

# Policy Statement

## WILDNESS IN SCOTLAND'S COUNTRYSIDE

Policy Statement No. 02/03

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### THE BACKGROUND

#### Introduction

1. There has been continued debate about losses to the extent and quality of Scotland's wild landscapes, mainly through development or land use changes. There had been no specific policy support to the protection of wildness and wild land until the publication of National Planning Policy Guideline NPPG 14 on the *Natural Heritage*. As part of wide-ranging guidance on the protection of the natural heritage, this advice from Government identifies wild land as an aspect of landscape character to be protected through land-use planning. It also advises Councils to identify and protect wild land in their development plans, as part of their policies for the conservation and enhancement of their areas.
2. This policy paper from SNH considers the value of wildness to society and its significance as a distinctive part of Scotland's natural heritage. It describes the main pressures leading to loss of wildness; it provides support to the policy approach taken in NPPG 14, and it considers the difficult matter of how to identify wildness and wild land in our landscapes. A distinction is drawn between wildness - the quality enjoyed - and wild land, or places where wildness is best expressed. While wild land has normally been identified in the uninhabited and remoter areas in the north and west, the quality of wildness can be found more widely in the countryside, sometimes quite close to settlements.

#### Appreciating wildness and wild land

3. The appreciation of wildness is a matter of an individual's experience, and their perceptions of and preferences for landscapes of this kind. Wildness cannot be captured and measured, but it can be experienced and interpreted by people in many different ways. It is enjoyed by visitors as they tour Scotland and view scenery from the roadside which is markedly different from what they experience at home, and which may appear to them to be highly natural. Wildness is often experienced through the active outdoor pursuits - not just walking and climbing, but fishing, sailing, hunting, riding, canoeing, or wildlife watching - indeed, any recreation or pastime which draws people into the remoter and more challenging areas of land or coast. And for many people, the enjoyment of wildness is an inspirational experience, rewarding for its own sake.

4. The range of values people find in wild landscapes includes the following attributes.

**Engagement with the physical world.** Enjoyment of wildness links people with the physical elements of a natural world, from which society is now more distant, as an outcome of modern styles of living.

**Solitude and sanctuary.** The experience of wild places invokes a sense of solitude and sanctuary which is important to many people. Protecting places where solitude can be enjoyed to the full helps to secure a full range of recreation opportunity for society.

**Closeness to nature.** The wild areas of Scotland contain the most extensive areas of near or semi-natural habitat in Britain, with a distinctive wildlife, some of which depends on the same qualities of sanctuary or lack of disturbance also valued by people.

**Wildness as a quality valued in its own right.** People value many different aesthetic qualities, for their own sake and for the social benefits they provide. Such qualities can lie in our cultural or historic heritage, or in the natural world, as in the case of wildness.

5. While the term 'wilderness' is often used to describe the wilder parts of the globe, it is best avoided in Scotland because it implies a more pristine setting than we can ever experience in our countryside, where most wild land shows some effects from past human use. Much of this land is still used for an economic purpose, and local populations depend on it in various ways for their livelihood - both directly and indirectly. Also, the scale of our wilder landscapes is very modest as compared to the extensive, barren lands of, say, the Arctic wastes or the great deserts of the world, for which the term wilderness is best reserved. The term 'wild land' is also best reserved for those now limited core areas of mountain and moorland and remote coast, which mostly lie beyond contemporary human artefacts such as roads or other development.
6. Wildness can also be found in more managed countryside settings, such as rocky gorges, isolated sections of coast or expanses of moorland in central and southern Scotland, even close to towns, and these wild places can be of significance locally. Some green enclaves within our cities can act as vital sanctuaries from adjacent noise and urban congestion, and can have a sense of wildness relative to their setting - but they cannot be classed as truly wild. So we can recognise that places having wild character, sometimes giving a high intensity of experience, are to be found widely throughout rural Scotland.
7. However, the best expression of wildness is to be found in the more remote mountain and moorland cores, on the most isolated sections of the coast and on uninhabited islands. Natural character, remoteness and the absence of overt human influence are the main attributes of wild land. For some people, the challenges of our western and northern coastal waters, and the high quality of sailing in this environment, offer equal rewards to those to be experienced on land, but here we are concerned primarily with the terrestrial environment.
8. Wild land can be described as extensive areas where wildness (the quality) is best expressed. NPPG 14 helpfully defines wild land as: *'uninhabited and often relatively inaccessible countryside where the influence of human activity on the character and quality of the environment has been minimal'*. These are the still

undeveloped parts of our countryside: at heart, the issues of debate here are to determine the extent to which society wants to keep these near-natural areas free from development or intrusive uses; how much of this resource should be safeguarded; how these areas can be protected and enhanced; and how this can best be done.

## **WIDER PERSPECTIVES ON WILDNESS AND WILD LAND**

### **The cultural links**

9. For some people, our wild landscapes are the setting for their home and workplace, and for some the source of their livelihood. An interest in protecting the qualities of wildness can be interpreted as a means of sterilising land from local economic uses or, somehow, as denying their past uses by populations, now either cleared or departed. The sensitivities attached to empty land being 'emptied' land are considerable.
10. Yet, the scope for dispute here should not be overstated. Land which is most valued for its wild qualities lies mainly in the remoter upland areas, or on remote coastlines and uninhabited islands. These isolated areas will have had no recent, permanent occupation, because they lack cultivable land, on account of their roughness, infertility, inaccessibility and the prevailing climatic limitations on plant growth. Yet, virtually all this land is in some use for its owner – say, for grazing or often for hunting. It should be acknowledged that the degree of wildness remaining in some of these areas is an outcome of the past and present policies of those who own or manage them.
11. Wildness in our landscape has significant economic value locally as one of the main attractions for visitors to upland Scotland, whether for general tourism, for the active outdoor pursuits, for nature-tourism or the field sports mentioned above. Debate about how best to protect wild land should therefore be a matter of how we evolve and collectively agree on new values for land having this special aesthetic quality, which meet the needs of a changing and more inter-dependent society – both the rural and urban populations.
12. There is a cultural inheritance to be found on some of this land, because little of it is wholly natural. Indeed, this kind of scenery is often perceived by the visitor as unspoiled and mainly untrammelled by human actions, albeit that social history, and ecological and archaeological evidence tell us that some of these landscapes have been modified or influenced by past human uses.
13. Over a longer time-scale, there has been an ebb and flow of different uses of hill land, which have been influenced by economic or climatic trends. The effects of these past activities are to be found in signs of habitation or routes of passage, ancient and more recent. Some of these areas may have archaeological evidence of human living in the more distant past, but without continuity of occupation to present times. However, this is usually a light imprint on the land. The effects of past human uses - where recognisable to the visitor – can be a reminder of a long history of people's past uses of these settings; these effects are rarely of a scale sufficient to be seen as an encroachment on wildness, and they can be seen as a reinforcement to the richness of the landscape history of the area.

## Nature and wildness

14. Wild landscapes also provide sanctuary for nature – retreats for nature in retreat. By the physical limits of harsh climate and impoverished soils, wildlife in these areas is often more specialist in its adaptation and requirements, and normally less rich in number of species. These are some of the most near-natural environments in Britain. Their fauna is distinctive in its ability to survive in harsh settings, and the presence of such wildlife – say the haunting call of golden plover, or the presence of ptarmigan on the high tops in winter – is important to people's enjoyment and a crucial part of the pleasure of being there.
15. Not all areas of wild land are of the highest nature conservation value or potential. Some of them have a relatively uniform and uninteresting vegetation cover, in part caused by past or present levels of grazing and burning. For others, the impoverished soils and infertile rock substrate, and the wetness of the ground will combine to offer little potential for diversity in habitat. Because of changing climate and different levels of human intervention, it is not certain what the true natural condition of these lands was or could be. However, for extensive areas under moorland vegetation, it is reasonable to predict that there could be much more woody vegetation than exists today. More natural woodland could be anticipated on the better quality lower ground, merging upwards through scrub and shrubbier moorland vegetation to the alpine heaths: elsewhere, open habitats would prevail. All these areas could also be more diverse in habitat mosaics; and many could be richer in species.
16. The prime value of these wild landscapes for nature lies in the extent of semi- and near-natural habitats and the space available for those species which range widely and need extensive territories, or those which thrive best on low levels of disturbance. Often these habitats and wildlife could be in better condition than they are at present, and a future vision for Scotland's wild places should include the aim to enhance the diversity and quality of their vegetation cover and wildlife.

## ASSESSING CHANGE TO WILD LANDSCAPES

### The importance of Scotland's wild land

17. The extent of countryside in Britain which is free from overt human influence is now limited. Most of this lies in Scotland and it is significant on a British scale. It also has value when assessed at the European level, because - outwith Scandinavia and some core areas of the high Alps - there are now few large areas of near-natural countryside close to the industrial heartlands of mainland Europe.

18. The value of Scotland's wild countryside can be said to rest on five main factors.

**Scarcity.** There is an increasing shortage of remote and relatively unmodified wild land in the most urbanised countries of Europe. Scotland holds by far the largest amount of this kind of countryside in Britain, and in comparison with the nearby lowland countries in mainland Europe.

**Intrinsic quality.** The quality of our wild landscapes is very high. They have a bare, austere character, enhanced by low northern light. There is a diverse, rugged often

spacious topography and the main areas of wild land are also fairly free from major human intrusions.

**Potential for nature.** These are the most extensive areas of semi- and near-natural habitat in Britain. Some - say, the northern peatlands - are of great importance for nature and of international significance, while others hold distinctive species characteristic of harsh environments: all have potential for enhancement for nature, for its own sake and as a critical part of people's enjoyment of these places.

**Economic.** As noted earlier, the wild character of our countryside and coast is of considerable importance to the tourism industry. It underlies the basic images used in the promotion of Scotland's fine scenery, and it is greatly valued by visitors, especially the committed, regular visitor.

**Accessibility.** It is a paradox that, through trunk road improvements, our wild and remote countryside is now much more accessible to people - within and furth of Scotland. This ready access encourages more use for open-air recreation, but more recreational use does bring some problems.

### **Recent changes to wild land**

19. Change to Scotland's wild land has mainly been incremental, often through small-scale change which is not easily catalogued. Change to the remote areas of rural Scotland is also longstanding, but its pace accelerated greatly in the post-war period, coming almost as a series of waves, according to the lead given either by public policy of the day, or by other economic or technical forces. Much of this post-war change in the remoter parts of Scotland has had very welcome social and economic benefits, either in enhancing the quality of life for remote communities, or as reasonable development of natural resources in the local or national interest. The main causes of change are sketched below.

20. **Hydro-electric development.** The first phase of post-war change affecting the remoter areas of Scotland was the rapid expansion of hydro-electric development from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, when much of the present hydro-electric generation capacity in the Highlands was put in place. This led to significant change to many Highland glens from the impoundment of reservoir lochs, from new roads and improvements to existing roads, along with the construction of dams, power stations and power lines. Further expansion of hydro-electric development was eventually halted for economic reasons in the early 1960s, and following increased protest against damage to fine landscapes.

21. **Afforestation.** The second main post-war wave of change to Scotland's uplands was the expansion of afforestation. Forest roads and conifer plantings were taken into places where they did not exist before. The adverse effects of earlier plantings have been recognised by the forestry industry, and will be modified as the early plantings mature into a more diverse forest structure. Former incentives which promoted planting in unsuitable locations have been withdrawn; forestry strategies aim to steer new planting away from unsuitable ground and planting on poorer ground now has an emphasis on native woodland recovery.

22. **Bulldozed roads.** In the late 1960s and the 1970s, there was a phase of private estate-road construction. While the older estate-road network mainly penetrated the glens, these new tracks extended motorised access onto high ground, mainly for field sports and, to a lesser extent, for hill farming. Many of these roads were

constructed to low standards and a few were taken to high altitude, onto sensitive, near-tundra habitat. The main effects of this phase of road building were in the east of Scotland, in the Grampians, but most parts of upland Scotland have been affected to some extent. New roads of this kind continue to be constructed in the remoter hill areas.

23. **Accessibility for open air recreation.** Improvements to the public road network have greatly enhanced the accessibility of the countryside. With the growth in tourism and more promotion of and fashion for the active outdoor pursuits, there has been an increase in the recreational use of remote countryside, although information on the extent of this change is mainly anecdotal. Some adverse effects do arise from more outdoor recreation in wild places, for example, more footpath damage, but these are modest in scale compared to the effects of the major land use changes.
24. **Other impacts.** There has been attrition to the extent and quality of wild countryside from a number of other forces. The major expansion of marine fish farming in the 1980s has occupied some of the wilder parts of the western seaboard, such that there are very few sea-lochs left now which do not have some use for aqua-culture. There has been an increase in the use of upland Scotland for military purposes - such as low-flying jet training; an increase in the number of small but highly visible artefacts, often serving public service purposes, such as masts, pylons and broadcasting repeater stations, some of which require private access roads; and traffic noise and light pollution are on the increase, and can affect the edges of some wild landscapes. Increased deer and sheep numbers in some areas hold back the recovery of a more diverse vegetation cover.
25. Ski developments have also affected the wildness of the hills, mainly through effects on their hinterland from the improved accessibility created by new roads and mechanised uplift. Helicopter tourism has been proposed in areas such as the Cuillin, but has not yet taken root in Scotland. In National Parks and other wild areas abroad, airborne tourism of this kind has proved to be an obtrusive and unwelcome disturbance to the quiet enjoyment of people on the ground, but it has proved difficult to control, once permitted. More recently, it has become evident that renewable energy projects have the potential to impinge on the character of wild land, and there is more use of off-road vehicles for estate management which is causing unsightly damage locally.
26. Finally, the least crowded bits of an increasingly crowded island are sometimes too easily seen as potential locations or depositories for activities which are not easily accommodated in the more settled areas, either because they are physically difficult to locate there, or because of adverse public opinion. This perception of wild land as being unused and therefore available for activities which are unwelcome elsewhere is a continuing threat.
27. **Assessment.** Taken one by one, many of these changes will be judged acceptable on their own. Many of them, as noted above, have been important for local economic or social reasons. But less apparent is the cumulative effect they have over time in causing progressive attrition to the essential wildness of the remaining undeveloped areas of Scotland. Change of this kind has often been led by public policy, but fashion in land management and economic factors also contribute.

28. These same effects are experienced elsewhere. For example, the Norwegian national conservation agency, the Direktoratet for Naturforvaltning (DN), has conducted a national survey of what it terms 'encroachment-free' countryside. This survey documents for Norway a major decline through the 20th century of land described as having wild character, from 48% of the country in 1900 to around 10-12% today. Most of this change has occurred as a consequence of public road construction, hydro-electric development, and access roads for agriculture and forestry. Through the findings of this survey, DN is encouraging Norwegian municipalities to protect their remaining wild countryside through their policies and decisions on land use. Much the same degree of loss of wild countryside is said to exist in other parts of Scandinavia, although extensive roadless areas are still to be found in the north of Norway, Sweden and Finland, some which are very large by Scottish standards.

### **Where can wild land be found?**

29. Because wildness is a matter of individual perception, such that different people can perceive wildness to differing degrees at different locations, it is not easy to describe the extent of wild land in Scotland. One surrogate, albeit mechanistic, approach is to take remoteness from significant human uses as a defining factor. The most obvious technique is to identify land which is beyond the limit of motorable roads, on the assumption that the limits of motorised access provide a significant threshold to people's perceptions of levels of human intervention.

30. Map 1 shows the extent of land at 2, 5 or 8 km in distance from the public road network. These maps appear to indicate some substantial areas in the Highlands beyond the road network but, in practice, there is only a limited number of areas with their remotest point more than 8 km distant from any public road. In the north, these areas are the central Cairngorms; the Monadhliath; Knoydart; Ben Dearg, east of Loch Broom and its hinterland; the Ben Alder deer forest and adjacent areas; the west Inverness-shire glens to Kintail block; Black Mount - Etive; and the Fisherfield Forest in Wester Ross. In the south of Scotland, only the Merrick block is of any size although afforestation is now extensive in this area. These locations accord with a map prepared by Dr R Aitken for his PhD thesis on Wilderness in Scotland (1972), which maps wild areas by time-distance on foot from the public road. Here the limit of time for travel to the core of the most remote area was around seven hours.<sup>1</sup>

31. However, if this analysis is extended to land distant from any motorable road - either public or private - then the amount of land beyond this combined road network shrinks greatly, as shown in Map 2. Only in a very few locations, notably south-east Lewis, west Jura, Fisherfield and West Inverness-shire is there a small amount of land shown as being more than 8 km from any motorable road. The other large remote areas shown in Map 1, such as the Cairngorms, the Ben Dearg hinterland, or the Ben Alder area all become greatly reduced in extent on

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Aitken's maps of time distance were calculated using a modified version of the Naismith formula for time taken to walk over rough country, which allows for time taken in ascent as well as linear distance. In practice, many journeys into these wild areas would take longer, depending on the roughness of the ground, weather conditions, the ability to cross burns, the presence of snow on the ground and so on.

this tighter criterion of distance from any motorable road - but see the important caveat at footnote<sup>2</sup> below.

32. Not all of the areas which qualify on the above definitions of distance beyond motorable roads are of the same intrinsic merit for their wild character. But many of them are on the lists of those parts of Scotland which have been judged by informed commentators to be amongst the finest of our wild areas, for their roughness or near-naturalness, for being lonely places, for having qualities of sanctuary, and in being only lightly affected by past human uses. They are not all mountainous, and include areas such as the northern peatlands, and which are of high aesthetic quality and wildlife value and difficult to access locally. Approaches to the definition of wildness and the identification of wild land are proposed in Annex 1.

## CARING BETTER FOR WILDNESS AND WILD LAND

### SNH's policy aims

33. SNH welcomes the lead given in NPPG 14 to specify wild land as a factor to be identified in development plans. Land-use planning provides a means of debating and determining how development in the community interest can best be accommodated in sensitive landscapes. But better planning cannot provide all the solutions: land management and change caused by factors outwith the planning system also have a role to play. Concern about protecting the wild character of Scotland's land and water is also only part of the general issue of how to protect and enhance the best of Scotland's valued landscapes.
34. **The policy aim.** SNH identifies as its policy aim that: *there are parts of Scotland where the wild character of the landscape, its related recreational value and potential for nature are such that these areas should be safeguarded against inappropriate development or land-use change.* The only uses of these areas should be of a low key and sensitive nature, which do not detract from their wild qualities. Within the main areas of wild land, a restrictive approach to development should be taken, as these will be landscapes where development is inimical to their character. In considering how best to meet this aim to guard wildness and wild land, SNH sets out the following policy objectives.
- **Safeguarding wildness and wild land.** Scotland has great diversity in its landscapes and in the degree to which they have been managed and developed to meet society's needs. The extent of wild landscapes is shrinking, and therefore those areas which bear no obvious effects of human activities, and where natural and aesthetic qualities are dominant and of high value, should have a strong presumption against development.
  - **Enhancing nature.** Wild land areas include the most extensive tracts in Britain of semi-and-near natural habitat, some of which is of international value, and appropriate protection and enhancement of nature should be promoted.

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<sup>2</sup> This dataset of private roads is drawn from the Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 sheets. It is therefore uneven across the country as to the date of survey, and does not include a number of recently created motorable tracks. It is to be stressed then that these maps present a more optimistic picture of the extent of remote terrain than exists in reality.



- **Responsible recreational use.** Active promotion of more recreational use of wild land should be minimised, and all encouragement given to visitors and potential visitors to care for the special qualities of these areas through responsible practice of their recreations.
- **Recovery of past damage.** Wildness and wild land have suffered adverse change through varied human activities in the past, and often the scale of change will be beyond recovery. But there is good potential for recovery of wild character in some areas, as exemplified by the pioneering work of the National Trust for Scotland at Mar Lodge in restoring bulldozed roads. Opportunities to promote more such action should be fostered.
- **Promoting awareness.** The wild character of many of our most valued landscapes is a distinctive element of what makes Scotland attractive to visitors, and as a place to live. It is an asset which has economic as well as social value, and greater awareness of its worth to the local and national community should be promoted.

### **Action to protect wildness and wild land**

35. The conventional method of giving protection to a piece of land (or building) which has value to society is by some form of designation or listing. This provides a means of signalling value, and allows for the notification and review of proposed changes through development or land management. However, a special designation for wild land (as does exist in some other countries) would not be an appropriate way forward in Scotland. We have a suite of existing conservation designations which is already judged by some to be too complex, and which should not be lightly increased. A designation approach would only cause confusion because wildness is an attribute (as stated earlier) which is only one facet of the character of Scotland's landscapes.
36. The best way forward for the protection and management of wildness and wild land is through a number of complementary approaches, building on existing mechanisms, especially those which support landscape protection. This should engage the National Scenic Area designation, and other national and local planning policies for landscape protection and open-air recreation. The safeguard of these areas should also be able to depend on the other public-sector support systems for land management, which should respect the above policy aims and objectives. Care for wild land can accommodate appropriate land uses, and the values attached to historic human uses of these areas should also be recognised.
37. **Existing policy support.** There is already a number of policy means other than NPPG 14 to help care better for wild countryside.
  - The National Scenic Area designation covers many (but not all) of the prime wild areas and their wild character is often recognised in the NSA descriptions. Government has recently asked SNH to review how the NSA designation could be made more effective, and SNH's advice was to sustain the NSA as an accolade designation, but that much more effort is needed to secure better care of the values of this designation through management strategies. These strategies should play an important role in the protection and enhancement of wild land.

- Already the National Planning Policy Guideline series has given support to the care of wild land. As well as NPPG 14, the NPPG 11 on *Sport, Recreation and Open Space* sets out a national policy (para 40) to protect land and water resources required for open-air recreation. In NPPG 13, for *Coastal Planning*, Councils are invited to identify for their area those sections of their coast which come under the category of isolated coastline, and guidance has been issued by Government (PAN 53) to help define what is intended by this term. The revised NPPG 6 on renewables notes the value of wild land. SNH's own policy on renewables is explicit in the need to guard wild land from such development.
- Councils are encouraged to adopt planning policies in line with the policy in NPPG 14 to safeguard wild land areas against development. Within other areas identified by them in their development plans as having wild character of a quality worthy of protection locally, there should be a precautionary approach, aiming to minimise change to their extent and quality. Annex 1 offers some guidance on identifying wildness and wild land.
- As part of appropriate planning policies, decisions on development adjacent to wild land should take into account the effects which might be caused to its character.

38. **Additional measures.** In addition to the foregoing means of providing support to the care of wild and natural areas, the following additional measures should be considered.

- While a designation is an inappropriate way forward, the implementation of planning policies locally requires some locational guidance and it is desirable that this be given some consistency from a national stance. SNH will lead a process of debate about this, building on the guidance provided in Annex 1.
- There should be action to resolve how best to influence activities which affect wild land, and which are given consent under the General Permitted Development Order, whether for agriculture and forestry, or developments by statutory undertakers and other bodies having special status under the regulatory system for planning. Review of the GPDO would provide the opportunity for this action.
- Military operations, apart from light-weight training appropriate to these settings, should not take place in wild land areas.
- National policies and mechanisms for financial support to land management should recognise the special value identified in wild land, and should not contribute to any changes which adversely affect them.
- Action should be encouraged by land managers, statutory undertakers and public bodies with an involvement in the planning or management of wild land (or areas having wild character), to remove or minimise the effects of obtrusive activities and artefacts.
- Collaborative management approaches through strategies and plans, or through land management schemes or agreements, can play an important role in creating stronger policies and management action over wider areas of wild land – say, through National Park plans.

- Land managers should be encouraged to employ methods of access and management which recognise the values of wild land and which, in particular, avoid ground damage from the use of off-road vehicles.
- Recreations inappropriate to these areas – in particular any mechanised, air-borne activities, or mass participation events (whether charitable or competitive) should be discouraged in wild land.
- Recreational bodies with an interest in the protection of wild and remote countryside should promote responsible recreational practice in the use of these areas.

39. **Management and persuasion.** While controls on land-use change through the planning system have an important role to play in the protection of wild land, many other changes are led by actions of the managers of these areas. One crucial means of guarding wild land has been through the ownership and benign management policies of private individuals or conservation organisations who espouse the values inherent in the wild character of landscapes under their control. Voluntary sector land-owning bodies have already played a critical role, such as the National Trust for Scotland with its range of fine mountain properties, and also the John Muir Trust - whose purposes are explicitly concerned to protect wild countryside. Public lands managed for conservation, such as the larger NNRs, also have a role to play here.

40. Protecting the qualities of wildness, or wild land, does need supportive management, even if the considered management prescription for many areas will be to do little or nothing. However, doing nothing will normally not be a realistic option for much of Scotland's wilder areas: none of them are islands, in the sense that effects can arise on them from outwith, whether it be in-coming recreational uses or the movement of grazing animals across their natural range. For many wild land areas, opportunities for enhancement will often exist.

41. Growth in the recreational use of wild land is a management issue which requires a sensitive approach to the physical management of the effects of more people, say, in the need for more management of paths. There is no tradition of managing recreational activities in wild land areas (as is the case in some other countries). Action of this kind would be controversial but there are some existing needs in a few locations – such as over-crowded hill bothies, or informal but over-used campsites – where a need for management exists now. The approach here should be through consensus, working with the representative recreational bodies, who have a role in influencing how people act responsibly in caring for the places they most enjoy.

42. Finally, we do not have sufficient debate about the value to society of our remaining wild and remote places. Most of these areas have such low productive potential that the more intensive land uses (sometimes in the past encouraged by subsidy) are inappropriate. Low intensity uses which respect the physical fragility and the sensitive values of these areas provide the best way forward. These can include the traditional uses for grazing and stalking at appropriate levels; appropriate forms of open-air recreation; and nature conservation. Practical action for the care of these national assets also gains great strength from the support of those who value and use them for enjoyment, and from those owners who take care of the wild character of their land. In turn,

if well cared for, these special places can continue to contribute economic benefits to local communities.

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**Scottish Natural Heritage**

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## ANNEX 1

### An approach to the identification of wild land

1. The purpose of this Annex is to provide guidance for the identification of wild land. Criteria are provided for the physical attributes most commonly associated with wildness, and also for the emotive reactions aroused when people visit such land. But it is recognised that these emotive or perceptual reactions will always be difficult to categorise and assess. A framework is provided to help interpretation of the physical attributes. As understanding of this issue develops through the experience of SNH and others in applying this approach, we will revise the content of this Annex.
2. Wildness is a quality experienced by people when visiting places of a certain character. Wildness can be found along a spectrum from places where this quality has only limited expression to others where wildness is a dominant element of the visitor's experience of the landscape. Thus, a degree of wildness can thus be experienced in many settings across Scotland's countryside, but where wildness is found to be a dominant element of the landscape character of an area, then the term wild land can be used. It is acknowledged that defining wildness or identifying wild land is a subjective matter, as people will respond differently according to their past experience and their expectations. But there is sufficient commonality of experience to feel confident that there is a set of attributes which can help to clarify this concept, as set out below.
3. The physical attributes which contribute to the experience of wildness (and thereby to the identification of wild land) are as follows:
  - a high degree of perceived naturalness in the setting, especially in its vegetation cover and wildlife, and in the natural processes affecting the land;
  - the lack of any modern artefacts or structures;
  - little evidence of contemporary human uses of the land;
  - landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging; and
  - remoteness and/or inaccessibility.

These physical attributes could be recorded and assessed by a simple scoring – say, low, medium and high – to give a measure of the degree to which they are expressed in an area. The term 'perceived naturalness' allows that those visitors who are not aware of the ecological status or habitat condition of seemingly natural places may assume them to be more pristine than they are in fact.

4. Of the perceptual responses evoked by these physical attributes, the following are often recognised:
  - a sense of sanctuary or solitude;
  - risk or, for some visitors, a sense of awe or anxiety, depending on the individual's emotional response to the setting;
  - perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities; and

- fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places.
5. These factors are less readily assessed than the physical factors, because they are less tangible, being dependent on the perceptions of the individual. Their presence can, however, be identified and recorded. The transient and seasonal aspects of Scotland's dynamic, oceanic climate can add further to how people experience wildness. Thus in winter, the sense of wildness will often be greatly enhanced by harsh weather, and by the added challenge of making a visit on short days with difficult conditions underfoot.
  6. The degree to which people identify all the physical attributes in an area and the extent of their emotional responses will vary according to their experience of wild places, and to their awareness of and sensitivity to the landscape they are in. The intrinsic quality of the setting will also weigh high in people's responses, such that, in some places of quite limited extent, there can be an intense response to its wild and natural character (say, in a dramatic rocky gorge or a cliffed coastline). But not all places where wildness can be experienced in the Scottish countryside can be classed as being wild land.
  7. The identification of wild land will depend on all the physical attributes being present. To these can be added an extent of area sufficient to encompass the physical attributes, and to provide an appropriate scale of setting to evoke the full range of perceptual responses. Criteria to help clarify the use of these physical attributes in defining wild land are set down below.

## PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES IN THE IDENTIFICATION OF WILD LAND

Attributes	Main Criteria	Further Interpretation of Criteria
Perceived naturalness	<p>Vegetation cover primarily composed of functioning, natural habitats.</p> <p>Catchment systems largely unmodified, and other geomorphological processes unaffected by land management.</p>	<p>Habitat may often not be in best condition or at optimum ecological status. But there will normally be potential for recovery, and the vegetation cover should be composed of natural components. Some small plantations may be tolerated especially at the edge of an area, if they are the only detracting feature and of limited effect on wildness,</p>
Lack of constructions or other artefacts	<p>No contemporary or recent, built or engineering works within the area.</p> <p>Little impact from outwith the area on wild qualities from built development, power lines, or masts or other intensive land uses (say forestry), or from noise or light pollution.</p> <p>Limited effects on the wild qualities of the area from older artefacts.</p>	<p>Older features (fences, bridges, stalking tracks, or small buildings) may be present, if not intrusive overall. Archaeological features (normally a light imprint on the land) will contribute to visitors' appreciation of the continuity of human use of these areas. Some intrusive features (say vehicular tracks which partly penetrate into an area) may be tolerated, where their effects are limited, and where excluding such land would reject an area of high intrinsic quality.</p>
Little evidence of contemporary land uses	<p>Extensive range-grazing and field sports (as economic uses of the land) will often be present, as well as public recreation. Land uses of an intensive nature should not be present.</p>	<p>The cumulative effects of the economic uses of the land should not be intrusive. Evidence of muirburn or over-grazing, habitat management, footpath deterioration and erosion, or the effects of the use of off-road vehicles may be visible. But the effects of any one of these activities, or their cumulative expression should not be of a scale or intensity so as to significantly devalue visitors' perceptual experience.</p>
Rugged or otherwise challenging terrain	<p>Striking topographic features, or land having extensive rough terrain or extensive boglands, difficult to traverse.</p>	<p>Different kinds of terrain can offer an inspiring or challenging experience for people but, in the main, it is those landscapes which are of arresting character</p>

Attributes	Main Criteria	Further Interpretation of Criteria
	Natural settings for recreational activities requiring hard physical exercise or providing challenge.	(by virtue of the scale and form of the terrain) which are most valued for their wildness.
Remoteness and inaccessibility	Distance from settlements or modern communications.  Limited accessibility, either by scale of the area, difficulty in passage, or the lack of easy access, say by vehicular tracks, bridges, or by boat.	Distance is not an absolute guide on its own, but most of the wild land resource will lie in the remaining remote areas, as defined by distance from private and public roads and other artefacts.
Extent of area	An area of land sufficient to engender a sense of remoteness; to provide those who visit them with physical challenge; and to allow for separation from more intensive human activities.	Smaller areas of land of high intrinsic merit or inaccessibility can hold the qualities which underpin a sense of wildness, say an inaccessible rocky gorge, and the same applies to some small uninhabited islands, or stretches of isolated coast.

8. Few parts of Scotland are untouched by human actions but, over extensive areas of the uplands, the effects of contemporary uses of the land are relatively light and many of the above criteria will apply. There is a judgement to be made about the degree of fit of the criteria against setting, and this should be informed by considering how these criteria come together to create a strong expression of wildness, thereby to help identify wild land. There may also be a wider comparative context to be taken into account across the nation, in recognising small areas of wild land away from the north and west.
9. In bringing the criteria together to identify wild land:
- all the physical attributes must be present and be well expressed in an area;
  - all the perceptual attributes should be identifiable to some degree; and
  - where detracting features exist they should be localised, their cumulative effects on the sense of wildness enjoyed by visitors should be limited, and there should be potential for enhancement.
10. The identification of wild land can also be aided by maps of land distant from public and private road networks (see Maps 1 and 2, earlier). However, these maps do have limitations. They are no more than a starting point for debate about where wild land may well exist. So this approach cannot attribute value - only indicate where value might be found.
11. Defining the outer edges of wild land is a difficult task, because wildness is a quality which augments progressively as a person moves into an area of remote



country. Boundaries can be located with reference to local terrain, especially using ridges to define a visual envelope, or to emphasise the separation of a wild area from land which does not fulfil the criteria. But the integrity of an area of wild land depends on its periphery also being safe from adverse change. Otherwise, continuing attrition from the outside would be likely to push back the physical and perceptual thresholds at which a sense of wildness can be experienced.

12. Some comparatively small wild areas closer to the central belt may have local significance on account of the shortage of this kind of land outwith the north and west, even if they do not meet all the criteria fully. Wild land of high quality can also be found on sections of isolated coastline and on some uninhabited islands. The general picture, however, is that the more extensive wild land areas are now relatively few in number, being limited mainly to the heart of the main groups of high hills, along with some remote moorlands and coasts.
13. Map 3 presents a preliminary search map for areas of wild land. Its purpose is not to delimit wild land, but to act as a starting point for review of where the main resource of wild land is most likely to be found. It is an incomplete map which does not identify all of the smaller areas of land which might meet the criteria, say, on the isolated west and north coasts, or on the coast of some of the larger islands. Nor does it identify wild and uninhabited islands, and some small areas in southern Scotland may merit inclusion. It includes land which is known to have detracting features, say roads or forestry plantations, and it also includes some land formerly of evident wild land quality, but now of less significance on account of major impairment – say, in the glens affected by major hydro-power reservoirs. At this stage, then, this is no more than a search area map, prepared for debate with other parties, but it is thought to include most of the significant and valued areas of wild land.