
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: Supporting Sustainable Deer Management: An Update

Prepared by: Colin McClean, Land Management Officer

Purpose

To update the Board on the CNPA's involvement in supporting sustainable deer management.

Executive Summary

This information paper updates the Board on four projects which seek to support sustainable deer management through the reduction of deer impacts on the environment, the development of inclusive deer management planning, the development of deer based wildlife tourism and venison promotion.

SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE DEER MANAGEMENT: AN UPDATE – FOR INFORMATION

Introduction

1. Supporting sustainable deer management is a Priority for Action within the National Park plan. This paper seeks to update the Board about work being carried out by CNPA and partners on four projects which seek to support sustainable deer management.

Joint working within the Cairngorms National Park

2. Joint working is the process involving DCS, SNH, FCS and SGRPID which aims to ensure designated sites are in optimum ecological condition. The achievement of optimum condition often involves habitat enhancement using incentives or regulation. Joint working is probably the single most important process with regard to the delivery of the National Park plan Priority for Actions of Conserving and Enhancing Biodiversity and Supporting Sustainable Deer Management. 39% of the CNP is designated as SAC, SPA and SSSI and some sites are in unfavourable ecological condition due to deer grazing, browsing and trampling. It is a national priority to have designated sites in favourable condition and a National Park plan Priority for Action to conserve and enhance our designated sites. Currently some 15 sites within the Park are the subject of work by agencies to enhance ecological condition using incentives and regulation. These sites include the Cairngorms SAC which covers the core of the Cairngorms, Caenlochan, Glenfeshie, Upper Deeside and the Drumochter Hills. Annex 1 contains information of work being carried out on these sites. Deer movement ensures that deer management on these sites will have impacts on deer populations across a much wider area than the sites themselves. CNPA is involved in discussions with agencies on how to enhance sites and we proactively encourage landowners to use incentives within the SRDP. We have also collected data to assess the socio economic impacts of deer reductions on one designated site.

Developing an inclusive deer management planning process

3. Sustainable deer management is difficult to define succinctly. However measures of conflict are an important aspect of sustainability. The reduction of conflict between interest groups, which has often surrounded deer management, is an objective for CNPA. The Cairngorm Deer Advisory Group (CDAG) was established in 2006 to promote understanding and communication between deer interests. CDAG members are drawn from Deer Management Groups (DMGs), agencies, NGOs and communities and there is an independent Chair.

CDAG focuses on the strategic issues surrounding deer management with operational issues being very much the remit of local DMGs. CNPA provides a secretariat for CDAG and seeks to stimulate CDAG thinking. In January 2008 CDAG agreed that CNPA should lead on developing an inclusive deer management planning process and in June 2008 CDAG agreed a draft planning process based on four stages.

4. The agreed four stage process involves a) Mapping the deer densities desired by landowners at the scale of landowner decision making. Deer densities required to meet public objectives for designated sites would also be mapped. b) These mapped desired deer densities would be used as the basis for discussion with a range of interests. Interests would be asked to indicate constraints and opportunities. Constraints could include damage to biodiversity outwith designated sites. Opportunities could include community aspirations for deer viewing. Different interests could comment at whatever scale they felt appropriate. c) Options for reconciling constraint issues and maximising opportunities can then be discussed. d) Finally land management decisions can then be explained in the light of this discussion.
5. CDAG also agreed that the 4 stage deer management planning process should incorporate habitat monitoring throughout the Park and should link to other relevant CNPA strategies and frameworks. We are currently working on the best means of data collection from landowners.

Developing a deer viewing network

6. Another element of supporting sustainable deer management involves maximising the socio economic value of deer so that deer generate income and support jobs. The value of deer stalking and venison is well established, but deer probably also have a socio economic value as a wildlife viewing resource. CNPA organised a pilot public deer viewing event in June 2007 in partnership with Lynaberack Estate and Highland Council ranger service. This pilot established that there was a potential market for deer viewing. In January 2008 CDAG invited Wild Scotland, the wildlife and nature tourism business operators association, to discuss the opportunities for wildlife tourism on estates within the Park. Following this discussion, CNPA and Wild Scotland arranged a workshop for land managers and wildlife tourism operators to further consider opportunities. Three wildlife tourism businesses presented case studies and subsequently six estates expressed interest in developing wildlife-watching opportunities.

7. Unfortunately a subsequent bid to Cairngorms Leader to develop a network of wildlife viewing facilities on estates failed. The bid was based on estates using deer as an introduction to wider biodiversity and land management. Costs were considered too high, the network too small and the bid was dis-proportionally weighted to Atholl Estates, currently outwith the Park. We will now explore further funding options to enable estates to develop deer viewing facilities.

Venison promotion in schools

8. Venison is an important element of the socio economic value of deer. CNPA are currently organising a venison promotion event in two Strathspey primary schools in partnership with the Deer Commission for Scotland, Highland Council and Kinveachy Estate. This event will increase understanding amongst local children about deer, their management and the value of venison as well as the importance of healthy, local food. It will involve a venison cookery class in the school followed by a visit to Kinveachy to discuss deer management in the forest and venison in the larder. There will be local press involvement and appropriate messages about the value of venison. A wider aim of this project is to encourage Councils outwith Highland to include venison on school dinner menus.

Colin McClean
4th August 2008

colinmcclean@cairngorms.co.uk

Annex 1

Update on Joint Working Sites

Caenlochan

1. Under the Section 7 agreement the deer population within the Caenlochan Section 7 has decreased markedly but is still slightly higher than the agreed target. Estates have agreed target culls and are working to achieve the target population by March 2009. Site condition monitoring, SCM, has been carried out over the wider Caenlochan SAC and some features are in unfavourable condition. SCM results and implications are being discussed with owners.

Cairngorms SAC

2. The Cairngorms SAC has entered the Joint Working programme. SCM has identified habitats which are in unfavourable condition. These include Caledonian pinewoods, blanket bog, alpine and sub-alpine heaths, upland fen and dry heath. Agencies plan to discuss proposals for future monitoring with owners.

Drumochter Hills SAC

3. Agencies met with owners in June 2007 to discuss and agree the way forward with the Drumochter Hills SAC.
4. Agencies propose to carry out repeat habitat monitoring in 3 to 5 years from the baseline survey in 2006 (2009 – 2011).
5. Financial incentives are available through SRDP for managers to manage deer to create the conditions that would enable key habitats to move towards or into favourable condition.

Glenfeshie

6. Surveys in 2007 and 2008 continue to show significant progress in tree seedling growth in Glenfeshie. Agencies are satisfied that current management will considerably enhance Caledonian pinewood within Glenfeshie. The current Section 7 Agreement expires in 2010 and agencies are discussing with the estate the best ways of maintaining this enhancement for the remaining period of the agreement and beyond.

Kinveachy SAC

7. Data from repeat surveys demonstrates clear progress towards enhancement in the condition of Caledonian pinewood habitat at the site. This progress is happening well ahead of the expected timescale.

Monadhliaths SAC

8. Agencies last met with owners in May 2006 to discuss the way forward with the Monadhliath SAC. No agreement was reached at that stage. Agencies propose to carry out repeat habitat monitoring in 3 to 5 years from the baseline survey in 2006. Financial incentives through the SRDP are available to manage deer to create the conditions that would enable blanket bog habitats to move towards or into favourable condition.

Upper Deeside

9. Agencies carried out an assessment of pinewood condition at Ballochbuie in August/ September 2006. Results showed pinewoods were not in favourable condition. Pinewoods at Mar Lodge were not included in the 2006 assessment but were surveyed in 2007. Blaeberry monitoring was carried out throughout upper and mid Deeside in summer 2007 to assess the suitability of blaeberry as capercaillie brood habitat. Some areas were found to be grazed too short to be in suitable condition for capercaillie. Agencies are discussing solutions with estates to all these issues. Solutions will include use of the "capercaillie package" within SRDP.