
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: **The Future of the Cairngorms Moorland Demonstration Sites**

Prepared by: **Nick Halfhide, Head of Strategic Policy and Programme Management**
Fiona Newcombe, Head of Land Management

Purpose

To seek Members' views on whether to continue investing in the two demonstration sites once the Cairngorms Moorland Project finishes this summer.

Recommendations

That the Board agrees not to invest further in either demonstration sites beyond the terms of the current moorland project.

Executive Summary

The CNPA inherited the Cairngorms Moorland Project from the Cairngorms Partnership in 2003. It is coming to an end this summer and there is an expectation among some sections of the land management community that we will continue to run and invest in the sites for at least another 5 years.

The paper examines options for our involvement in the two sites and recommends that we do not invest further once the current project is finished. Instead, we should focus on the wider programme of work on moorlands emerging from the Park Plan including training through the Land Based Business Training Project and improving public sector support to moorland managers.

THE FUTURE OF THE CAIRNGORMS MOORLAND DEMONSTRATION SITES - FOR DECISION

Introduction

1. The draft National Park Plan sets out our long-term aspirations for the condition, management and understanding of moorlands in the Park; and identifies actions relevant to moorlands under the 7 Priorities for Action over the next 5 years.
2. During the public consultation on the draft Park Plan, and over subsequent months, we will be working with partners to identify changes to these long-term aspirations, and refining a joint work programme for the next 5 years. This will include identifying the role of the CNPA alongside other partners.
3. At this stage, we expect this work to include:
 - a) working with partners to identify current public sector activity for uplands, and then prepare and implement a plan for integrating this existing support, and filling the gaps left;
 - b) training through the Land Based Business Training Project;
 - c) support to moorland managers to communicate the benefits of their work to a wider audience;
 - d) drawing together information and knowledge about moorland and montane management, and commissioning new information where necessary; and
 - e) strengthening links between the Cairngorms National Park and Scotland's Moorland Forum.
4. In the short term, the Cairngorms Moorland Project is coming to an end this summer. Inherited from the Cairngorms Partnership, and two-thirds funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, this project has developed two demonstration sites at Balnaboth and Blairfindy; and run a programme of activities to raise awareness and understanding of the value of moorlands.
5. Although the project is coming to its scheduled end, there is an expectation amongst some sections of the land management community that the CNPA will take a lead in continuing the demonstration moors for at least a further 5 years.
6. It is important for us to explore the value of continuing these sites, examining whether they offer opportunities to take forward the emerging work programme of the Park Plan.

Background to the Cairngorms Moorland Project

7. The project was initiated by the Cairngorms Partnership on the advice of the Cairngorms Moorland Forum – a grouping of moorland stakeholders including the Game Conservancy, Heather Trust, SNH, and British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC). The budget is about £550,000 over three years, principally

funded by HLF (67%), CNPA (20%) and SNH (10%). It employs a full-time project manager and two part-time (60%) liaison officers.

8. The project has three objectives:
 - a) To undertake and demonstrate good moorland management techniques on two representative sites in the Cairngorms Partnership area;
 - b) To provide incentives to land managers to manage their moorlands in a sustainable and effective way to preserve and enhance the integrity and conservation value of existing moorland in the area, by presenting the findings from the demonstration moor programme to the future National Park Authority and encouraging them to develop a management scheme for the area as a whole; and
 - c) To raise awareness of the environmental, social and economic importance of moorlands, and provide recreational and educational opportunities to help people, especially the young, to enjoy, understand and appreciate the Cairngorms moorlands.

9. Beyond the running costs of the project, most of the funds are being spent on stock reduction payments; site works, in particular fencing to assist stock management; and site monitoring, both an initial baseline and then on-going measurements. A breakdown of the main costs is at Annex 1.

Discussion

10. The Park's moorlands are nationally and internationally important. The product of many centuries of management for field sports and stock, they are the dominant land use in the Park, and clearly contribute to its "special qualities". It is also clear that whilst many are well managed already, moorlands in general could contribute more to the 4 aims of the Park. The discussions through the Park Plan will give us a clearer understanding of how best to do this, and which elements are immediate priorities.

11. At a site specific level, both demonstration moors have begun to show the improvements you can make if land managers adopt certain regimes. Although it is too soon to quantify these changes, it appears that there is already some heather regeneration, improved stock quality, and other wildlife improvements. Some of the changes are the result of better co-ordination between keepers, farmers, owners and shooting tenants. But the single biggest driver is economic, in this case, paying for stock reductions, new fencing, extra burning and keeping. What these two moors demonstrate is how to go about achieving these benefits - what it has costed in direct payments and time.

12. However, we have to question whether continued investment in one or both of these two demonstration sites represents good value for money.

13. The argument for continued investment is that we need "model" moorlands that openly show what can be achieved on low performing moors if all the ingredients of

stock management, keeping, burning etc are done in the right way. They may be expensive but that is the cost of inspiring others, and is information that we need if we are to attract investors, whether public subsidy or private money, into moorland management. Overall these sites will need to be run for at least 8 years to show sufficient change.

14. The counter argument is that whilst these models are useful, we would have greater impact in improving the contribution of moorlands to the aims of the Park through investing our limited resources in a wider range of activities. In other words, other forms of intervention in the form of training, advice, schemes and policy influence would be a better use of our limited resources.
15. It is clear that we do not have the resources to do both effectively. We have discussed different funding possibilities with SNH and the Scottish Executive in particular, but there is no obvious easy route to continue the sites without major input from ourselves. The way forward, therefore, boils down to whether we think that it is more important to focus our energy, time and money on continuing with one or both of these two sites as model "restoration" moors; or whether we should focus on achieving benefits more widely for moorlands through the activities emerging from the Park Plan.

Options

16. There are 4 main options:
 - a) We continue to invest in both sites ensuring that the current levels of stock management, keeping and burning are maintained; and that the impact of this work is well monitored.
 - b) We continue to invest in just one of the sites.
 - c) We continue to invest in one or both sites in the expectation that our investment could be substituted within the next 2 years by funds under the new Rural Development Fund.
 - d) We discontinue our investment and focus on delivering a wider package of benefits.
17. Option 1 values the restoration model and believes that continuing to invest in these two sites is important. Based on the figures for the existing project, it would cost between £90-120,000 per year. Our total allocation for work on moorlands, including the activities emerging from the Park Plan, is approximately £43,000 in 06/07 and £30,000 in 07/08. There are no immediate offers of funding to make up the shortfall, other than a contribution from SNH towards monitoring.
18. Option 2 would reduce the annual cost to between £45-60,000 per year, more in line with our existing allocations. Partners in the project have expressed a clear preference to continue at Balnaboth over Blairfindy should a choice be necessary.
19. Option 3 is a compromise position that specifically places an end point on our financial involvement in the hope that changes to mainstream funds, either through

the Rural Development Programme or a research grant, would relieve us of this commitment. It gives us more time to find a solution.

20. Option 4 would allow us to invest our limited resources in other moorland-related work as outlined above at paragraph 3.

Recommendation

21. Although we did not instigate the original project and our financial commitment to this area of work remains constant, there is a clear expectation among many of the partners involved that we will find a solution that enable us both to continue with the site specific work on the demonstration moors and take a lead on a range of other moorland-related work as emerging through the Park Plan.
22. This is not a realistic position given our limited cash and staff time. The arguments come down to a straight decision between focusing our moorland energy on one or both sites, or on a wider programme of work. In our view, the latter is preferable and more in line with the actions emerging from the Park Plan.
23. **The Board is recommended to agree not to invest further in either demonstration sites beyond the terms of the current moorland project.**

Consultation

24. We have sought advice on the future of the demonstration sites with individual partners as well as collectively with the Integrated Land Management Advisory Forum and a special meeting of moorland interests. Strong views were expressed in favour of continuing at least with one moor. At the same though, partners considered that broader communication of the value and management needs of moorlands to a wide audience was their top priority.
25. We have discussed different funding and operational routes for continuing the demonstration sites with SNH and the Scottish Executive.

Policy Context

26. All 4 options above are consistent with our Corporate Plan and the draft Park Plan. However, we consider that Option 4 is the most appropriate use of our resources.

Implications

Financial Implications

27. These are addressed in the discussion above.

Presentational Implications

28. We have inherited a leadership role for these two demonstration sites. We will be criticised if we stop them and therefore need to explain clearly that we consider our efforts on moorlands should be directed at a wider programme of activities that have the potential to benefit all moorlands and their managers.
29. Further, we are sending our clear messages that we are able to take difficult decisions; prioritise our own limited resources; and lead others to prioritise theirs.

Implications for Stakeholders

30. In the short term, the main implications are for the land managers on the two demonstration sites as these come to an end.
31. In the medium term, stopping our investment in the two demonstration sites will release more of our resources for a wider programme of work which will benefit a range of moorland stakeholders.

Next Steps

32. We will continue to manage the final months of the Cairngorms Moorland Project and work closely with our partners to develop the moorland actions within the Park Plan.
33. We plan to bring more detailed proposals to the Board on future moorland work later in the year.

Nick Halfhide

Fiona Newcombe

April 2006

nickhalfhide@cairngorms.co.uk

fionanewcombe@cairngorms.co.uk

Breakdown on main costs for Cairngorms Moorland Project over three years

Heading	Item	Cost	%
Staff	Project Manager	97,250	18
	Interpretation Officers	89,000	16
Demo Moors	Site works, eg fencing	74,300	13
	Stock reduction payments	105,300	19
	Balnaboth keeper	20,100	4
	Site monitoring	95,000	17
	Professional advice	10,200	2
	VAT	28,000	5
Interpretation	Display boards	9,400	2
	Publicity materials	4,250	1
	Open days	4,000	1
Evaluation	Mid-term evaluation	12,700	2
Total		549,500	100