

**This document is intended to share the John Muir Trust's commitment to the Gaelic language**

## Background

Gaelic has been spoken in Scotland for more than 1,500 years and continues to be spoken throughout Scotland today. It is part of Scotland's cultural heritage. Recognising a duty to secure the future of this language, the Scottish Parliament debated and passed the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. This Act seeks to secure the status of Gaelic as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to English. The Act established a body, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, with responsibility for the use and promotion of Gaelic in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> Flowing from this Act came the National Gaelic Language Plan, which has three main aims: increasing the use of Gaelic; increasing the learning of Gaelic; promoting a positive image of Gaelic. This document outlines Trust activity that helps towards achieving these three aims and how we see our role in helping to keep this language alive.

## Relevance to the Trust

The John Muir Trust owns property in north west Scotland and is in partnerships with community landowners in the Western Isles; a region of Scotland where Gaelic is still the first language for a sizeable proportion of the people living there.<sup>2</sup> The Gaelic heritage of Trust land in the Highlands offers a link, through the Gaelic language, to communities in this part of Scotland today. We recognise too that Gaelic is a living language that is spoken throughout Scotland, in urban areas as well as rural; has a growing online presence and, in Gaelic Medium schools, it is the language that children learn through. The Trust's promotion and use of Gaelic helps to make our work relevant to people living throughout Scotland today.

## Trust position

In our work connecting people to wild places, we can have a role in supporting the use, learning and promotion of Gaelic.

### Increasing the use of Gaelic

- 1. John Muir Award resources:** the John Muir Award Record Book is available in Gaelic<sup>3</sup>, and John Muir Award certificates are printed in Gaelic.
- 2. Content:** we create content for our journal and website that has been inspired by the relationship between the Gaelic language, wild places and nature e.g. during our Wild Words Campaign.<sup>4 5</sup>
- 3. Interpretation:** across most of the Trust's properties, and across 34 of the 42 Wild Land Areas, the features of the landscape appear on the maps in their Gaelic names. We provide onsite visitor interpretation at our properties on Skye and in Sutherland in Gaelic and English.

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<sup>1</sup> This body advises Ministers on Gaelic culture, education and language, produces a National Gaelic Language Plan, can ask Public Authorities to prepare Gaelic Language Plans and guides schools on the provision of Gaelic education.

<sup>2</sup> The [Scottish Government's Gaelic Plan 2016-2021](#) notes: 'Of those who identified themselves as Gaelic speakers in the 2011 Census, the council areas with the highest proportions able to speak Gaelic were found to be in Na h-Eileanan Siar (52%), Highland (5%) and Argyll & Bute (4%).'

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/assets/000/003/405/JMA-RB-Gaelic\\_original.pdf?1542024385](https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/assets/000/003/405/JMA-RB-Gaelic_original.pdf?1542024385)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/latest/news/1803-wild-words-reading-the-land>

<sup>5</sup> See [NatureScot's Research Report No. 1230 'Ecosystem services and Gaelic: A Scoping Exercise'](#) for how Gaelic offers a way to understand human interaction with landscape and nature.

## Increasing the learning of Gaelic

1. **John Muir Award Gaelic language resources** are used by pupils in Gaelic Medium Education so they can complete their Award entirely in Gaelic.<sup>6</sup>
2. **Bilingual signage** at some of our properties enables those visiting to continue to learn Gaelic words relating to the environment.
3. **Translating key engagement resources into Gaelic:** in 2013, we collaborated with 'Mission:Explore' to create a 13 page illustrated workbook designed to encourage young Gaelic speakers to explore the outdoors and connect with nature. We subsequently translated this into free online Gaelic resources with support from Scottish Natural Heritage (now NatureScot) and Fèisean nan Gàidheal to inspire young Gaelic speakers to follow in the footsteps of John Muir.<sup>7</sup>
4. **Sharing new research and learning resources amongst Trust staff.**

## Promoting a positive image of Gaelic

1. **Partnerships with Gaelic speaking communities:** through our work with Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (the Galson Estate Trust), Urras Ceann a Tuath na Hearadh (the North Harris Trust) and Urras Taobh an Iar na Hearadh (the West Harris Trust) we celebrate the links between cultural heritage, nature and belonging.
2. **Recognition of the cultural significance of the Gaelic language:** we promote Gaelic in our online content, for example in 'Callander's Landscape', an article by Dr Ross Crawford that examined Gaelic place names<sup>8</sup>, and a staff blog about how knowledge of Gaelic can enrich our understanding of the landscape at Quinag.<sup>9</sup> On Skye, we are working on an Oral History Project, which will record and document the Gaelic history of Strathaird, particularly in relation to place names and landscape.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/about/resources/1255-john-muir-award-story-creating-gaelic-names-for-lichens>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/initiatives/missionexplore-john-muir>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/latest/news/1785-wild-words-gaelic-placenames-in-callander>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/latest/news/959-staff-blog-gaelic-enriches-understanding-of-quinag-landscape>