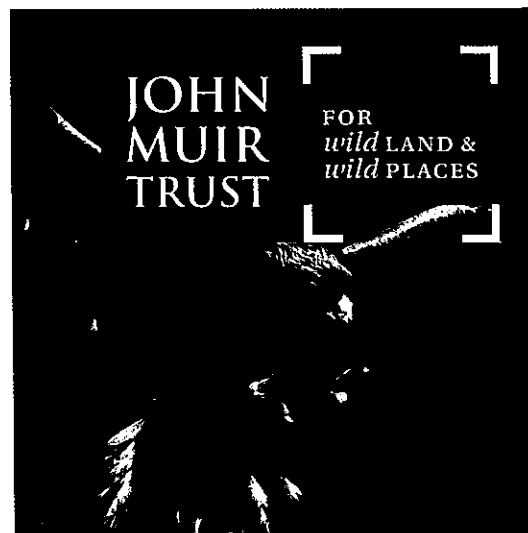


The John Muir Trust is the leading wild land conservation charity in the UK. Working with people and communities to conserve, campaign and inspire, the John Muir Trust is a membership organisation that seeks to ensure that wild land is protected and that wild places are valued by and for everyone.

www.jmt.org

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29 January 2013

Dear Convener

PE1383: Better protection for wild land

The John Muir Trust submitted petition PE1383: "Better protection for wild land" in January 2011 because of compelling evidence that development pressure on Scotland's wild land was leading to significant loss.

Specifically, the Trust's petition called on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to improve protection for the best areas of wild land, by introducing a new national environmental designation.

The Trust's petition met with broad, initial support, with most respondents agreeing that the petition raised important issues. In particular, the Trust welcomed the recognition of the Scottish Government that the issues raised were timely and that there was evidence of increasing impacts visually on wild land areas.

Since then, compelling, new evidence has emerged of strong public support in Scotland for action to protect wild land. According to a major survey completed in July 2012¹, 86 per cent of the public surveyed believe further action is needed to preserve wild land in Scotland. Of those who believe that further action is needed to protect Scotland's wild land, the most widely supported measure was the introduction of a specific "wild land" designation.

In January 2011 when our petition was submitted, Scottish Natural Heritage was expected to conclude its wild land mapping (known as Phase 2) within a few months. The Petitions Committee

¹ *Public Perception Survey of Wildness in Scotland: Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority, Cairngorms National Park Authority & Scottish Natural Heritage: July 2012*

therefore agreed to wait until then, recognising that the mapping could provide an important contribution to the discussion about whether there is a need for legislative or policy change with respect to the protection of wild land. Indeed, SNH itself noted *"we intend to share the results of our mapping work with Scottish Government and to discuss with them its implications, including the question of whether there is a need to identify at a national level areas of particular importance."* (SNH response to petition Feb 2011). However, this Phase 2 mapping work - if completed - is not in the public domain and there has been a much longer-than-anticipated timeframe for completion of this work. This has also meant that the Trust has not yet had the opportunity to make a presentation to the Committee and expand on the issues raised by the petition, as noted in the Official Report of the Committee meeting on 13 December 2011.

The pressures on Scotland's wild land continue to grow. Recently it has become apparent that, in the absence of an updated policy position from SNH and the Scottish Government with respect to the status of wild land, local authorities are suggesting there is a question over how much weight to apply to wild land when considering planning applications for developments that impact on wild land. This is a backwards step. For example, see Highland Council Head of Planning and Building Standards report to councillors on the Dalnessie, Lairg, planning application. However, it is quite clear from National Planning Framework 2 and Scottish Planning Policy that wild land is and remains an asset of national importance, playing a critical role in helping the Scottish Government to deliver its objective of "creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth."

It is now two years since our petition was submitted and the Trust requests that the Committee seeks the views of the Scottish Government and Scottish Natural Heritage with respect to these issues.

There is a very real danger that time is running out for Scotland's wild land. We urge the Committee to bear in mind the comments made by Scottish Natural Heritage in its initial response to our petition that "the time available for existing approaches to prove their efficacy must be regarded as limited", and also that "there is a history, in the field of environmental protection, of acting decisively only when the resources in question are under extreme threat" (SNH response to PE1383, 2 February 2011).

We therefore look forward to the Committee exploring these issues with the Scottish Government and Scottish Natural Heritage as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely

Helen McDade
Head of Policy

cc by email to Clerk of the Committee petitions@scottish.parliament.uk
by post to Members of the Committee