored and promoted.***

APPENDIX 1

**PERCY UNNA'S LETTER**

23 November 1937

To the Chairman and Council of the National Trust for Scotland

Dear Sirs

As the movement initiated by a group of members of the Scottish Mountaineering Club to acquire Dalness Forest and hand it over to the National Trust for Scotland, to be held for the use of the nation, so that the public may have unrestricted access at all times, has now materialised; as subscriptions to that end were invited not only from the members of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, but also from the members of all the other mountaineering clubs in Great Britain; and as the funds so subscribed enabled the forest to be handed over free of cost to the Trust, together with a surplus to be used as an endowment fund; it is considered desirable that what are believed to be the views of the subscribers as to the future of the estate should be expressed in writing, and recorded in the minutes of the Trust. This is all the more necessary, as in the attached circular which was issued for the purpose of inviting these subscriptions it was stated that the land 'would be held on behalf of the public and preserved for their use', and 'that the Trust' would 'be asked to undertake that the land be maintained in its primitive condition for all time with unrestricted access to the public'. The views in question are -

1. That 'primitive' means not less primitive than the existing state.
2. That sheep farming and cattle grazing may continue, but that deer stalking must cease, and no sport of any kind be carried on, or sporting rights sold or let; any use of the property for sport being wholly incompatible with the intention that the public should have unrestricted access and use. It is understood, however, that deer may have to be shot, as that may be necessary to keep down numbers and so prevent damage, but for that purpose alone.
3. That the word 'unrestricted' does not exclude regulations, but implies that regulations, if any, should be limited to such as may in future be found absolutely necessary, and be in sympathy with the views expressed herein.
4. That the hills should not be made easier or safer to climb.
5. That no facilities should be introduced for mechanical transport; that paths should not be extended or improved; and that new paths should not be made.
6. That no directional or other signs, whether signposts, paint marks, cairns, or of any other kind whatsoever, should be allowed; with the exception of such signs as may be necessary to indicate that

the land is the property of the Trust, and to give effect to the requirement in the Provisional Order of 1935 that by-laws must be exhibited.

7. That should a demand spring up for hotels or hostels it is possible that it may have to be satisfied to a limited extent. If so, they should only be built alongside the public roads, and should be subject to control by the Trust; and it is suggested that no hotels or hostels should be built in Glencoe itself, or on any other part of the property, except, perhaps, in the lower reaches of the Trust property in Glen Etive. It is hoped that the Trust may be able to come to an understanding with neighbouring proprietors as to corresponding restrictions being maintained in regard to land near to that held by the Trust.
8. That no other facilities should be afforded for obtaining lodging, shelter, food or drink; and, especially, that no shelters of any kind be built on the hills.
9. It is hoped that the design of any buildings which may be necessary will be carefully considered by the Trust; and that, where possible, trees will be planted in their vicinity.
10. In conclusion, it is suggested that the whole question of the management of the Trust properties in Glen Etive and Glencoe should receive special attention, in view of the possibility that the policy adopted by the National Trust for Scotland in the present instance may create a precedent for similar areas in other mountainous districts, not only in Scotland, but also in England and Wales.

P J H Unna  
President  
Scottish Mountaineering Club