

### **Purpose and Scope**

Wild land is an integral and vital part of our natural heritage in Scotland. We gain enjoyment from it, it contributes to our physical and mental wellbeing, and helps to safeguard our planet against climate change. The Trust has a role in managing and safeguarding wild land on the sites we own but also to advocate for the safety and protection of wild land throughout Scotland.

This policy sets out the opportunities available to us to how we can protect and conserve our wild land spaces for generations to come.

## **1. Introduction**

Wild land is areas of land where natural processes predominate, and where both humans and nature can enjoy tranquil and undisturbed surroundings. Scotland's wild land is one of our country's finest assets. Wild land areas are valued by the vast majority of Scots<sup>1</sup>, whether for the high-quality opportunities they offer for mental wellbeing, for peace and tranquillity, for physical activity; as havens for Scotland's wildlife; for their spectacular scenery; for the economic opportunities they provide from tourism; and, for some just knowing it is there.

All of Scotland's landscapes wild or otherwise, have to some degree been inhabited, influenced or modified by human activity at some point in time and so are a combination of the natural, cultural and historic environment.

Scotland's wild land remains fragile and vulnerable to change, particularly from large scale renewable energy developments and the infrastructure required to support them and from changes to land use, even where these areas have been formally recognised as important heritage or cultural assets.

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<sup>1</sup> According to a 2021 survey carried out by Survation on behalf of the National Trust for Scotland, 88% of people regarded wild land as important to them.

The Trust is fortunate to care for a number of areas where the degree of wildness is considered to be high, particularly on its larger countryside properties, e.g. the Cairngorms plateau on the Mar Lodge Estate, the mountain core of Glencoe and the Falls of Glomach.

However wild land is not just found in the larger properties but also the smaller ones too, particularly island properties, for example Mingulay, which match these larger areas for wild qualities even if not in scale. Closer to urban centres, pockets where a higher degree of wildness can be found are evident, despite being less remote. These areas are all valued for their 'wild land qualities'.

Wild land conservation has been important to the Trust since its inception and has come a long way since the Trust's Unna Principles (See Appendix 3), and the Trust's first Wild Land Policy in 2002.

Identifying wildness can be a subjective issue. However, there are common attributes to wild land that allow us to make an assessment. The Trust led the way for Scotland in establishing indicators of wild land quality which could be used to assess the character and quality of the land and the experience of those enjoying it (see Appendix 1). The Trust's definition of wild land is drawn on an individual basis from these indicators.

Subsequent to this, Scottish Natural Heritage (now NatureScot) produced a *Map of Wild Land Areas* (2014) identifying the most extensive areas of highest wildness in Scotland (See Appendix 2), with their importance being recognised in Scotland's National Planning Framework 3<sup>2</sup> (NPF3) as a '*nationally important asset*'. Smaller areas, often close to urban centres, which exhibit a high degree of wildness are not covered by this term but are often still highly valued locally in terms of their landscape and wildlife and as accessible areas where 'wildness' can be experienced.

It is important to recognise that wildness is not simply a scenic attribute, it is often more subjective and could be largely due to certain characteristics of the land provoking certain perceptual responses. The map of wild land areas in Appendix 2 shows the areas which present a high level of commonality and are able to be appreciated in a way that will evoke such responses.

NatureScot<sup>3</sup> identifies these perceptual responses as:

- a sense of sanctuary or solitude;
- risk or, for some visitors, a sense of awe or anxiety;
- perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities; and
- fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-3/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nature.scot/doc/assessing-impacts-wild-land-areas-technical-guidance#F2>

Further to this, to support Scottish planning policy, NatureScot have consulted on and published new guidance: *Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas: Technical guidance*<sup>4</sup>. This establishes a methodology for assessing the impact of development proposals on Wild Land Areas (WLAs) identified on the 2014 NatureScot WLAs map, drawing on the previously published descriptions of each of the 42 Wild Land Areas.

In 2021 The Trust commissioned public research which highlighted the huge value attributed to wild land, its beauty and the benefits of such areas for physical activity, health and wellbeing and the ecological benefits provided in terms of wildlife populations and biodiversity. The results from this survey and future surveys on this topic will be used to strengthen our voice when advocating for the recognition and protection of wild land areas in Scotland.

Please note that whilst it is recognised that the conservation and enhancement of wild land could be labelled as rewilding, this policy does *not* consider rewilding or species reintroduction. Please see the Trust's policy on **Conservation Translocation**<sup>5</sup> for more information.

## 2. Policy Statement

Wild land is a highly valued, distinctive and increasingly rare aspect of Scotland's heritage and identity, providing many environmental, social and economic benefits to the people of Scotland and beyond. It also has a wealth of social and ecological history to impart. In recent years protection of the most extensive areas of highest wildness has greatly improved. However, many of Scotland's wildest landscapes remain vulnerable to change and erosion from changing land uses and increasingly, climate change.

The Trust works to safeguard and enhance Scotland's wildest places, both those in its care and across Scotland more widely, and it will continue to do so, collaborating with others, in particular local communities, where this will further strengthen wild land protection.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nature.scot/doc/assessing-impacts-wild-land-areas-technical-guidance>

<sup>5</sup>

[http://trustnet.nts.org.uk/Policy/Lists/Policy%20Guidance%20And%20Form%20Document%20List/Conservation%20Translocations%20Policy%20\(2021\).pdf](http://trustnet.nts.org.uk/Policy/Lists/Policy%20Guidance%20And%20Form%20Document%20List/Conservation%20Translocations%20Policy%20(2021).pdf)

### 3. Policy Guidance

In working to achieve this, the Trust will:

1. manage areas of wildness in its ownership to avoid, where possible, any reduction in wild land quality. Where possible and appropriate The Trust will enhance<sup>6</sup> these qualities and/or extend the areas, whilst balancing the needs of people and communities with the protection of natural and aesthetic value. Wild land quality will also be considered in any new acquisitions;
2. refer to the list of enhancers and detractors (see Appendix 1) to decide on the management approach to wild land areas with the ultimate aim to seek to enhance these qualities and/or extend the areas which exhibit them, ensuring that where wild land quality is highest, is given highest priority. The Trust will however carry out light maintenance of the land or landscape (e.g. path or fence maintenance) where it is found doing so will, in the long term, further protect the wildness, biodiversity or ecology of the land overall. In addition, where public safety concerns have been highlighted, it will install signage where appropriate. Where possible signage should be kept to existing areas of human intervention such as car parks, or on existing paths or roadways.
3. engage with people at all levels, including its members, the public, local communities, user groups and policy makers, whether on its own or in collaboration with other interested parties to advocate for wild land protections and management including those in its care and those in other areas of Scotland;
4. seek to build on the work of NatureScot and the *Map of Wild Land Areas* so that smaller areas, including our remote coastlines and uninhabited islands are also recognised for their wild land qualities and are given due protection;
5. work with others who own or manage areas of wild land towards finding a common approach to wild land management, in particular how to manage physical features and visitor impacts, whilst promoting the sustainable use and enjoyment of Scotland's wild places;
6. promote the establishment of projects, whether on Trust land or on land owned and managed by others, to promote wild land conservation and enhancement, where management can be monitored and assessed, best practice shared, and lessons learnt;

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<sup>6</sup> Enhancement of wild land qualities has been achieved in the past through promotion of 'the long walk in' to mountainous areas and removal of intrusive high altitude hill tracks

7. look for opportunities to encourage and enable people to experience wild places whether on the Trust's larger countryside properties or to experience relatively wild areas nearer to home, whether in person or as an element of the landscape experienced from the road, railway or a path network;

## Appendix 1: Indicators of Wild Land Quality

<p><b>Enhancers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of remoteness (linked to distance from roads, tracks and transport)</li> <li>• Size of area and scale of landscape</li> <li>• Scenic grandeur</li> <li>• Surrounded by sea (islands)</li> <li>• Solitude</li> <li>• Roughness of terrain</li> <li>• Peacefulness, quietness</li> <li>• Absence of contemporary human activity or development</li> <li>• Seemingly natural environment</li> <li>• Biodiversity, with a variety of wild species present</li> <li>• Evokes emotional experience whether first-hand or at a distance</li> <li>• Absence of re-assurance in a hazardous and challenging environment</li> <li>• Physically demanding experience resulting in a sense of achievement, e.g. “the long walk in”</li> <li>• Scotland’s climate</li> <li>• Historic ruins and disused structures – where they add scale and fit the landscape</li> <li>• Presence of wildlife</li> </ul>	<p><b>Neutral</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deer management</li> <li>• Sites of ancient habitation (see also Enhancers list)</li> </ul> <p><b>Detractors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recent signs of human activity, particularly ‘people in charge of nature’ including intensive agriculture and insensitive forestry</li> <li>• Dams and drawdown zones</li> <li>• Recent human artefacts (including litter)</li> <li>• Presence of crowds or group activity</li> <li>• Unsympathetic recreation activities</li> <li>• Human-made noise</li> <li>• Facilities to make recreation easier or safer</li> <li>• Ecological imbalance e.g. changes to the natural ecology from human caused pollution</li> <li>• Invasive species</li> <li>• Visual intrusions e.g. roads, pylons, fences</li> <li>• Mechanical transport</li> <li>• Low flying jets and helicopters</li> <li>• Wind or hydro energy generation and transmission e.g. wind turbines</li> </ul>
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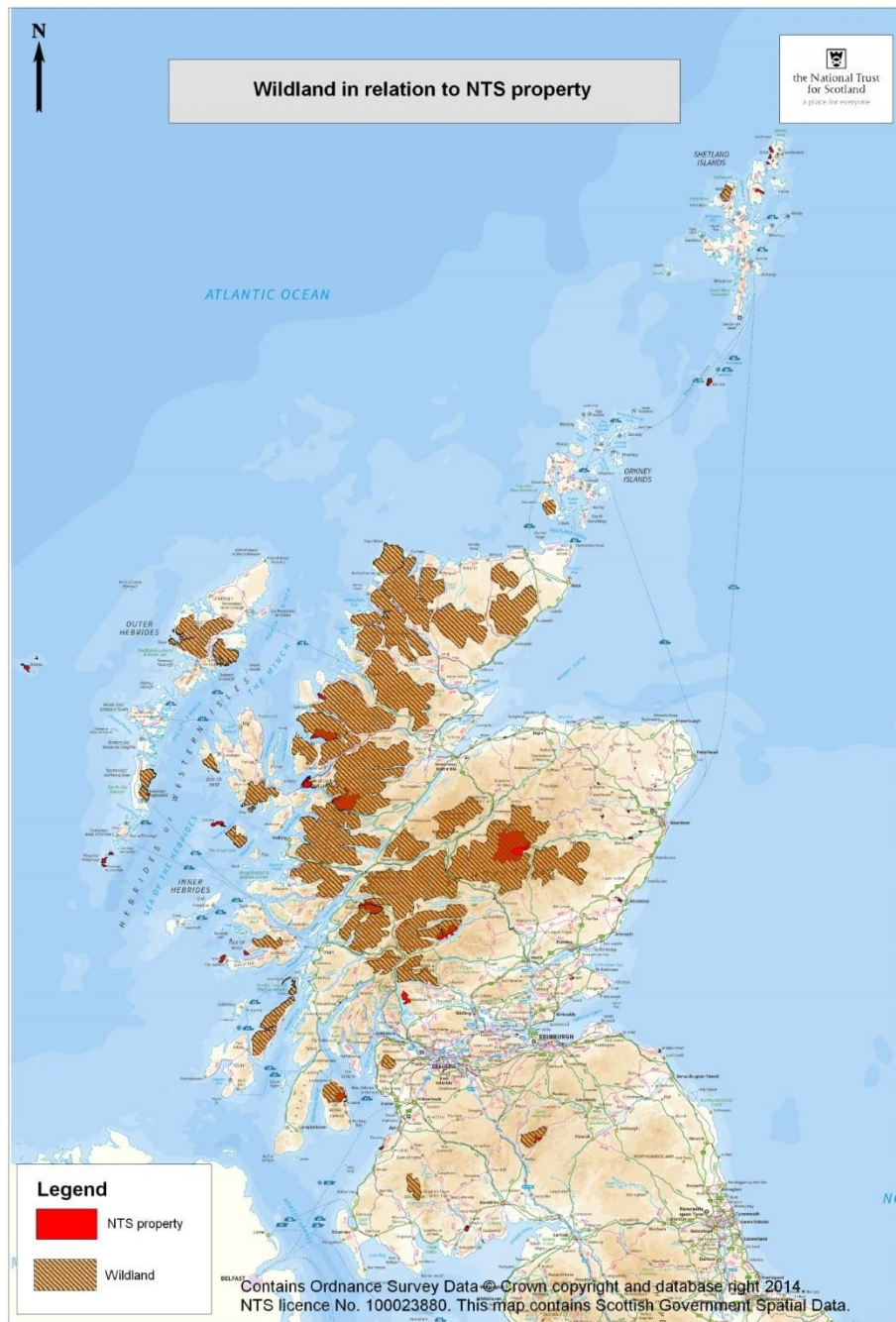
The above list of indicators can critically affect the character and quality of wild land and the experience of those visiting it. These include both physical aspects of a place, the reactions they provoke among visitors, and factors affecting wildlife populations and natural flora and fauna. Some are beyond the control of management, while others are the result of operational decisions, such as built structures or levels of activity.

The list is not exhaustive and could be extended. They are not listed in a specific order and none are prerequisites of ‘wild land quality’ or ‘wildness’. Enhancers will generally produce a positive response while detractors a generally negative one for people and all other forms of life.

The indicators listed as neutral are considered unlikely to affect wild land quality. The more enhancers that apply to an area the more likely it is to give a sense of wildness. If large scale and high impact, one detractor may reduce the wild land quality very significantly

despite the presence of many enhancers. The overall assessment therefore is not an adding up of the 'number of criteria met' but must be based on experience and judgement.

## Appendix 2: Scottish Natural Heritage identified wild land in relation to NTS properties





### Appendix 3: The “Unna Principles”

Percy Unna (1878-1950) was an environmentalist, philanthropist, and keen mountaineer. He contributed hugely to the development of the National Trust for Scotland, helping raise funds for the acquisition of the Glencoe estate in the 1930s, and Kintail in the 1940s. The Mountainous Country Trust he helped establish in partnership with the Scottish Mountaineering Council, went on to help acquire Ben Lawers (1950), Goatfell, and Grey Mare’s Tail.

In 1937, he wrote to the National Trust for Scotland setting out his own thoughts on how wild mountain areas could be managed and enjoyed.

“23 November 1937

To the Chairman and Council of the National Trust for Scotland

Dear Sirs,

As the movement initiated by a group of members of the Scottish Mountaineering Club to acquire Dalness Forest and hand it over to the National Trust for Scotland, to be held for the use of the nation, so that the public may have unrestricted access at all times, has now materialised; as subscriptions to that end were invited not only from the members of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, but also from the members of all the other mountaineering clubs in Great Britain; and as the funds so subscribed enabled the forest to be handed over free of cost to the Trust, together with a surplus to be used as an endowment fund; it is considered desirable that what are believed to be the views of the subscribers as to the future of the estate should be expressed in writing, and recorded in the minutes of the Trust. This is all the more necessary, as in the attached circular which was issued for the purpose of inviting these subscriptions it was stated that the land 'would be held on behalf of the public and preserved for their use', and 'that the Trust' would 'be asked to undertake that the land be maintained in its primitive condition for all time with unrestricted access to the public'. The views in question are –

1. That 'primitive' means not less primitive than the existing state.
2. That sheep farming and cattle grazing may continue, but that deer stalking must cease, and no sport of any kind be carried on, or sporting rights sold or let; any use of the property for sport being wholly incompatible with the intention that the public should have unrestricted access and use. It is understood, however, that deer may have to be shot, as that may be necessary to keep down numbers and so prevent damage, but for that purpose alone.

3. That the word 'unrestricted' does not exclude regulations, but implies that regulations, if any, should be limited to such as may in future be found absolutely necessary, and be in sympathy with the views expressed herein.

4. That the hills should not be made easier or safer to climb.

5. That no facilities should be introduced for mechanical transport; that paths should not be extended or improved; and that new paths should not be made.

6. That no directional or other signs, whether signposts, paint marks, cairns, or of any other kind whatsoever, should be allowed; with the exception of such signs as may be necessary to indicate that the land is the property of the Trust, and to give effect to the requirement in the Provisional Order of 1935 that by-laws must be exhibited.

7. That should a demand spring up for hotels or hostels it is possible that it may have to be satisfied to a limited extent. If so, they should only be built alongside the public roads, and should be subject to control by the Trust; and it is suggested that no hotels or hostels should be built in Glencoe itself, or on any other part of the property, except, perhaps, in the lower reaches of the Trust property in Glen Etive. It is hoped that the Trust may be able to come to an understanding with neighbouring proprietors as to corresponding restrictions being maintained in regard to land near to that held by the Trust.

8. That no other facilities should be afforded for obtaining lodging, shelter, food or drink; and, especially, that no shelters of any kind be built on the hills.

9. It is hoped that the design of any buildings which may be necessary will be carefully considered by the Trust; and that, where possible, trees will be planted in their vicinity.

10. In conclusion, it is suggested that the whole question of the management of the Trust properties in Glen Etive and Glencoe should receive special attention, in view of the possibility that the policy adopted by the National Trust for Scotland in the present instance may create a precedent for similar areas in other mountainous districts, not only in Scotland, but also in England and Wales.

P J H Unna  
President  
Scottish Mountaineering Club"