

Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group Meeting Grantown-on-Spey on 13th February 2014

Present Mark Bilsby (DFT)
Will Boyd-Wallis (CNPA)
Giles Brockman (FCS)
Stephen Corcoran (CNPA)
Anne Elliot (SNH)
Andy Ford (CNPA)
Thomas MacDonell (Wildland Ltd)
Alistair Maclennan (NFUS)
Martin Price (chair)
Justin Prigmore (CNPA)
Jeremy Roberts (RSPB)
Andy Wells (SLE), via conference call

Apologies:

Pete Mayhew (RSPB)
George MacDonald (SGA)
Nick Mardell (Community Development Officer)
Shaila Rao (NTS)
Ian Wilson (NFUS)

1. Minutes of last meeting

Content agreed – Anne Elliot's name needs to be added to the present list.

Oct13 AP1: discharged

Oct13 AP2: invite Freshwater Habitats Trust to give a presentation at the June 2014 meeting

Oct13 AP3: further input required by AF and AW. AW will present a report at the next meeting

Oct13 AP4: on-going action, discharged

Oct13 AP5: not done, MP will follow-up to see if any opportunities within CNP

Oct13 AP6: workshop with NBN on 28th February, discharged

Oct13 AP7: awaiting paper from Jan Dick, AW will report back at future meetings

Oct13 AP8: event held in November, discharged

2. Cairngorms Nature Action Plan

Progress report

There was a wide ranging discussion on format and content of progress report from around the table. Main points to note:

- Report needs to focus on progress
- A separate risk-register would be more useful
- Report should be used as a discussion document

- Use of colour coding (green, amber, and red) was questioned for many of the items. The group felt that while policy work was going well, actual action on the ground was less advanced. Therefore the report needs to highlight more amber progress.

Feb13 Action Point 1: AF to liaise with partners on content and format of progress report

There were discussions on native woodland survey, wader action, Estate survey, Dee floodplain restoration, and the SRDP consultation.

Feb13 Action Point 2: AF to circulate link for the Native Woodland Scotland Survey around the group

Feb13 Action Point 3: AF to invite Woodland Trust Scotland to the Strategy Group to present their Heritage Lottery Funded project on Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites

An update on the project development for a new project on rare plants and fungi was presented to the Strategy Group. The group made it clear that the project should focus on delivering what was essential for the species (as set out in the CNAP) and focus on action on the ground. The group supported the principle of a project focusing on species conservation and people engagement, even if this means that SNH could not be a key partner in the project. Ultimately, the project has to make a tangible difference. The largest obstacle will be sourcing funding for a project that Cairngorms Nature wants to see delivered.

Feb13 Action Point 4: AF to include the Rare Plants & Fungi Project as an agenda item for discussion at the next meeting

Feb13 Action Point 5: SC to circulate final report of the now completed Cairngorms Rare Plants Project

WBW reported on a constructive meeting with Fisheries Trusts which included discussions on beavers. A comprehensive management framework, that is flexible in its approach, is essential for this species. This was followed by a discussion on the water abstraction on the upper Spey and renewal of SSE's licence. A consultation on this proposal should be out in due course.

The Montane Scrub Project is moving forward. The Project was presented to Montane Scrub Action Group, who were fully supportive. The hope was to have everything in place by January 2015 to put forward a collaborative bid to the new SRDP. There may need to be an EIA undertaken beforehand and the issue of montane woodland expanding into designated sites will need to be agreed. It will also be essential to develop nursery stock (from seeds or cuttings) this year to provide planting material for 2016. The possibilities of

taking seed from Norway to provide future seed source from locally grown stock was raised. A stakeholders group will need to be established to discuss the proposal with a wide variety of interest groups.

Feb13 Action Point 6: AE to explore if SNH can do more to enhance montane scrub on their land

It was felt that Cairngorms Nature needs to be clear about the issues regarding raptors, providing clarity and honesty on this subject. The challenge was put to the Strategy Group to do more to enhance raptor populations across the CNP and to celebrate these iconic species.

3. Communications & Engagement

The CN Festival is taking place on 17/18 May across the CNP. CNPA is coordinating the festival and a programme is being finalised and should be published soon with national promotion. Brief update provided on CN "Speaking Tour" by Niall Benvie to be launched at Festival.

A first draft of the new website is done and this is being enhanced before a version is presented to the group. There was some discussion on content and feedback from the group is wanted.

Feb13 Action Point 7: all members of CNSG to provide feedback on CN web content to AF

4. Project Updates

Capercaillie Framework

The Project Board for this project is made up of representatives from FCS, SNH, RSPB, Land Managers and the LOAF. The data gathering exercise is presenting some considerable challenges: there is good data coverage on species distribution and habitat information but data on recreation is much more limited. The suggestion is that where data evidence is weak we use expert opinion. Strategy Group impressed on the need to be honest about the quality of the data and focus work on the access/human disturbance issues. The group suggested that if after 9 months of work there is still a need to collect more data, then the framework should make that recommendation. Better this than making a best guess – important to present credible and evidence-based recommendations and highlight where there are gaps.

RSPB Futurescapes

JR presented this RSPB led project that is focusing on pinewoods and wetlands in the CNP. This is a partnership project about promoting and enhancing these habitats at a landscape scale. Looking to recruit a community engagement officer for Deeside and develop one for Nethy Bridge/Boat of Garten/Abernethy area. The funding for Futurescapes will be reviewed later this year as the EU founding comes to an end in December 2014.

Feb13 Action Point 8: JR to circulate Futurescapes update to CNSG

Economic Development & Diversification Strategy

David Watson (CNPA Economic Development Manager) presented the consultation on this new strategy. This is following research and discussions with the Cairngorms Economic Development Forum. Of relevance to CN are the special qualities of the CNP and to ensure that is not threatened, and the opportunities for wildlife tourism. There is a consultation being launched in February, and the individual organisations round the table were invited to respond.

Feb13 Action Point 9: AF to circulate link to EDDS consultation to the Group

Cairngorms LEADER

Alice Mayne (Cairngorms LEADER Manager) gave a presentation about the success of LEADER and its future in the CNP. The LEADER programme just finished provided £2.5m in funding to over 250 projects with a total spend of £7m. The new LEADER programme is now out for consultation under the title of “Local Development Strategy” and has 16 proposed themes. The 5th theme “Protection and enhancement of the National Park landscape, wildlife and local heritage through sustainable living” is the most relevant to CN. However, there is almost no reference or actions within the Community Action Plans that have been developed to biodiversity or environmental projects.

For the next programme AM is looking for bigger, more ambitious projects; greater knowledge exchange; better partnership working; and they must deliver at least two of the themes. AM asked what projects would the group like to see delivered by the next programme?

Feb13 Action Point 10: AF to circulate Local Development Strategy to all Group members asking for comments by 10 March

5. AOCB

The Highland Environment Forum is meeting in March, AF, AE and GB all sit on this Group

6. Date of Next Meeting

Mid June - Doodle poll to be sent round.