

Our Position on National Parks

This document sets out when the Trust would support a call for a new National Park or an expansion to an existing National Park in any of the nations of the UK.

Trust position

1. The Trust welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to designating a new National Park in Scotland in 2026¹, the Welsh Government's commitment to a new National Park in Wales in 2026² and the UK Government's announcement in November 2023³ that there will be a new National Park in England. The Trust believes Northern Ireland has landscapes that deserve to qualify for its first National Park. The Trust will consider supporting proposals for new or extended National Parks on a case-by-case basis.
2. The Trust calls on National Parks to act on the two locally focussed recommendations of 'Raising the Bar: Improving Nature in our National Parks', a paper from the Campaign for National Parks, June 2018. The recommendations are:

'National Park Authorities should demonstrate more leadership and ambition on raising the bar on enhancing nature within their Park'⁴; and,

'National Park Authorities should identify an area, or areas, within which they will implement policies to make the areas feel relatively wilder.'⁵
3. The Trust believes criteria for determining whether an area would benefit from becoming a National Park should include:
 - a) The potential for the land to be managed in an exemplary way to protect and restore our finest wild places. The park must be based on a thriving natural ecosystem.
 - b) The strength of interest and support from the local community for the area to be designated.
4. The Trust supports National Park bids in principle where they:
 - a. Support the three freedoms for wild places.⁶
 - b. Have local community support to be managed in harmony with wild places.
 - c. Encourage engagement and participation with wild places.This aligns with the Trust's Strategy⁷.
5. The Trust engages with bid nominations where it has land within a proposed National Park, and where this aligns with our strategy. Subject to resourcing, the Trust will

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/landscape-and-outdoor-access/national-parks/>

² <https://www.gov.wales/north-east-wales-national-park-designation-project>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-pledges-to-boost-britains-access-to-nature-ahead-of-cop28>

⁴ 'Raising the Bar: Improving Nature in our National Parks', page 4. Report available online at: <https://www.cnp.org.uk/news/raising-the-bar>

⁵ 'Raising the Bar: Improving Nature in our National Parks', page 5

⁶ For more information on the three freedoms for wild places see the Trust's strategy, available at:

<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/resources/334-our-strategy>

⁷ <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/resources/334-our-strategy>

seek to offer further support to communities nearby to Trust properties whether or not their bids are successful.

6. The Trust recognises that National Park status can result in areas becoming a “honey pot” and lead to pressure from high visitor numbers and adverse impacts on qualities of wildness, the wider environment and local communities. The Trust seeks to address this through its wider advocacy work.
7. The Trust supports updating the statutory purposes of the National Parks so there is a clear emphasis on nature recovery within the designated landscape. The Trust believes that the legislative aims could be given more dynamic expression if we used words such as ‘repair’ and ‘restore’ to describe the purposes of National Parks.

Policy context and history

8. There are currently 10 National Parks in England, three in Wales and two in Scotland. There are currently no National Parks in Northern Ireland.
9. The Scottish Government’s 2021-22 Programme for Government contained a commitment to create a new National Park by Spring 2026. In May 2022 the Scottish Government consulted the public for views on ‘The Future of National Parks in Scotland.’ The Trust responded to that consultation⁸ and the subsequent consultations led by NatureScot.^{9,10} We expect a full consultation on detailed proposals to follow and for careful consideration to be given to resourcing the new Park Authority so it can fulfil its objectives.
10. In the 2021 Senedd Election the Welsh Labour Party pledged to create a new National Park in Wales. After winning a parliamentary majority and forming a Welsh Government there is a commitment to designate a new National Park in north east Wales by 2026.¹¹ The search area for the new National Park is based around the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
11. In November 2023 the UK Government announced plans for a new National Park in England.¹²
12. In September 2019 the UK Government published the ‘Glover Review’ of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Campaign for National Parks has been calling for the UK Government to implement some of the Glover Review recommendations since they were first published. In January 2022 the UK Government published its response to the Glover Review recommendations and invited comment.¹³ The Trust responded in March 2022.¹⁴ In November 2023 the UK Government published a consultation outcome to the Glover Review

⁸ Trust response to initial consultation for ideas on the Future of National Parks in Scotland:

<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/resources/1202-future-of-national-parks-in-scotland>

⁹ Trust response to second ‘Future of National Parks in Scotland’ consultation:

<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/resources/1335-trust-response-to-new-national-park-in-scotland-consultation>

¹⁰ Trust response to nominations and appraisal framework for a new National Park in Scotland:

<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/resources/1513-trust-response-to-new-national-park-appraisal-framework>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.wales/north-east-wales-national-park-designation-project>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-pledges-to-boost-britains-access-to-nature-ahead-of-cop28>

¹³ ‘Landscapes review (National Parks and AONBs): government response, available online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response>

¹⁴ Trust response available online at: <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/resources/1128-uk-government-glover-recommendations-response>

recommendations which included an Action Plan for protected landscapes.¹⁵ This partially addressed some of the recommendations whilst leaving others unaddressed.

Why we care/relevance to the Trust

13. The vision of the John Muir Trust is a world where wild places are valued for present and future generations. Our purpose is to conserve, protect and restore wild places for the benefit of all. Our focus is to inspire people about the benefits of wild places across the UK and showcase how wild places tackle the climate crisis and reverse biodiversity loss. We believe that our vision, purpose and focus are aligned to the intent in creating new National Parks in the UK.
14. The Trust has experience managing land in designated landscapes for nature recovery, sustainable access and enjoyment. Between 2017-23 the Trust managed land at Glenridding Common, within the Lake District National Park, on a six-year lease.¹⁶
15. National Parks also have a duty to '*promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of National Parks by the public*' (legislation in England and Wales) and '*to promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public*' (legislation in Scotland). John Muir Trust has had an active presence in all 15 UK National Parks, as well as several Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), as a result of John Muir Award participation and strategic partnerships with a number of National Park Authorities. Completing a John Muir Award in a National Park encourages people to be active in them, find out more about them and care for them. The Trust recognises the opportunities to experience wild places that both National Parks and AONBs offer people.

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¹⁵ Implementing the Landscapes Review: summary of responses - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

¹⁶ Article featuring the Trust's impact as a land manager at Glenridding Common is available at: <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/impact/land/glenridding>