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# CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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## FOR DECISION

**Title: MOORLAND MANAGEMENT**

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### **Purpose**

This paper addresses strategic issues relating to moorland management in the context of delivering the National Park Partnership Plan and aims of the National Park. The Board is asked to consider the policy and delivery implications for CNPA as a first step to guide deployment of CNPA resources and partnership working on this topic.

### **Recommendations**

#### **That the Board:**

- a) Considers the issues and desired outcomes;**
- b) Agrees the role of CNPA in working to improve the integration of moorland management with wider land use objectives;**
- c) Supports the development of a partnership initiative with landowners to deliver and demonstrate integrated moorland management.**

## MOORLAND MANAGEMENT - FOR DECISION

### Strategic Context

1. Moorland management is a significant land use in the National Park, extending to approximately 44% of land cover, shaping much of the landscape. Much of it is managed for the primary aim of producing sufficient populations of red grouse and/or red deer for sport shooting. Its management for sporting purposes is a strong influence on landscape, wildness, habitat, species and other land management, for example hill livestock, peatland, woodland and water management. Annex A shows a map of moorland habitat in the Cairngorms.

Currently moorland management is a significant component of the total employment figures attributed to estates. In total estates comprise approximately 9% of total employment in the Park according to the 2013 landowners survey.

The survey records the dominant form of land use as managed moorland (189,552ha), followed by rough grazing (66,678ha), conservation (35,165ha) commercial forestry (28,390ha) and native woodlands (19,384ha).

The most prevalent objectives of 'high importance' were sporting land uses (27), agriculture (23), conservation (20) and forestry (19), followed by residential property (17), tourism and leisure (16) access and interpretation (10) and renewables (8).

Our current policy direction expects to see moorland management, including management for grouse and deer, continue to be part of the land use mix in the Cairngorms. However there are questions emerging about the balance and intensity of moorland management in relation to wider land use objectives that CNPA should address with our partners.

2. The National Park Partnership Plan sets a clear framework for land use policy focused on:
  - a) Long term and landscape scale planning;
  - b) Delivering multiple benefits;
  - c) Habitat enhancement and connectivity;
  - d) Collaboration at a landscape scale;
  - e) Support for delivery of public benefits underpinned by sound economic businesses.
  
3. The way in which moorland management is carried out has a significant influence on delivering a range of National Park Partnership Plan and Cairngorms Nature outcomes and priorities including:

Plan ref	Policy direction
NP Partnership Plan outcomes	4. the quality and connectivity of habitats is enhanced
	5. the species for which the Park is most important are in better conservation status
	6. the special landscape qualities, including wildness, are conserved and enhanced

NP Policy Priorities	1.1 Support the diversification of existing land-based businesses
	2.2 Enhance the resilience of habitats, species and land use to climate change
	2.4 Conserve and enhance habitat quality and connectivity
	2.5 Conserve and enhance the species for which the Cairngorms National Park is most important
	2.6 Support collaboration across ownership boundaries and between interests to reduce conflicts in species and wildlife management
Cairngorms Nature Actions	3.1. Restore and enhance blanket bog habitats
	3.2 Montane scrub
	3.3 Restore the full community of raptor species

## **Current Issues**

4. Moorland is an important habitat in the matrix of land use in the Cairngorms and sporting land use is expected to remain part of the land use mix. A well-managed moorland can bring associated social, environmental and economic benefits. The key strategic consideration is the balance of land use objectives and the extent to which the intensity of grouse management practices in particular is affecting long term sustainability and delivery of National Park Partnership outcomes.

### ***Intensity of management***

5. In recent years there has been an increase in the promotion of techniques designed to maximise production of red grouse on moorland. Whilst this has led to significant increases in the game bags in some places there are concerns about the single-species focus of this management and negative impacts on other species and habitats in the National Park. A central question relates to the cumulative effects at a landscape scale of an increase in intensity of management for grouse in areas characterised by a high degree of wildness.
6. Both the benefits and the concerns about cumulative effects of moorland management are discussed below:

### ***Habitat management***

7. In ecological terms the great majority of the moorland habitat in the Cairngorms National Park is a habitat artificially suppressed by burning and grazing. This management creates the ideal conditions for red grouse and a number of other species such as mountain hare and curlew, but prevents succession into other beneficial habitat including, montane scrub and woodland important for e.g. black grouse and capercaillie.
8. In area terms, moorland covers more than twice the area of woodland in the National Park. Moorland and montane habitats combined constitute an open, upland landscape that covers approximately 70% of the Park. On a National Park scale there is considerable scope to increase habitat diversity in strategic locations and for moorland management to encourage habitat succession into important scrub and

woodland ecosystems as part of a diverse matrix of habitat. This is already happening in some areas and should continue to be encouraged. Indeed to achieve Cairngorms Nature targets we would anticipate some reduction in overall proportion of moorland without the loss of the important moorland habitat networks.

9. Controlled muirburn reduces the fuel load and therefore can reduce the likelihood of the spread of wildfire. Expertise and equipment held by the keeping community has been a crucial asset in the control of wildfires in the NP. Poorly managed muirburn can lead to destruction or restriction of rare habitat and species (such as juniper, willow scrub and woodland), carbon losses/emissions, impacts on water quality and highly damaging wildfires. There are statutory controls on muirburn but currently some of the most important habitat protection measures are subject only to voluntary best practice guidelines and principles in e.g. the Muirburn Code, supplementary guidelines and Principles of Moorland Management. These are all currently under review.
10. Management of grazing/browsing on moorland by domestic sheep, wild deer and mountain hare has in recent years become heavily influenced by objectives for the control of tick. Consequently deer have been entirely excluded from some areas using fencing (discussed further below).
11. The importance of peatlands as carbon stores and habitat beneficial for a wide range of species including red grouse has become increasingly recognised in recent years. Peatland restoration projects are taking place in partnership with moorland managers in a number of locations in the National Park. Prior to their importance being more fully understood, peatlands have in the past been extensively drained, there is need to continue to encourage restoration and positive management for peatland and to prevent drainage.
12. **Desired outcome in CNP:** Effective soil and peatland management; greater habitat diversity including increased area of woodland and montane scrub in appropriate locations.
13. **Focus of CNPA role:** working with Moorland Forum to review best practice and with moorland managers to facilitate collaborative action, encouraging increased habitat diversity, montane scrub and woodland expansion (including via SRDP).

#### **Legal and illegal predator control**

14. Legal predator control helps to increase the productivity of ground nesting birds and mammals. Many of these species are protected and in significant need of conservation e.g. capercaillie, black grouse, upland waders, water-vole and wildcat. The benefits of legal predator control are significant, but illegal persecution of

protected species has had a very damaging impact not only on conservation objectives, but on public understanding of legal control.

15. There is an unfortunate record of illegal raptor persecution in and around the National Park, which risks undermining the Park's reputation as a well managed place for nature and wildlife tourism. We have an opportunity, supported by the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform and the Partnership Against Wildlife Crime, to renew efforts to eliminate any illegal activity and work with land managers to deliver positive management for raptor species.
16. **Desired outcome in CNP:** No incidences of wildlife crime in the National Park and positive management underway to deliver raptor populations appropriate to the landscape.
17. **Focus of CNPA role:** working with estates, the Moorland Forum, Wildlife Estates Scotland and Partnerships Against Wildlife Crime to increase understanding of predation, eliminate illegal raptor persecution and deliver positive management for raptors.

### **Deer and mountain hares**

18. Because of the threat of disease associated with ticks, deer have in a number of areas been entirely fenced out or culled from some moors. This can assist habitat enhancement, but deer are a part of upland ecology and restricting the free movement of deer over extensive areas can result in deer welfare issues and knock on management issues. It is important therefore that fencing out deer, for any management objective, is not undertaken without full consideration of the impacts on neighbouring land and on the species welfare. There have been instances in the National Park of deer fences being erected without discussion with neighbouring estates or deer management groups.
19. Grouse moor management enhances habitat for mountain hares potentially leading to high numbers. Hares have some degree of protection, but they can be legally controlled. They are predominantly controlled on many moors to reduce tick and in some cases to protect trees. There is a risk that hare control is excessive and will lead to a perception that the hare population is at risk in the absence of effective monitoring.
20. **Desired outcome in CNP:** appropriate grazing levels to deliver public interest objectives; integration of deer and grouse management planning; sustainable mountain hare populations.
21. **Focus of CNPA role:** working with deer management groups and SNH to promote the Association of Deer Management Groups benchmark for deer management and

SNH's public interest assessment to ensure deer are managed collectively and in the public interest; working with land managers to ensure that deer and mountain hare management is integrated with other land use objectives.

### **Hill tracks**

22. Hill tracks increase accessibility to remote areas for deer and livestock management, wildfire control and recreation; hence they bring some benefits but a proliferation of new tracks, particularly associated with an intensification of grouse management, and their cumulative impacts have a very significant effect on landscape, wildness, habitat and the recreation experience.
23. **Desired outcome in CNP:** Reduction in extent of new hill tracks, reduction in impacts on landscape, wildness, habitat and recreation experience.
24. **Focus of CNPA role:** working with Scottish Government and our partners to implement the new system of prior notification for hill tracks; providing practical advice and guidance for land managers.

### **Fencing**

25. The impact of ticks, bringing diseases such as louping ill to red grouse has led to a significant increase in the use of fencing on moorland in the National Park in recent years. Stock fencing is used to control the movement of sheep which are being used to 'mop' up ticks. Deer fencing or dual stock/electric fencing is used to keep tick-carrying-deer off the moor. Whilst fencing can be beneficial in assisting habitat enhancement and can be a short-term measure, there are also concerns about cumulative impacts on habitat, deer welfare, access and sensitive upland landscapes.
26. There is a significant risk that deer fenced out on some moors only exacerbates habitat management problems elsewhere. Inappropriately designed and located fencing to manage livestock and deer, just as fencing for other objectives, can impact negatively on the landscape and ability for people to access upland areas. There are also potential welfare issues for deer accessing shelter in winter and bird-strike impacts on birds, which all need to be considered. In the majority of cases land managers do successfully work with neighbours and agencies to consider negative impacts, in some cases they do not.
27. **Desired outcome in CNP:** minimise use of fencing; liaison with CNPA in planning new fencing; compliance with access guidance and best practice.
28. **Focus of CNPA role:** working with estates alongside SNH and Deer Management Groups to help ensure that new fences do not cause avoidable negative impacts.

### **Landscape**

29. Moorland management maintains an open landscape and a strong sense of 'the uplands', greatly valued by many people. The regular patterns of muirburn and heather blooms are a highly distinctive 'cultural landscape' in this part of Scotland. Yet to some they create an artificial character to the uplands which detracts from the sense of wildness. This is particularly apparent where there are extensive hill tracks and fencing, with very regular patterns of muirburn and mounding for grit.
30. **Desired outcome in CNP:** retention and enhancement of wildness characteristics.
31. **Focus of CNPA role:** working with estates to pursue opportunities for landscape and habitat enhancement where the impacts of fencing, hill tracks are minimised, open landscape retained and habitat diversity improved in strategic locations.

### **Local economy and culture**

32. Moorland and its management is a significant aspect of the local economy and culture for many people living in the National Park. The fact that estates invest heavily in moorland management is clearly demonstrated in the landowners' survey carried out in 2013. This means jobs in sometimes remote locations. Investment in moorland management is a personal choice often driven by a range of external social and economic motivations. Changes to any model of land use carries risks and uncertainties about how alternatives are funded, particularly for individual businesses. Addressing long term economic viability and continued employment opportunities is therefore an integral part of our land use policy.
33. **Desired outcome:** Viable, resilient and diversified land management businesses with investment in public interest outcomes.
34. **Focus of CNPA role:** working with land managers to explore new opportunities for income, combining the value of sport with a high quality environment, maintaining employment and investment to deliver public interest outcomes.

### **Partnership Working**

35. We have discussed these issues with land owners over the last six months, including a round table discussion at our regular land owners meeting and subsequent moorland site visit. The land owners meeting resulted in a small sub group to explore these issues further. We are also working closely with SNH which is carrying out a Scientific Advisory Committee review of evidence on sustainable moorland management. Cairngorms Nature established a raptor sub-group to propose practical action to deliver positive management for raptors.
36. This partnership progress will inform the agenda for a meeting the Minister for Environment will attend on raptor persecution in the Park, scheduled to take place in January 2015.

37. A partnership approach to addressing these issues is critical. These are topics which at a national level are sometimes characterised by conflicting objectives, debates about evidence and lack of trust amongst parties. Working with a very practical focus at a National Park scale, we have an opportunity to work with all relevant parties to progress positive outcomes on the ground.
38. We are in the early stages of working with a group of landowners to scope a partnership initiative on sustainable moorland management. We have an opportunity to develop an initiative that focuses on practical actions:
- a) To demonstrate best practice in moorland management;
  - b) To recognise and address public concerns about perceived increases in intensity in grouse management and balance with other objectives;
  - c) To deliver enhanced conservation management for habitat and species diversity;
  - d) To engage people in understanding land management and what is delivered.
32. Key elements of the initiative are likely to include:
- a) Agreement on key principles, collaboration and ways of working
  - b) Delivering enhanced management on the ground for a range of Cairngorms Nature targets including peatland, heathland, woodland and raptors.

### **Strategic Risk Management**

<b>Risks to Delivery:</b>	
<b>Risk</b>	<b>Risk management</b>
Insufficient financial resources to fund management action	Seek ways to minimise financial costs and obtain partnership funding
Insufficient staff resources to work with land managers and communities	Prioritise staffing resources accordingly and pool efforts with partners
Misperceptions about CNPA's intention to work in partnership to support positive action for both moorland and wider habitats.	Ensure communications are clear

### **Implications**

#### **Resources**

33. This is a long term area of work for CNPA to engage in, which underpins delivery of many outcomes across all three themes of the Partnership Plan.
34. CNPA's role in resource terms is staff time to develop partnerships, advise and explore external funding opportunities. The draft 2015-18 Corporate Plan anticipates this work being a priority for staff time rather than direct budget allocation.

#### **Stakeholder relations**

35. This is a complex, sometimes contested and controversial area of work to address. CNPA's role is to engage with all parties and maintain a clear, practical focus on

delivering outcomes on the ground. Regular and open communication will be key to progress. Our continued good working relationships with estates and moorland managers, with open discussion of issues of mutual concern is critical to success.

### **Success Measures**

- a) A partnership initiative in place with a group of estates collaborating to deliver moorland management integrated with other habitat and species targets;
- b) Progress to Cairngorms Nature habitat and species targets;

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## Supporting Information

### ***Cairngorms Nature 50 year vision for moorlands:***

“Moorlands have structural diversity and link habitat together sympathetically. A natural transition from woodland to montane scrub to upland heath is developing throughout the National Park. Raptor persecution ended decades ago and a full complement of native raptors lives and breeds across the National Park. Productive grouse moors and high quality stalking remains a mainstay of life, contributing environmentally, economically and socially. Most of the blanket bog is in favourable condition, retains water and acts as a carbon sink. The contributions it makes to ecosystem services are widely recognised.”

### ***CNPA's current involvement in moorland management***

- 1. Moorland Forum** – CNPA is a member and regular attendee of the moorland forum. Through the forum we are working with SNH to develop proposals for a new *Good Practice Moorland Management Manual*, updating one of its early publications (*Principles of Moorland Management 2003*). This is likely to follow the model of the successful *Wild Deer Best Practice Guidance*, and draw heavily on experience gained from that.
- 2. Wildlife Estates Scotland** – CNPA has supported the development of this initiative from the start, with its pilot phase in the Cairngorms. WES promotes and recognises good practice in sporting management. We actively promote and offer help to encourage estates to participate.
- 3. Training** – CNPA runs ‘best practice’ training on relevant subjects, including hill-tracks, heather management, habitat monitoring, peatland restoration, montane scrub restoration.
- 4. Partnership Against Wildlife Crime** – CNPA has been a member of regional PAW initiatives for several years. More recently we have joined the national PAW raptor group, specifically to take forward further action to tackle raptor persecution and promote positive management for raptors in the Park.
- 5. Deer management** – Through CDAG and our direct work with Deer Management Groups we support effective deer management and help address conflicts/tensions between deer management objectives.

### ***Examples of current national moorland/raptor management initiatives relevant to the CNP:***

## POLICY & LEGISLATION

- Moorland Forum review of Principles of Moorland Management
- Moorland Forum Understanding Predation project
- Review of sustainable moorland management being led by SNH Scientific Advisory Committee, with evidence sessions taking place in December 2014.
- Review of ‘General licences 1, 2 & 3’ led by SNH.

- DEFRA proposed 6 point plan for Hen Harriers in England including 'brood management'.

#### SPECIES SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT

- Sea Eagle reintroductions in Aberdeenshire, with evidence of potential breeding imminent in CNP
- Sea Eagle Management Scheme – Administered by SNH, currently being reviewed and set to restart in 2015.
- Hen Harrier LIFE, major 5 year project led by RSPB – wide ranging UK wide initiative with potential focus on two HH SPAs in CNP.
- Hen Harrier Diversionary feeding trialled at Langholm Moor and since successfully trialled at Glen Tanar Estate

#### RAPTOR RESEARCH AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme led by BTO
- Raptortrack, using GPS transmitters on CNP raptors
- "Heads up for Harriers" initiative led by PAW Scotland – encouraging people to submit records of Hen Harriers.