



Quinag Management Plan 2020-2022

JOHN
MUIR
TRUST

Vision

To safeguard the wild landscape of Quinag for future generations to enjoy, and for the benefit of the rich diversity of wildlife it supports. To develop opportunities to connect people to wild land local to them, undertaking educational visits and initiatives and as a platform for partnership working in the North-West Highlands.

Key objectives *(with link to John Muir Trust Strategy Priorities in italics)*

1. Promote participation in the John Muir Award and volunteering on the property (*IC06; 3&9*) & (*IC16; 1,3&10*)
2. Provide interpretation, information and opportunities for the local community and visitors to engage more broadly with the property and the Trust's work (*IC11; 1,9&10*)
3. Use the property as a platform to enable Partnership working and pursuit of joint projects with local organisations and initiatives (*IC17; 2,4&5*)
4. Work to restore natural processes, particularly those that will contribute towards the protection and management of designated features (*RR01; 10,11&12*)
5. Expand native woodland on the property, including the restoration of natural treelines (*RR02; 10&12*)
6. Engagement in partnerships to facilitate path restoration and repair, habitat and landscape enhancement (*RR03; 9,11&12*)

Facts and figures

Size: 3,699 hectares (9,140 acres) of mountain range comprising three main peaks, which are three of Scotland's most northerly Corbetts (hills over 2,500 ft)

Tenure: Two areas of common grazing; Unapool (250 ha) and Newton (80 ha) Common Grazings

Lease: The Trust holds a lease (from Vestey Estates) over the walkers' car park located 2.75 kms north of Skiag Bridge, to the east of the A894

Management Agreements: None in place.

Statement of significance

Landscape Description

Quinag is a dramatic range of peaks formed by Sàil Gharbh (rough heel), Sàil Ghorm (blue heel), and Spidean Coinich (mossy peak), rising up against the surrounding low-lying landscape. Its name comes from the Gaelic *Cuinneag* meaning a milk pail, reflecting on its distinctive Y-shape. The property stretches from the shores of Loch a Chairn Bhain, near Unapool in the north, down over the peaks of Quinag to the northern bank of Loch Assynt in the south.

The entirety of the property lies within the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area with all of the 'special qualities' evident across the Quinag estate, in particular;

- Spectacular scenery of lone mountains
- Rocky topography of great variety

- A landscape of vast open space and exposure

Geology

Beneath most of the estate lies one of the oldest rocks in the world – Lewisian Gneiss. This ancient metamorphic rock was produced by the deformation of older granites in a period of mountain building 3000 – 2700 million years ago. Red Torridonian Sandstone is also present, having been folded into the summits during the Caledonian mountain building period, between 510 and 480 million years ago. The three peaks of Quinag are capped with a layer of Cambrian Quartzite.

Local habitats

Quinag boasts a broad range of important and diverse habitats which enable numerous species to thrive. Although many of the habitats, such as blanket bog, are widespread in the North-West Highlands, they are rare when considered in the context of the wider British Isles or Europe.

Montane and sub-montane zones

Sub-montane habitats are found above 300 metres, containing a complex of habitats, one of the most internationally important of which are the oceanic-montane and bryophyte heaths, of which excellent examples are found on Quinag; among the best sites in the North-West Highlands for calcicolous montane species.

Moorland

Quinag has excellent examples of wester, oceanic heath and bog; it is especially notable for the superb extent and good condition of liverwort communities found on the property's steep north-facing slopes within the rich heath habitat. Some of the uncommon liverworts and heaths that grow in blanket bogs here are notable and unique to Britain.

Freshwater

The larger lochs provide extremely important habitat for breeding black-throated divers, while the smaller hill lochans are favoured by rare red-throated divers. The margins of lochs contain muddy areas where common sandpiper, oystercatcher and greenshank can be found feeding. Burns and rivers of varying size drain the hillside, with populations of brown trout found in their lower reaches. Ravines and waterfalls are found along the Allt a Ghamhna burn, providing shelter from the elements and protection from grazing for plants and small trees.

Woodland

Quinag boasts some of the most northerly fragments of native woodland in the British Isles. Although small in area the woodlands present are extremely important for the distinctive range of plant and animal species that they support and for their landscape value. The predominant species present is downy birch, but also present are pockets of oak, hazel, aspen, alder and willow scrub. These woodlands have a special micro-climate with high humidity throughout the year, conditions required by many species of ferns, moss, liverworts and lichens – many of which have a very restricted distribution in Scotland. The shore of Loch a' Chairn Bhain is heavily wooded in some places, uncharacteristic of other areas of the estate.

Species

Notable species present at Quinag include; otter, badger, fox, pine marten, mountain hare, water vole and red deer. The estate's wooded areas hold a small variety of woodland birds, including the wood warbler and spotted fly catcher. Out on the open hill; merlin, ring ouzels, golden plover and greenshank are found breeding, with ptarmigan found on the higher slopes. Over Quinag's peaks golden eagles are occasionally sighted.

Many of these species are listed as 'Red' or 'Amber' under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UP BAP), their presence on the estate is therefore an important indicator to the diverse and healthy nature of habitats present. Further information can be found in [Appendix B](#).

Natural heritage designations

The significance of some the habitat and species present are recognised by various designations;

- The entirety of the property lies within the **Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area (NSA)**.
- **Assynt Lochs Special Protection Area (SPA)**: 230 ha, out of a total of 1,156 ha (Favourably maintained)
- **Assynt Lochs Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**; total of 230 ha (Favourably maintained)
- **Ardvar and Loch a' Mhuilinn Woodlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC)**; 59 ha out of a total of 807 ha (Unfavourable declining)
- **Ardvar Woodlands Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**; 59 ha out of a total of 807 ha (Unfavourable declining)

History of settlement and land use

There are only limited records of human habitation on Quinag, most relating to summer sheilings, marked by green flushes on the landscape. An old drove round crosses the south of the property and then runs along the eastern boundary through Gleann Leireag. In the past cattle were grazed, but now domestic stock is limited to sheep on the Newton and Unapool Common Grazings on the North-East of the property. Prior to the Trust taking ownership of the property the predominant land use was deer forest. Since purchase of the estate in 2005 the Trust has made significant investment in the main stalkers path running west from the A894 car park up to the Bealach a Chornaidh. Beyond this point informal path lines have developed along the three main summits. The general public's main interaction with the property is through recreational hill walking, whilst through the summer months guided walks, volunteer work parties and events are hosted by the Trust.

Contemporary pressures

The past five years have seen a steady increase in visitor numbers, with the advent of the North Coast 500 which passed along the A894 on the eastern boundary of the property. A rising annual footfall brings opportunity in the form of higher visitor numbers to engage with the Trust's work and to experience the majesty of the landscape, whilst also contributing significantly to the local economy. More direct impacts on the path network and wider local

infrastructure are felt with ongoing path maintenance and upgrades needed and pressure on local services.

Consultation and review

The revision of this plan, following the previous (2014-2019 version), has been informed through consultation and engagement with the local community, neighbouring land-owners, and wider Trust membership and staff teams. It is the Trust's intention that consultation remains an ongoing process with opportunities provided for input and feedback throughout the plan's three-year timeframe.

Operations

1.0 Management Planning

1.1 Audit existing state and condition

- Information gathered previously, and available in appendices

1.2 Establish survey and monitoring programme

- Continue current programme of annual monitoring work, with a particular woodland focus
- Incorporate montane scrub (see below) into the monitoring programme,
- Consider use of fixed point photography within deer range and woodland
- Sharing data with; Assynt Field Club and National Databases etc

1.3 Develop SMART Actions – within revised management plan

1.4 Consult stakeholders – arrange annual event in Lochinver, and attend Assynt Games etc. Local based staff always available for concerns, suggestions & comments

2.0 Soil, carbon and water

2.5 Maximise Water table on peatlands

- Peatland restoration; explore possibilities with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) – through the Peatland Action Fund, and smaller scale work that can be undertaken in house; drain blocking etc

2.6 Minimise exposure, burning and grazing – none undertaken on the property

2.7 Minimise Pollution – Remove any litter when on site, and work parties undertake litter picks

3.0 Biodiversity and woodland

3.8 Maintain in favourable condition

- Implement SNH advice working in conjunction with neighbours and local deer managers

3.9 Maximise native habitats

- Montane Scrub; monitor existing scrub and explore options to aid its' expansion

3.10 Biodiversity Species Management

- Mink monitoring rafts (in place and checked regularly)

3.11 Re-structure woodland

- Explore time-limited fencing as a means to promote and enable woodland expansion and establishment
- Collect seeds, in conjunction with Little Assynt Tree Nursery, for growing on

3.12 Re-introductions – consider where appropriate as part of national schemes

4.0 Deer and woodland

4.13 Minimise deer impacts

- Ongoing programme of culling and extraction for the purpose of encouraging natural woodland regeneration.
- Annual culls are undertaken by a combination of John Muir Trust staff, local stalkers and neighbouring estate in co-operation with the Assynt Peninsula Sub-Group (APSG) Deer Management Group.
- Collect and analyses relevant data from; habitat monitoring, foot counts, recruitment counts

4.14 Leave deer carcasses for eagles

- A small number of carcasses will be left each year, as per moorland management agreements

4.15 Minimise livestock impacts

- Liaison with Unapool and Newton Common Grazings

5.0 Facilities and heritage

5.16 Staff Training Plan

- Develop a training plan, to assist with delivery of land management objectives

5.17 Infrastructure and heritage maintenance

- Continue regular local volunteering and bi-annual work parties for assistance with delivery of a range of practical tasks
- Explore opportunities for jointly shared office/storage accommodation locally

5.18 Reduce, re-use and recycle – Trust wide audit being undertaken through 2020, with actions to be incorporated into this plan thereafter.

5.19 Minimise carbon footprint – As above. In the interim seek to reduce vehicle use and utilise technology to enable online meetings.

5.20 Explore local renewable energy – If / when appropriate

5.21 Remove redundant structures – Much old fence line has been removed, some remains on the north side (potential target for volunteer work parties).

5.22 Sensitive new build techniques – N/A

5.23 Sensitive footpath techniques

- Undertake path work repairs / upgrades as per the programme agreed through CALLP Scheme, from 2019-2021

6.0 Communities, visitors and awareness

6.24 Provide responsible access

6.25 Meet responsibilities towards local people

- Hold open meetings; planned for November 2019, and annually
- Use local contractors where possible, as appropriate within funding procurement guidelines - John Muir Trust staff to attend relevant meetings of local organisations
- Liaise with neighbours and local community groups on an ongoing basis

6.26 Joint Project Work

- Contribute to relevant regional projects and events; Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape Partnership (CALLP) Scheme
- Hill to Grill Programme, continue with Ullapool High School, and develop an adult programme in conjunction CALLP
- Primary7 John Muir Award (JMA) transition programme – Discovery Award
- Isle Martin annual Secondary1 trip for JMA Explorer Award
- Liaise with SNH team in Ullapool
- North-West Highland Geopark; develop an MoU and continue to explore accommodation sharing options

6.27 Maximise Interpretation

- Review and update leaflets, ensure dispensers filled
- Review and maintain interpretation panels, including provision in Gaelic; upgrades planned for Spring 2020

6.28 Maximise education opportunities

- Continue with local events, such as wildflower day
- Continue guided walk programme, consider new subject areas based on ideas/feedback
- Participate in wider events, eg Assynt Games, Fishing Feis, and others as appropriate
- Wildlife Watch Group in Lochinver
- Consider resurrection of the John Muir Trust North-West Members' Group
- Run fortnightly volunteer sessions at Little Assynt Tree Nursery
- Target for delivery of John Muir Awards on/in conjunction with the property: 40 per year

Targets for delivery

1				Quinag
2	WLMS HEADING	TARGET / INDICATOR	UNIT	Target Actual
3	Management Planning	Baseline Data Surveys	No. identified and achieved	1
4		Habitat Monitoring	No. identified and achieved	5
5		Species Monitoring	No. identified and achieved	5
6	Soil, Carbon & Water	Peatland Restoration	Ha of peatland restored	0
7		Minimise pollution	No. of litter picks undertaken	4
8			Tonnes / no. of bags removed	12
9	Biodiversity & Woodland	Designated Features	Features in favourable condition	1
10		Designated Sites	Site status improvement	1
11		Native Woodland	ha of native woodland planted	0
12		Native Woodland	ha of native woodland maintained	12
13		Native Woodland	ha of native woodland regen	2
14		Plantations	ha of conifer plantation felled	0
15	Deer & Livestock	Cull targets	Stag target achieved - Y/N	
16		Cull targets	Hind target achieved - Y/N	
17		Leave carcasses	no. left on the hill	2
18	Facilities & Heritage	Path maintenance	kms of path maintained	3
19		Path repair/upgrade	kms of path repaired/upgraded	0.075
20		Conservation volunteering	no. person days of volunteering	16
21	Communities, Visitors & Awareness	Public meetings held	no. of meetings held	1
22		Projects / Partnerships	no. projects / p'ships engaged with / deliv	2
23		Interpretation	no. of new panels/leaflets/virtual tours	3
24		Engagement	no. of guided walks / events	8
25		Education	no. of school groups hosted/engaged wi	2
26		Education	no. of college groups hosted/engaged wi	2
27		John Muir Award	no. of JMAs facilitated	40
28	Other - JMT General	Communication	no. articles / updates written	10
29		Local Employment	no. of staff days per property	390

Links to the John Muir Trust's strategy

- **Inspire**; 4. By growing public support for wild places, including in communities that live within or close to wild land areas.
- **Protect**; 9. By better managing and engaging with visitors across all the properties and places in our care.
- **Repair**; 10. By setting measurable targets for progress across each of our properties underpinned by realistic funding, and to demonstrate long-term wild land management in action.
- **Repair**; 11. By using our Wild Ways programme to showcase the practical work we do to enrich public access to some of our most famous wild landscapes, and to build public and political support for additional funding of footpath work.
- **Repair**; 12. By establishing further partnerships and programmes that create new models of landscape-scale ecological restoration, particularly for woodlands.