



Public Petitions Clerks
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Tower House
Station Road
Pitlochry
Perthshire
PH16 5AN

Monday, 25 May 2015

Dear Ms Robinson,

Re PE 1556

The John Muir Trust strongly supports the petition from the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS) and the Scottish Council for National Parks (SCNP) to the Scottish Government asking the government to prepare and implement a strategy to designate more National Parks in Scotland. The Trust takes its inspiration from John Muir (1838-1914), the Scots-born founder of the modern conservation movement. Like Muir, the Trust believes in protecting wild land for its own sake – and because we believe wild places are essential for people and wildlife. Naturalist, explorer and writer John Muir was central to the creation of the world's first National Parks in 19th-century USA and is known as the 'Father of National Parks.' It is interesting to note, when considering potential economic benefits and disbenefits, how valuable the US National Parks designation is in attracting sustainable tourism from both US citizens and those who come from afar. America's National Park System generates more than four dollars in value to the public for every tax dollar invested by the Federal Government¹

There are currently 15 National Parks in the UK, including Snowdonia in Wales and the Lake District in England but Scotland has been relatively slow to realise the potential of designation. There are further areas of outstanding importance for landscape, recreation and biodiversity in Scotland worthy of National Park designation, coupled with evidence of strong public support for this at both national and local levels.

The seven potential national park areas which APRS and SCNP have proposed for further investigation all include a considerable element of wild land and so, if any of these were adopted as a National Park, we believe it would contribute to protecting and enhancing wild land. The John Muir Trust agrees with APRS and SCNP that designating a special area as a National Park would generate a high profile for the chosen areas, support their active management and protection, as well as encourage integrated planning and management by all public bodies, and lead to investment of additional national resources, helping both residents and visitors to enjoy the landscape whilst conserving it for future generations.

The protection of Scotland's wild land was the subject of a Trust petition submitted to the Scottish Parliament in 2011, helping to move forward government policy around wild land at that time and in 2014 the Scottish Government took a historic step forward with the adoption of the Wild Land Areas map and reference to the Wild Land areas in the new Scottish planning policy. However, that mapping, useful though it was, only addressed the potential impact of onshore wind development. The Trust argued, during the consultation, that protection of wild land should be approached holistically – as a natural heritage resource and asset rather than regarded only as a possible constraint. Granting National Park status to more of Scotland's wild land could help to redress this balance as the existing National Parks

have demonstrated to those beyond the environmental community just how valuable such an accolade can be.

In the background to their petition to the Scottish Parliament, APRS and SCNP highlight how Scotland's landscapes rank amongst the best in the world, including wild mountains, pristine rivers and lochs, ancient forests, stunning coastline and islands, all rich in wildlife and history. With landscapes of such quality it would be reasonable to expect to see a much greater proportion of them recognised, celebrated and protected through National Park status. Such an accolade is recognised internationally as the leading designation for places of the highest national importance for natural or cultural heritage, including landscape, wildlife and recreation. Visit Scotland, in their report for the 2013 Year of Natural Scotlandⁱⁱ highlight the value of scenic beauty (landscape) as the key motivator for tourist visits. We believe creating more National Parks will increase Scotland's appeal and bring even more tourists and revenue into our rural areas. If managed well (and there is no reason to believe this will not happen) this source of income is sustainable and unlike some other forms of economic activity in high value scenic areas (energy production for instance) does not degrade the environment.

The Trust is conscious of the need to consult with local communities and discuss their perception of protected area status. This would be a good opportunity to explore the benefits that might flow to those communities, drawing on the experience of our two existing National Parks.

The Trust would highlight this quote from Scottish Natural Heritage's submission to the Public Petitions Committee on PE1383 in 2011 -

"... given the intensity of current pressures, the time available for existing approaches to prove their efficacy must be regarded as limited ... 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 John Muir Trust petition PE1383 "Better protection for wild land" to the Scottish Parliament, February 2011).

Those threats have not been fully addressed (see <http://www.jmt.org/wla-34.asp> for specific examples). Moreover, the opportunities for Scotland to continue and enhance its role as one of the best natural heritage destinations in the world are in danger of slipping away if inaction continues.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Brooks
Chief Executive

ⁱ <http://www.npca.org/protecting-our-parks/park-funding/Park-Assets.html?referrer=https://www.google.co.uk/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.visitscotland.org/pdf/20121126%20Year%20Of%20Natural%20Insights%20Pres.pdf>