

# WILD LAND POLICY

AS APPROVED BY TRUSTEES, 23<sup>RD</sup> AUGUST 2010



## Policy Statement on Wild Land

- We will advocate the need for greater legislative control to improve protection for wild land in the United Kingdom
- We will support measures aimed at enhancing and restoring the wild land qualities of damaged landscapes
- We will directly engage with local communities and land managers to maximise society's uses and benefits whilst managing and sustaining the natural processes of wild land
- We will promote educational initiatives, particularly the John Muir Award, that seek to increase awareness and understanding of the benefits of wild land
- We will seek improved economic and environmental appraisal of the potential long-term impacts caused by significant intrusions into areas of wild land

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*"Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilised people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life."*

John Muir (1838 – 1914)

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Working with people and communities to conserve, campaign and inspire, the **John Muir Trust** is a membership organisation that seeks to ensure that wild land is protected and that wild places are valued by and for everyone.

Throughout the world, wild land is a finite and diminishing resource. The protection and, where possible, enhancement of existing wild land is the primary objective of the Trust, to enhance understanding of the need to care for wild land in the United Kingdom.

**This policy will assist in the delivery of wild land conservation, in response to opportunities to care for and enhance wild land in both John Muir Trust owned properties and other areas.**

## DEFINING WILD LAND

There is no universally accepted definition of wild land. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “wild” as: *“in its original natural state.”* Within the United Kingdom, the whole of the Scottish Highlands may be seen as wild in comparison to the more developed areas of Europe, while on an international scale, only the most remote areas are likely to be considered as truly wild and undeveloped.

While almost nowhere in the United Kingdom is entirely natural or free of past or present human manipulation, despite millennia of human influence, there are still areas that have remained free of major man-made intrusions.

While some areas of wild land contain evidence of significant past human activity, such as ruined buildings or ancient cultivation, such archaeological remains, created using only ‘close to hand’, natural materials, may have little or no impact on wild land qualities.

The term *wild land* used in this policy therefore refers to the larger key areas of a more iconic nature in the United Kingdom. For clarity, the John Muir Trust adopts the following simple definition for wild land in the United Kingdom:

***“Wild land is restricted to large areas of high scenic and wildlife value, with minimal evidence of modern human development.”***

Many of the qualities of wild land can also be found in more accessible wild places throughout the United Kingdom. A connection with the nature and sense of wildness can be found in many places, often within or close to urban areas. These wild places are where most people have an opportunity to enjoy, value and care for nature. The term “*wild place*” may be used to describe any locality, however small, where nature prevails.

Wild land in the United Kingdom can be mapped using a Geographical Information System (GIS) approach, which enables the overlay of different criteria or ‘layers’ onto a single map. By overlaying these different layers onto a single map, a continuum of wild land can be produced for the United Kingdom, as shown in the Figure ,.

The layers used to construct a map of wild land in the United Kingdom following the wild land definition above were:

- **Biophysical naturalness** – the degree of human modification to ecosystems
- **Population accessibility** – the remoteness from human settlements
- **Road density** – the accessibility by car and impact of modern development
- **Remoteness** – the distance from major roads
- **Ruggedness** – the character of the terrain

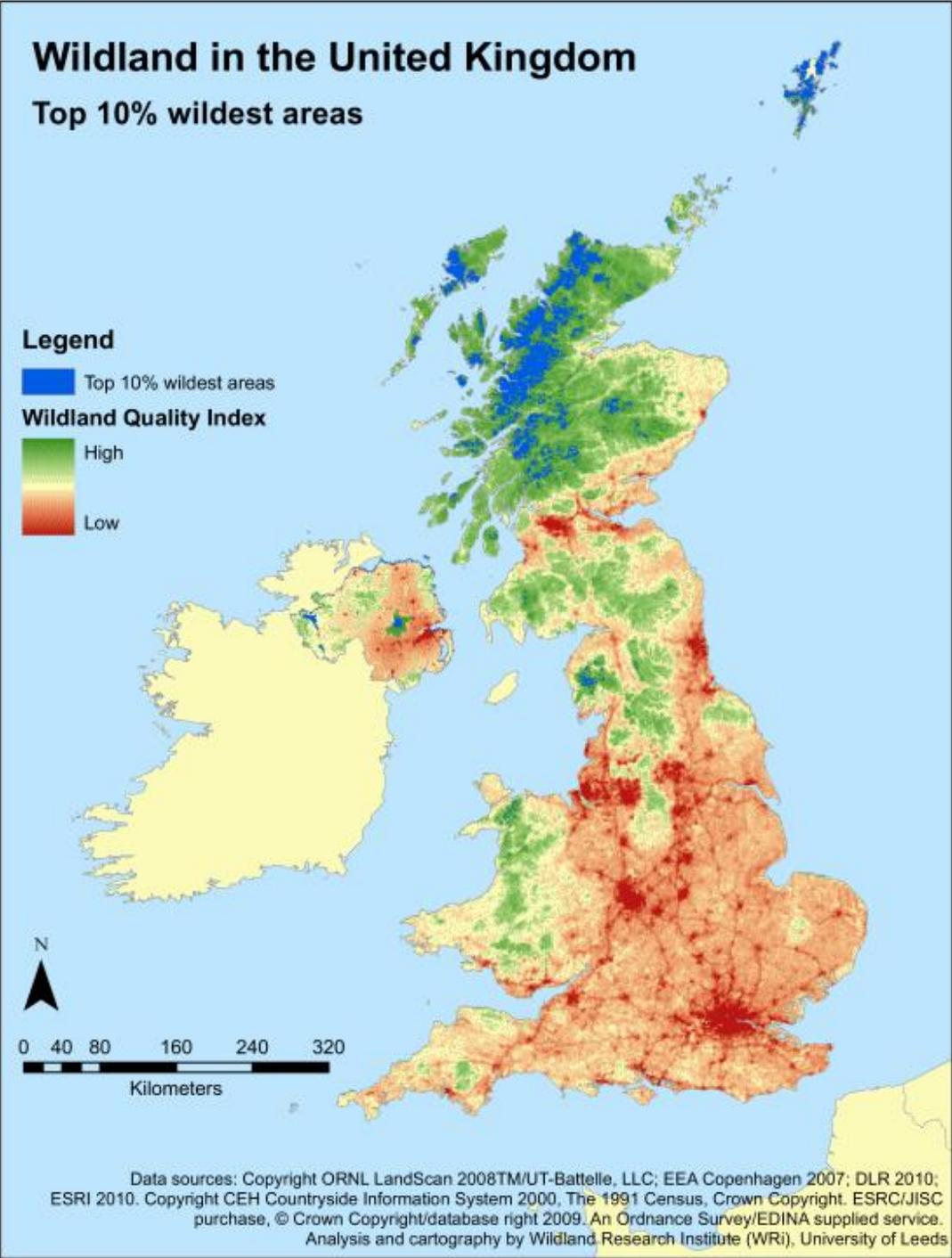


Figure 1: Wild Land in Great Britain

## VALUING AND ENHANCING WILD LAND

The overall area of wild land in the United Kingdom has, and continues to be steadily depleted. In an increasingly urbanised and material world, it is considered a vital refuge and source of inspiration to all who visit.

Wild land should not be viewed merely as a recreational or even an economic resource for humans alone; it is intrinsically important and contributes a range of significant benefits.

### LANDSCAPE

Wild landscapes are one of the United Kingdom's greatest assets. They are world renowned for their scenic qualities and are intrinsically linked to national and regional culture. Our planning system is failing to adequately protect our most important landscapes and wild land. Intrusion into the landscape with roads, industrial energy schemes and electricity transmission lines, amongst others, is significantly reducing the scenic quality and extent of wild land in the UK.

The sustainable management and enhancement of wild land requires an integrated view of the land: from the geology and soils that underpin everything, through the biodiversity that depends on them; from the deer and livestock that live on the vegetation, to the people who live on the land, and those who visit it.

**With regards to sustainable management of wild land, the John Muir Trust will:**

- **Campaign for improved protection for the remaining areas of wild land in the United Kingdom within the planning system.**
- **Promote restoration and enhancement of wild land qualities in damaged areas.**

Many areas have been, and continue to be, unnecessarily damaged by all-terrain vehicles and the development of new vehicle tracks created to ease estate management. A number of new tracks have been built following earlier habitat damage by vehicles.

Whilst always remaining freely and openly available, wild land should not be tamed by way markers or by path improvements that serve only to speed up access. There is a need for self-reliance in wild land, which should be accepted on its own terms. However, where paths currently exist, sensitive, low-key maintenance can prevent excessive wear and erosion of surrounding habitats and minimise any visual intrusion.

**With regards to continued enhancement of wild land, the John Muir Trust will:**

- **Support measures aimed at restoring to their natural condition habitats that have been damaged or destroyed by tracks entering into wild land areas.**
- **Seek to restrict the construction of new paths in or into core areas of wild land.**
- **Advocate improved controls on construction activities in wild land currently allowed by the General Permitted Development Orders.**

## **ECOSYSTEM SERVICES**

Much of the wild land in the UK is in a relatively poor ecological state compared to its natural condition. Centuries of heavy grazing by sheep and deer has removed much of the native woodland cover and its associated plants and animals. Large tracts of peatland have been burned, drained and converted to agriculture and non-native timber production - often in inappropriate sites and unsympathetic landscape designs.

Peatlands and woodlands contain the majority of the UK's terrestrial carbon deposits, when they grow they lock up carbon and help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Our wild land also provides us with other vital ecosystem goods and services, such as clean water, food and timber. Unsustainable management practices and badly designed and constructed developments can significantly reduce the value of these natural assets.

Keystone species such as the lynx and the European beaver have been hunted to extinction and endangered protected species continue to be illegally killed in wild land. However, wild land in the UK remains home to such iconic species such as red deer, golden eagle, wild cat and salmon and much is being done to restore our native biodiversity. There is huge potential to incorporate more environmentally friendly land management practices that benefit both people and wildlife in and around wild land by enabling natural ecological processes to develop.

**With regards to protecting ecosystem services, the John Muir Trust will:**

- **Promote habitat and ecosystem restoration through sensitive grazing and other land management practices in the United Kingdom.**
- **Support moves to restructure commercial forests towards native species, and to reduce the level of visual intrusion of their appearance.**

## **CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION**

Our climate is changing, both naturally and as a result of our interaction with nature. In order to reduce the impact on the environment from carbon emissions, we need robust and fully functioning ecosystems in wild land to provide natural carbon storage and flood management.

Wild land is vulnerable to the intrusion of new developments and their associated infrastructure. In past years, commercial forestry, super quarries and newly bulldozed tracks have been seen as the main threats, but more recently the development of renewable energy projects, such as hydro-electric schemes and onshore wind farms, have increased.

The drive to replace energy generation from fossil fuels with energy from renewable sources is essential, but as the search for new locations spreads, it has become increasingly incompatible with our aim of defending wild land. In many instances renewable energy developments on wild land threaten peatlands and emit carbon dioxide.

**With regards to the threat to wild land from our changing climate, the John Muir Trust will:**

- **Promote climate change mitigation through habitat restoration of wild land**
- **Campaign for improved legislation to protect core wild land from development.**

## **THE ECONOMY**

The natural environment is worth billions of pounds annually to the British economy. For example, more people visit Scotland for its scenery than for any other reason. As a consequence, rural economies are dependent upon the maintenance of a healthy and attractive environment where food is produced, leisure and tourism is promoted, and field sports and outdoor pursuits are carried out.

High quality areas of wild land attract a variety of recreational uses. Some previous developments in montane environments have been in direct conflict with those seeking the quiet solitude of wild land. It is also frequently a venue for training flights for military aircraft and, increasingly, mountain sightseeing trips by helicopter or small, fixed-wing aircraft, which can have a significant and detrimental effect on the area in terms of noise and light pollution, as well as being visually intrusive.

**With regards the economic benefits of wild land, the John Muir Trust will:**

- **Support calls for the improvement of economic and environmental appraisals for new developments, so that potential long-term damage and significant intrusions into wild land can be properly assessed.**
- **Will raise awareness of the impact of aircraft on wild land areas, advocating considerate and sensitive access at all times.**

## **HEALTH AND WELL BEING**

Wild land is relevant to and should be available to all sections of society, particularly for those who may spend much of their lives in confined, urbanised situations, or who work predominantly indoors. The peace, solitude and open space encountered in wild land provides a sense of freedom and escape that may not be found anywhere else.

For many, wild land provides a sense of 'spiritual renewal' that transcends the confines of any specific religious belief or ethical approach. Research is increasingly demonstrating that exposure to quality green and wild places can help us stay healthy and improve the overall quality of our lives. This accords with government priorities to improve the health of the population.

**With regards the health and well being benefits of wild land, the John Muir Trust will:**

- **Promote the re-positioning of the way wild land is viewed and used.**
- **Will raise awareness of the positive health impacts of wild land.**

## **CULTURE AND EDUCATION**

The cultural heritage and identity of many local communities through land use and management, art and literature is entwined with the surrounding landscape and wildlife. The educational and recreational resources of wild land must continue to be available to present and future generations, young and old alike.

Even if a person is not able to visit a particular area of wild land, or they are not inclined to do so, surveys have shown that many people still find it important that wild land is safeguarded for all of the reasons presented above.

In order to foster greater support for wild land, there is a need to broaden the level of understanding people have of its value and its importance to all sectors of society.

**With regards improving awareness of the benefits of wild land, the John Muir Trust will:**

- **Promote the benefits and values of wild land, through the John Muir Award and other relevant educational initiatives**