



Sconser, Strathaird and Torrin
Management Plan
2020-2022

JOHN
MUIR
TRUST

Vision

To safeguard the Estates' wild landscape for current and future generations to enjoy, and for the benefit of the rich diversity of wildlife it supports. The Trust seeks to work in close co-operation with its' crofting tenants, neighbours and partners to engage in collaborative projects that contribute to the wellbeing of the local community, encourage people to enjoy wild places, and enhances biodiversity.

Key objectives *(with link to John Muir Trust Corporate 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. Involve the local community in the Estate's management and through engagement work (*IC09; 4&8*)
3. 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*)
4. Use the property as a platform to enable Partnership working and pursuit of joint projects with local organisations and initiatives (*IC17; 2,4&5*)
5. Work to restore natural processes, particularly those that will contribute towards the protection and management of designated features (*RR01; 10,11&12*)
6. Expand native woodland on the property, including the restoration of natural treelines (*RR02; 10&12*)
7. Engagement in partnerships to facilitate path restoration and repair, habitat and landscape enhancement (*RR03; 9,11&12*)

Facts and figures

Size and tenure:

The three estates owned by the Trust on Skye total 12,044 hectares, divided as follows;

- Sconser Estate: 3,400 ha, of which 2,019 ha are under crofting tenure
- Torrin Estate: 2,283 ha, the entirety of which is under crofting tenure
- Strathaird Estates: 6,361 ha of which 1,295 ha is under crofting tenure

Mineral rights:

- Strathaird & Sconser Estates: Mineral rights lie with the Trust
- Torrin Estate: Mineral lease held over the entire estate, excluding the Horse Park (rights reserved to Lord MacDonald), which expires 28th May 2024.

Wayleaves:

- SSE; wayleaves covering pole supply to; Torrin, Kilmarie, Drinan, Glasnakille and Elgol. The overhead line runs parallel to the B8083 through Torrin and Strathaird, with spurs off to Kilmarie, Drinan and Glasnakille. On the Sconser Estate; wayleave rights for overhead powerline between Luib and Sligachan, running roughly parallel to the A87. A small section of the powerline was put underground in 2009 as part of the Sligachan gateway works.
- BT; wayleaves covering underground/ subsurface cables supplying Torrin, Kilmarie, Drinan, Glasnakille and Elgol. The cables run alongside the B8083 through the Torrin and Strathaird Estates. On the Sconser Estate wayleaves covering underground/sub-surface cables for supplying the Estate.

- Scottish Water; a wayleave covering mains supply from Broadford to Torrin and Elgol, following the route of the B8083.
- Camasunary; servitude right of access for foot and vehicular traffic from the track leading off the B8083 at Kilmarie. Joint responsibility for maintenance between the Trust and the Johnson Family (owners of Camasunary).
- Stephen Kettlewell; access to woodland at Faoilean
- Additionally a number of private water supply wayleaves

Sporting rights:

- Deer stalking rights across all three Estates are held by the Trust
- Fishing rights across all three Estates are leased to the Portree Angling Association

Management agreements:

- **Moorland Management Plans** – In place through the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) as part of the management of the Cuillins Special Protection Area. These are with the John Muir Trust (for the non-crofted areas) and with the respective grazing committees for the land held under crofting tenure.
- **Sconser Management Committee** – The committee came into being as part of an agreement reached in 1997 between the Trust and the township. The committee, which is non-constituted body meets on a quarterly basis to discuss and implement land management activity on the Sconser Estate. There is an aspiration to develop and agree a Memorandum of Understanding to formalise the agreement.

Statement of significance

Landscape description

The entirety of the Torrin and Sconser Estates and the northern two thirds of the Strathaird Estate lie within the Cuillins National Scenic Area (NSA). The special qualities most evident across the three Estates are as follows;

- Magnificent mountain scenery
- The contrast and complement of the Black and Red Cuillin
- The surrounding wild landscape, a fitting foil for the mountains
- Iconic images of crofting townships with dramatic backdrops

The landscape across all three estates is dramatic, dominated by imposing mountains in close proximity to the sea. A wild and rocky coastline, rising to impressive cliffs in places, meets the crofting townships and grazing land. Beyond, the contrasting sights of the jagged, Black Cuillins and the rounded, red hills are separated by U-shaped glens, low lying peatlands and blanket bogs. Many burns have carved scars into the hillsides and freshwater lochs and lochans pepper the land.

Natural heritage designations

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

- Cuillin Hills **National Scenic Area** (NSA) entirety of the Sconser and Torrin Estates, and part of the Strathaird Estate

- Sligachan Peatlands **Special Area of Conservation** (SPA) 213 ha on Strathaird Estate & 187ha on Sconser Estate
- Strath **Special Area of Conservation** (SAC) 117 ha on Torrin Estate
- Cuillins **Special Protection Area** (SPA) entirety of the Sconser Estate & 6,490 ha on Strathaird & Torrin Estates
- Cuillins **Site of Special Scientific Interest** (SSSI) 3,350 ha on Strathaird & Torrin Estates & 300 ha on the Sconser Estate
- Strath **Site of Special Scientific Interest** (SSSI) 320 ha on Torrin Estate
- Elgol Coast **Site of Special Scientific Interest** (SSSI) 66 ha on Strathaird Estate

Geology

The geology across the three Estates varies considerably and includes some very rare minerals. Tertiary igneous rocks make up the bulk of the land, the Granite of the red hills contrasting with the Gabbro formations of Bla Bheinn and Clach Glas. At Elgol and Camasunary on the Strathaird peninsula, we find Jurassic exposures of sedimentary rocks where several very significant fossils have been discovered in the exposed Bathonian strata. This is the type and only known locality for the mammal *Borealestes*. As such these exposures are of international importance to palaeontology and in particular the study of vertebrate evolution.

Torrin sits upon Durness limestone of Cambrian to Ordovician age and was metamorphosed in places by the intrusion of granite to form Skye Marble. The Tertiary volcanic geology, Strathaird Jurassic sedimentary exposures, Durness limestone and Kilchrist Vent are of, at least, national importance, with the latter being internationally famous. Marsco is the type locality for the Marscoite Suite, a unique suite of rocks, and provides evidence for the relative ages of several superimposed granite intrusions. Coire Uaigneich comprises an unusual combination of three key rock units and associated distinctive mineralogies.

Geomorphology

Much of the landscape across the three Estates is characterised by the effects of glaciation. The Cuillins are an area of outstanding importance for glacial geomorphology. A wide variety of classic features are evident including, corries, aretes, striated rocks, roches moutonnees, several types of moraine and the glacial trough now occupied by Lock Coruisk.

Evidence suggests two phases of glaciation during the Late Devensian period, the main ice sheet and the Loch Lomond Re-advance, a subsequent period of valley and corrie glaciers during which the Cuillin Icefield centred around what is now upper Glen Sligachan.

There are interesting and varied examples of moraines elsewhere on the Estates including a fine moraine ridge near Camasunary and areas of 'active-ice' around Torrin, Loch Slapin and Srath Mor. Periglacial features are also present with particularly fine examples of talus slopes of Late Glacial age skirting the basalt scarps of Ben Meabost and An Carnach.

Soils

The predominant soils on the lower ground of all three Estates are peaty gleys, peaty podzols and peat but of varying derivations. The vast majority of the land is classified as being capable only for use as low quality, rough grazing (class 6), whilst the rocky upper slopes are basically

unsuitable for agriculture. Only very small areas at Elgol, Kilmarie and Torrin are described as having the capability for use as improved grazing.

Local habitats

Upland habitats predominant, amongst which bare rock and scree are significant components. The granitic red hills are fairly uniform vegetationally with their generally thin acidic soils. Despite its basic character the gabbro is very resistant to weathering and does not produce particularly basic soils. Richer vegetation occurs at basaltic intrusions and outcrops of more lime-rich rocks, including a luxuriant species rich tall-herb stand in Coire Uaigneach and a significant assemblage of plants including the nationally scarce, Mountain Aven on the SW ridge of Bla Bheinn. Juniper heath occurs in several locations across the Estates with the most natural example found on Sgurr na Stri, and on the NE facing slopes of the Beinn Dearg group, rich levels of oceanic liverworts are encountered.

Peatlands and wet-heath

Blanket bog and wet heath occurs on the more or less level ground across the Estates. The blanket bog in upper Srath na Creitheach and Glen Sligachan exhibits a variety of features with valley side flows and flushed mire communities; bog pools are present south of Loch na Creitheach and around Lochan Dubha. This peatland structure and vegetation is little modified and in good condition. The actively growing blanket bog is a priority habitat under the EU Habitats Directive. In lower Srath na Creitheach additional interesting features are found including frequent white beak sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*), abundant black bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), pale butterwort (*Pinguicula lusitanica*) and the scarce oceanic moss *Campylopus shawii*. Elsewhere the peatlands vary in condition, with some areas showing signs of significant modification, such as in the lower Abhainn Cille Mhaire basin

Grasslands – modified and unmodified

Unmodified grasslands are species – poor and occur as mosaics with wet & dry heath plant communities across all three Estates, although very restricted west of Bla Bheinn. Generally, on slightly higher ground, mat-grass is abundant, often with a heathy component. Both species rich grassland and tall herb vegetation occur in the Elgol Coast SSSI and elsewhere where there are more calcareous soils. Below An Carnach crags, species – rich grassland occur alongside dwarf shrub heath and tall herb vegetation stands. Enclosed areas of modified grassland have been significantly affected by human modification (drainage, intensive grazing, re-seeding), as seen around Kirkibost.

Woodland

Small pockets of fragmented native woodland, restricted to inaccessible areas outwith the reach of grazing animals are the only native woodlands present on the estates. Sustained grazing pressures prevent the growth and maturity of seedlings spreading. Some native tree planting projects have been completed on unused areas of ground, including the Allt Daraich enclosure at Sligachan and an area close to the Raasay ferry terminal. Hazel-Ash woodlands are present on Torrin common grazing, included as one of the Strath SAC qualifying habitats.

Most of Torrin and Strathaird woodlands are coastal and occur on land under crofting tenure. Torrin east, Torrin south, Allt na Dunaiche, Faoilean, Drinan, Glasnakille north and Glasnakille south have seen an expansion of woodland. Several natural regeneration projects have been established, increasing native woodland cover through planting within enclosed areas. On Sconser estate, some non-native trees such as Sitka Spruce have been planted as shelterbelts within gardens or on croft boundaries. Small areas of conifer blocks still remain on the land, notably at Robostan.

Species

The most notable species over the Cuillin Hills are the breeding pairs of golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), which were primarily the reason for the Cuillins SPA designation. Other notable species within Strathaird, Torrin and Sconser are: white tailed eagle, greenshank, golden plover, ring ousel, ptarmigan, grasshopper warbler, arctic tern, curlew, pipistrelle bat, long eared bat, mountain hare, otter, red deer and a small resident population of roe deer. Many species regarded as nationally scarce and rare can also be found within the bryophyte, fungi, lichen and vascular plant families. The various sea lochs around the Estates are also important habitats with both Loch Sligachan and Ainort serving as nursery grounds for herring, cod and saithe, and breeding areas for mussels. Other marine species include common dolphins, harbour porpoise, common seals and basking sharks, who are believed to breed in the area.

Studies on invertebrates have taken place, highlighting an astonishing amount of Lepidoptera, Neuropteran, Hemipteran, Hymenoptera, Coleoptera, Araneae on Strathaird estate, including 81 species of marine Mollusca. Many of these species are listed as 'Red' or 'Amber' under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UP BAP), their presence on the estates is therefore an important indicator to the diverse and healthy nature of habitats present.

History of settlement and land use

All three estates have significant evidence of past and present settlement and land use. Skye itself has records of human activity dating back to the Neolithic and Bronze Age. Extensive clearance of woodland is thought to have taken place in the south of Skye, significantly altering the landscape character in Roman times. Intensive sheep farming began in the 1820's marking a departure from previously practised models of subsistence farming. Several archaeological surveys were undertaken through the 1990s, logging many features of interest and cultural importance, a number of which are of national importance.

Today the main land use is crofting, with sheep and cattle present, albeit in gradually falling numbers. Conifer plantations were established through the 1970s and 80s, many of which have now been felled with the aim of returning these areas to native woodland through a combination of re-stocking and the encouragement of natural regeneration.

Contemporary pressures

In recent years Skye has seen a steady increase in visitor numbers, flocking to the Island's numerous attractions and beauty spots. Whilst higher visitor numbers bring opportunity in terms of economic benefit and the potential to engage with a wider audience there are increasing concerns raised by the local population about the impact of visitors, many of whom now come in motor homes and 'wild camp'. There are issues with waste management in general, and in particular disposal of human waste which the Trust has sought to address

with the provision of improved visitors' facilities at the Bla Bheinn car park in 2019. These trends are expected to continue in the future and a co-ordinated approach working with other groups and organisations locally to ensure provision of improved facilities and experiences for visitors, and local residents alike, appears to be the best approach.

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

1.2 Establish survey and monitoring programme

- Continue programme of annual monitoring work, as per that set out in 2014-19 plan, with the addition of; bees project to map extent and numbers
- Consider the use of fixed-point photography as a means of evidencing landscape changes
- Sharing data; National Databases etc
- People Counters; currently just at the start of the The Allt Daraich enclosure at Glen Sligachan (Highland Council managed) and at the start of the Bla Bheinn path (installed October 2019)

1.4 Consult stakeholders

- Attend relevant local meetings and events
- Consult with local community of particular projects/issues as they arise
- Local based staff always available for concerns, suggestions & comments

2.0 Soil, carbon and water

2.5 Maximise water table on peatlands

- Faoilean Peatland restoration; SNH Peatland Action Fund project proposal for Faoilean; removal of spruce stands and smoothing of ground to restore bog habitats
- Ringill: small-scale drain blocking work, and removal of non-native species, as per Spring 2019 scoping study recommendations
- Sligachan Peatlands; SNH monitor condition of the designated site, which has grazing restrictions in place.

2.6 Minimise exposure, burning and grazing

- AECS moorland management scheme in place, which prohibits burning and requires eight deer carcasses to be left for eagles per year, in place until 2022.

3.0 Biodiversity and woodland

3.9 Maximise native habitats

- Investigate extent of and explore potential for expanding montage scrub

3.10 Biodiversity Species Management

- Ongoing removal of invasive (plant) species (Japanese knotweed, rhododendron and cotoneaster), with local primary school & consider deployment of mink rafts (in conjunction with SISI & Skye & Wester Ross Fisheries Trust)

3.11 Re-structure woodland

- Keppoch; replanting planned for 2021, to meet re-stocking obligations following previous clear-fell and to allow for a further area to be brought in under 'Woodland Creation'.
- Ringill; continue with existing Low Impact Silvicultural System (LISS) approach; small scale thinning and extraction.
- Potential new planting schemes; consider Drinan; would require re-fencing and an extension to the Strathaird Forest Plan to enable its inclusion.
- The The Allt Daraich enclosure (Glen Sligachan); some additional planting (& management/weeding etc) with Carbost Primary School, could include delivery of John Muir Awards.
- Strathmore Crofter Forestry Scheme (part of Torrin Common Grazings); dates from the mid-1990s. FGS contract now closed, but fence repair work required. Could form part of a larger riparian restoration project. For further consideration.

4.0 Deer and woodlands

4.13 Minimise deer impacts

- Deliver annual cull targets; these are generally determined through commitments and obligations with moorland management agreements and woodland grant schemes.
- Consider and act on feedback from the local community regards deer numbers
- Collect and analyses relevant data; habitat impact assessments, foot counts & recruitment counts, as appropriate

4.14 Leave deer carcasses for eagles

- Leave eight carcasses on the open hill each year, as per moorland management agreements.

4.15 Minimise livestock impacts

- Liaison with Common Grazing Committees
- NB – generally livestock numbers on the ground (esp at Sconser) are reducing thus deer numbers may rise, requiring possible adjustment to the deer cull target

5.0 Facilities and heritage

5.16 Staff Training Plan

- Variety of refresher courses and training needs identified, and to be actioned

5.17 Infrastructure and heritage maintenance

- Ongoing maintenance on all buildings as required.
- Strathaird Kirk; undertake feasibility study into potential future uses,
- Fencing, at Strathaird; ongoing stock fencing replacement/upgrade; will be undertaken by a combination of contractors / John Muir Trust staff time

5.18 Reduce, re-use, recycle

- Trust wide audit being undertaken through 2020, with actions to be incorporated into this plan thereafter.
- Investigate establishing a plastic recycling facility at Strathaird Farm, principally for agricultural plastic waste; feed wrappers etc, but possibility to extend if demand evident

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 options – as appropriate with micro generation schemes

5.23 Sensitive footpath techniques

- Maintenance required on a rolling annual basis (set up annual maintenance contract) particularly on the following paths/sections;
 - o Bla Bheinn
 - o Glen Sligachan; along full extent of path
 - o Beinn Dearg Mheadhoinach
 - o The Allt Daraich enclosure (Glen Sligachan)
 - o The Elgol – Camasunary Coastal Path
- More extensive upgrade / repair works may be required on the following;
 - o Elgol – Camasunary Coastal Path
 - o Druim Hain; from watershed to Loch Coruisk
 - o Beninn Dearg Mheadhoinach; consider best approach for flat plateau in-between enclosure and ridge, where work has recently been done.

6.0 Communities, visitors and awareness

6.24 Provide responsible access

- Install interpretation at appropriate locations to provide guidance on responsible access etc

6.25 Meet responsibilities towards local people

- Attend relevant local meetings; community associations, grazing committees etc
- Use local contractors where possible, as appropriate within funding procurement guidelines
- Liaise with local community, neighbours and organisations operating in the local area

6.26 Joint Project Work

- Skye & Wester Ross Fisheries Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage, & Surfers Against Sewage (beach cleans / plastic recycling etc)

6.27 Maximise Interpretation

- Review and update leaflets, ensure dispensers are re-filled regularly
- Review and maintain interpretation panels;
 - I. Blaven Car Park
 - II. Camasunary Path Car Park and Loch Slapin
 - III. Sligachan Gateway
 - IV. Other locations to be considered and discussed as appropriate
- Provide interpretation in Gaelic as appropriate

6.28 Maximise education opportunities

- Work with local primary schools to deliver John Muir Awards
- Continue to work closely with UHI College in Broadford to deliver rural skills and deer management modules
- Continue to host Elmwood College students for footpath skills work each May
- Target for delivery of John Muir Awards on/in conjunction with the property: 25 per year

Targets for delivery: Insert spreadsheet with targets and measures