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**CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM**

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**Title:** Dogs in the Outdoors: programme of work 2011-12

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**Purpose** The purpose of this paper is to bring the Forum up to date with the work that the Cairngorms National Park Authority has been undertaking on outdoor access with dogs over the past 18 months.

**Advice Sought**

Forum members are invited to endorse the direction of the campaign, and give feedback and suggestions.

**Background**

1. As part of its role in publicising and promoting the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, the CNPA early on identified that dogs in the countryside was a topical and controversial issue affecting *local* people and places, and also *nationally* designated sites and land managers. Dogs have a long association with humans and are widely regarded as being a 'good thing'. However problems associated with irresponsible dog ownership - from dog fouling in public places to interference with farming and agricultural practices to disturbance to wildlife - are widely acknowledged and we felt there was merit in having a strand of work dedicated to addressing the issues.
2. In October 2009 the CNPA Board approved a plan for an events and publicity campaign to raise awareness amongst the general public about responsible dog ownership and to influence behaviour to ensure greater compliance with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code for the benefit of land managers, other recreation users and conservation interests. The campaign has been based around three key messages about dogs relating to farming; natural heritage and dogs in public open spaces.
3. Following a reminder of what the Code say about access with dogs, the paper sets out different projects and aspects of work that have been undertaken to achieve this end.

**Scottish Outdoor Access Code – a reminder of the position**

4. The Code states that dogs should be kept under "proper control" (page 42, para 3.53). The key points are summarised as such:
  - Never let your dog worry or attack livestock
  - Do not take your dog into fields where there are lambs, calves or other young animals

- Do not take your dog into fields of vegetables or fruit unless you are on a clear path such as a core path or right of way
- If you go into a field of farm animals, keep as far as possible from the animals and keep your dog on a short lead or under close control
- If cattle react aggressively and move towards you, keep calm, let the dog go and take the shortest, safest route out of the field
- During bird breeding season (usually April to July) keep your dog under close control or on a short lead in areas such as moorland, forests, grassland, loch shores and the seashore

*“Close control” means that the dog is able to respond to your commands and is kept close at heel.”*

5. Wording does exist within the Code that allows for a firmer stance to be taken. Page 106 of the Code on Nature Reserves and other Conservation Areas states that:

“Access rights extend to these places but remember that they are carefully managed for nature conservation and to safeguard rare animals and plants. Take care to avoid damaging the site or disturbing its wildlife, or interfering with its management or enjoyment by others. Depending on your activity, you might be requested to follow a specific route or to avoid exercising access rights in a specific area: following such local guidance can help to safeguard the natural heritage of these areas.”

## **Projects**

### **A. Commissioned report – People and Dogs in the Outdoors**

6. Last November the CNPA with support from Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) commissioned a report from Stephen Jenkinson, an Access and Countryside consultant with a particular specialism in canine issues. The two main objectives of the review were to gain a greater understanding of the motivations of dog owners in relation to access taking and to gain an understanding of the opportunities to influence dog owner behaviour in protected areas.
7. The CNPA are currently developing a guidance note from this piece of work, summarising the main points and putting it within the context of the Cairngorms National Park – a place where multiple environmental and ecological designations apply. The National Access Forum has also taken an interest and there is potential for this report to have a strong influence at a national level. SNH are currently drafting a paper for the NAF on Managing Access to Safeguard Ground Nesting Birds which has drawn on Stephens’ work and shows a good level of fit with the CNPA commissioned report.

### **B. National Nature Reserve Managers subgroup**

8. Following on from a workshop for NNR Managers in April 2011, Fran Potheary of the Outdoor Access team joined a sub group of the Cairngorms National Nature Reserve Managers and SNH staff in taking forward work on promoting responsible dog access. The role of the group is to provide guidance to NNR managers (and others managing sites containing sensitive species) on accommodating dog access without adverse impact on the natural heritage. The group is looking to develop best practice guidance and for

project opportunities which will demonstrate best practice. There is also a role for the group in considering Cairngorms-wide spatial planning for dogs and access.

### **C. Local initiatives – Grantown Green Dog Walkers**

9. In March 2011 Anagach Woods Trust (AWT) in conjunction with Highland Council and the CNPA launched a Green Dog Walkers Scheme for Grantown, primarily focused around Anagach Woods. Over the two day launch, a total of 20 people ‘signed the pledge’ to pick up after their dogs and promote the practice amongst other users of the woods. Feedback in the weeks subsequent to the event indicated that people thought the woods were cleaner as a result though there is recognition that a continuous reminder to people is necessary. Whilst the GDWS met with widespread support, the question of dog access and capercaillie in Anagach Woods has proved more contentious and the Trust and members of the community – dog walkers in particular – have some work to do to find common ground. The CNPA access team have offered support to AWT in taking this forward.

### **D. Events and training**

10. The CNPA have supported annual dog events throughout the National Park organised and run by Rangers. These include the Pitlochry Super Dog event April 2011 and the Glenmore Top Dogs Day Out July 2011.
11. We have also organised an event for land managers November 2010 which focused on practical ways of managing visitors on land, delivered by Stephen Jenkinson and supported by the Scottish Land and Estate (formerly SRPBA). This was a sister event to one organised in Glen Tanar (May 2010) which was aimed at dog owners and focused on responsible countryside access.

### **E. Information for visitors with dogs**

12. A project in its early stages is the development of a web page for visitors to the National Park with dogs. This idea came from a web page on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park website entitled “Holidays with your Best Friend” <http://www.visitpembrokeshire.com/content.asp?nav=52>. It presents an open and welcoming face to dog owners and makes information readily to hand to plan their visit to the National Park with a dog. A similar web page for the CNP could cover many aspects of visits – dog friendly accommodation, shops, attractions and eateries; dog related services such as vets, poo bag outlets etc; an overview of the habitats of the Park; as well as signposting to the best walks; and tips on responsible behaviour etc. We are currently looking at gathering information and considering the most appropriate web host.

### **F. Resources for CNPA staff, rangers and land managers**

13. The eye catching capercaillie, sheep and dog Inca signs were commissioned and distributed to Balmoral, Abernethy, Cairngorm Mountain and Glen Tanar and have met with approval. Instant Signmaker has proved its worth in us being able to develop signage for land managers specially addressing their needs e.g. Cairngorms Mountain and the Reindeer Centre. Event banners displaying key points from the Code are currently

being developed for use at larger events such as dog shows, farmers markets, highland games etc.

14. Also under development is the Tread Lightly leaflet and poster which several Ranger Services and estates have expressed a strong interest in. This will focus on **key** generic responsible behaviour messages to do with fires, litter, camping, toileting, wildlife and dogs.

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