



Wildness

Taking action for wild places

JOHN
MUIR
TRUST

Introduction

Wildness can be found all around us, wherever we live. It is a vital component of our natural world, providing us with clean air, clean water and carbon storage. It can help us lead healthier lifestyles and reduce stress and depression. It supports fragile local economies by attracting visitors, especially to some of our more sparsely populated areas.

The John Muir Trust has two key aims for wildness:

- to promote greater recognition of the value and experience of wildness so that more people can enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits that wild nature offers
- to nurture wildness through good stewardship and by repairing and rewilding impoverished ecosystems.

To build support for these aims, we will engage with others including: rural communities; teachers introducing children to the wild; policy makers who can influence protection and use of wild places; and land managers, whose actions significantly impact on the wildness experiences we all share.

Our Scheihallion land team is working with our Heart of Scotland Forest partners to create a linked woodland corridor in Highland Perthshire.

Photograph: Liz Auty



“Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over civilized 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*



What is wildness?

Wildness is intangible, rather than physical. It is an experience, not a place. The terrain, the weather and even our own feelings of vulnerability can all be part of that experience. Wildness makes us feel more invigorated, more alive and closer to nature.

The John Muir Trust respects our cultural as well as our natural heritage, and wants to see people and communities thrive alongside wild places. In acting to conserve wildness, we encourage sustainable land stewardship that will allow present and future generations the opportunity to experience and benefit from the wild. In many places, we believe that there is an exciting opportunity to explore rewilding alongside rewilding.

What are wild places?

These are physical places where people can experience a strong sense of wildness and get closer to the natural world. Wild places comprise natural elements, such as animals and plants, landforms and weather, and can be found almost anywhere, from the heart of our cities to our most remote mountain-tops. They can provide solitude and sanctuary, inspire a sense of adventure and renewal, and take us out of our comfort zones.

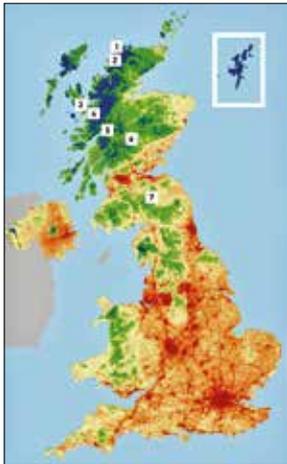
People often use the term tranquillity to convey their experience of wild places.



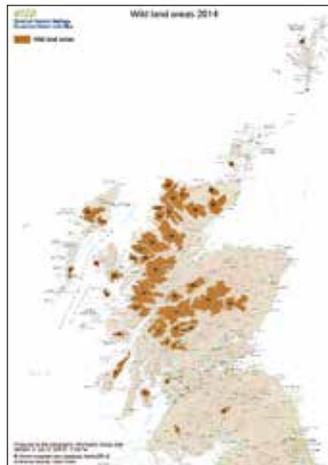
What is wild land?

This is an extensive area of wildness, characterised by ruggedness, remoteness, physical challenge and a lack of large-scale, insensitively-designed human structures.

Even our wildest land has been modified by human activity over thousands of years, so the term 'wild land' should not be confused with 'wilderness', which refers to those areas of the world where humans have had virtually no impact on the natural environment.



In 2010, the John Muir Trust, in conjunction with the University of Leeds Wildland Research Institute, produced a colour-coded map that depicts relative gradations of wildness across the UK.



In 2014, Scottish Natural Heritage published a map of 42 Wild Land Areas covering 20 per cent of Scotland's landmass.

Left: Admiring the view on the route up Tom na Gruagaich in Torridon.
Photograph: Mark Hamblin/Scotlandbigpicture.com

Far right: Patchwork of muirburn on moorland managed for grouse shooting.
Photograph: Peter Cairns/Scotlandbigpicture.com

Photograph: Peter Cairns/Scotlandbigpicture.com

What are the risks to wildness?

The experience of wildness is at risk whenever changes diminish nature and alter the character of the landscape. The John Muir Trust has been particularly concerned about the intrusion of roads, large-scale energy schemes, electricity transmission lines and vehicle tracks. Opportunities to experience wildness can also be put at risk by the intensification of land use – for example for commercial forestry and grouse moor management. High concentrations of deer numbers, encouraged by some sporting landowners, can also erode wildness.

In contrast – and as seen in a few areas, mainly under the management of conservation bodies, community land trusts and a small number of private landowners – qualities of wildness can be enhanced. This occurs when the approach to land management includes restoring natural processes – sometimes referred to as 'rewilding' – to create new, ecologically sustainable landscapes.



Conservation and rewilding

Working with others to enhance, repair and rewild ecosystems and landscapes

The John Muir Trust is involved in both conservation and rewilding. Conserving wild places means taking care of them to ensure their wildness qualities will be maintained for future generations. Rewilding involves repairing or re-establishing natural processes. It is not about turning back the clock, but about resetting it for the future.

Rewilding projects can vary in scope and timescale. They can involve the transformation of landscapes over many decades by bringing back extensive areas of native woodland with their associated wildlife. Or they can be more localised projects, including in urban environments, to allow nature to flourish on a smaller scale.

Both processes must involve people as well as nature, including those who live and work on the land and those who visit it. The idea has been raised – especially in relation to the Scottish Highlands – of reappealing sparsely populated areas. We believe that wildness can be an ally in the drive to sustain and reinvigorate local communities. There are many examples of communities across Europe living and thriving alongside wild nature.

Because these communities are often fragile demographically, there is growing interest in exploring ways in which the natural assets of wildness can be harnessed to support them. In many rural areas of Britain too – notably the Scottish Highlands, Cumbria and North Wales – nature-based tourism is already a major economic driver, supporting hundreds of communities and generating revenue and employment.

Hiker on footpath through wooded glen towards
Beinn Eighe ridge, Torridon, Scotland
Photograph: Mark Hamblin/Scotlandbigpicture.com



“There is a love of wild nature in everybody.” *John Muir*



Action at national level

Campaigning for policy change

To turn our vision for wildness and wild places into a reality, we want politicians to take the following actions:

- Make strong public statements that recognise the value of wild places for people and nature.
- Clearly identify the wildest areas in each part of the UK.
- Explicitly commit to protect and enhance wildness in all landscape designations, particularly National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Scenic Areas and Wild Land Areas.
- Provide statutory recognition of wildness in planning and land use policies, and in energy and infrastructure policy.
- Provide statutory and non-statutory standards and codes of practice that will support and guide land managers in areas of high wildness value.
- Produce robust research to establish how wild land can best be managed in the public interest – for example to support climate change targets, local economies, and health and well-being.
- Identify and manage of large areas where natural processes can be restored to prevent wildlife loss and/or mitigate climate change impacts.
- Develop energy, infrastructure and land use policies that take account of the value of wild places.
- Provide wider recognition and use of local wild places for outdoor play, learning and recreation to enable people to experience and enjoy wildness.
- Strongly support peatlands and woodlands, including increasing public funding to support large-scale restoration of these habitats.



Above: Young Londoners enjoy nature as apart of the Keeping It Wild HLF funded project.
Photographs: Penny Dixie, London Wildlife Trust





Bogbean on bog peatland, Flow Country, Scotland.
Photograph: Mark Hamblin/Scotlandbigpicture.com

Action on our land

Working to bring about change on land we manage

To turn our vision for wildness and wild places into a reality, we take action on and around our own properties (which include Ben Nevis, Helvellyn, Schiehallion and parts of Skye, Knoydart, Assynt and the Scottish Borders) to do the following:

- Manage and monitor land and habitats to ensure wildness is maintained and enhanced for the benefit of people and wildlife.
- Encourage more widespread adoption of land management practices that deliver nature-based solutions to economic, social and environmental needs.
- Work with local communities, neighbours, and environmental and conservation NGOs to promote landscape-scale protection and restoration of natural processes, and to develop nature-based solutions to environmental, economic and social problems.
- Provide opportunities for people to gain reward and recognition through voluntary work and education in wild places, including running the nationally acclaimed John Muir Award scheme.



Above: Land managed by the Trust as Li and Coire Dhorrcail in 2000 (top left) and more recently (top right and far right).
Photographs: John Muir Trust, Jean Hendry and Stephen Ballard.





Our vision A world where wild places are respected and protected, where nature flourishes and where the value of wildness is shared for the benefit of everyone.

Our mission To work with others to inspire people to get close to wild nature; speak up for the benefits of wildness; prevent the loss of wild places; manage wild places in a responsible and exemplary fashion; and repair and rewild what has been damaged in the past.

Cover photo by Chris Rutter shows heather above Camasunary and Sgurr na stri, on Skye.

This is a summary of a policy document that can be found at johnmuirtrust.org/wildness

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Registered office: Tower House, Station Road, Pitlochry PH16 5AN

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