

FINAL CUAG minutes – Fri 15th March 2024

Venue: in person in Park Authority office, Grantown and online attendees.

In attendance in person: Peter Cosgrove (Chair & Park Authority Board), Colin McClean, Fiona Holmes, Grant Moir (all Park Authority), John Grierson (AoCC/LOAF), Hannah Grist (Park Authority Board), Leslie George (SGA) Iain Wilson (NFUS), Neil Murray (SF), Stuart Smith (JHI)

Online attendees: David Frew (NTS), Richard Gledson (ECMP), Tim Kirkwood (Cairngorms Connect), Richard Cooke (ADMG), Stephen Young (SLE), Graeme Taylor (NS)

Apologies: Mike Cottam, Andy Ford (both Park Authority) Will Anderson (ConFor), Peter Clark (BASC), Rory Kennedy (GWCT,) Dave Windle (NE Mountain Trust), Peter Gilbert (RSPB), Alison Hester (JHI)

Minutes of last meeting:

No comments, all accepted.

Actions from last meeting :

All either ongoing or complete.

No AOB suggested for today

PREAMBLE:

Reminder of general CUAG purpose: allowing better communication and relationships between land managers with different objectives, sharing advice and guidance plus good practice and research. Where the CUAG meeting is an open, friendly, space where all can feel free to speak on issues relating to upland land management, but is not strict Chatham House rules.

PART 1 - UPDATES:

1. Park fire byelaws

Park Authority consultation is ongoing with the results heading to the Park Board soon.

CUAG discussion included:

- Muirburn to be dealt with separately by ScotGov?
- How to enforce a byelaw - pressure on rangers and resourcing the enforcement

ACTION – CUAG to let Park Authority know of any fire hot-spot locations

2. Deer consultation


ScotGov have ongoing consultation: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/managing-deer-climate-nature-consultation/pages/7/>

Park Authority have some thoughts on the proposals, and it's been discussed by Park Board, but no decision on a Park Authority response has been made yet.

CUAG discussion included:

- Exploring a 'Cairngorms' brand for venison and venison sales out of season
- ADMG haven't formed final response yet but current thinking is they're likely to oppose all changes suggested in consultation
- ScotGov Strategic Deer Board are proposing trials for issues around lowland deer, and Sika control
- Detail of 'nature restoration management orders' is a key issue
- NatureScot are running an 'issues log' type process within all discussion forums like CUAG to capture discussion and thoughts across sectors and then add this into the consultation responses to ScotGov

3. Climate Adaptation Fund

Update on opening of new grant fund, details here  [CAFGuidanceNotes.docx](#)

4. Farmers Forum

Update on proposals for revised engagement between agriculture sector and Park Authority. Park Authority are proposing to have an Agricultural Advisory Group like CUAG.

5. Cairngorms Nature Action Plan (CNAP)

The Cairngorms Nature Action Plan is main delivery mechanism for nature objectives in the National Park Partnership Plan and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy in the Cairngorms.

The new Action Plan will be developed through 2024. CUAG will have the opportunity to feed in.

CUAG discussion included;

- If predator control was to be included within new CNAP?
- NatureScot Species Licensing Review – a review has now been requested by ScotGov to be completed within 6months by NatureScot staff. Unsure yet what sort of public consultation process might be involved

ACTION NatureScot to report in more detail on this at next CUAG meeting (date set for 29 Aug 2024)

ACTION NatureScot to share draft scope of review when it's available

PART 2 - DISCUSSIONS:

1. Woodlands and forestry

The Park Authority are suggesting creating a short 'advice note' that clearly outlines the Park Authorities role in Scottish Forestry consultations. CUAG were asked for their views on the idea and were generally supportive.

Additional comments from Scottish Forestry;

- noting forthcoming changes to the consultation process, with more information being available via the Public Register
- want prompt and early responses to woodland consultations during the 12 week due diligence period - when it is easiest to influence forest design.

CUAG also discussed:

- The new UK Forestry Standard, which doesn't apply yet, but is likely to from 1st October, will require 'maintaining the deer population to a level where regeneration can occur'
- Scottish Forestry outlined their future approach given the recent large cuts in their grant giving budget – see 2 x notes linked below

<https://forestry.gov.scot/publications/1545-sf-briefing-note-46-fgs-budget-and-end-of-claim-year-management/viewdocument/1545>

<https://forestry.gov.scot/publications/1554-sf-briefing-note-47-fgs-budget-update-and-budget-availability-for-new-applications/viewdocument/1554>

CUAG conversation moved onto wider forestry/woodland themes and to all consultations run by ScotGov and the Park Authority and included:

- Feeling that all consultations are just a 'tick box' exercise and Park Authority need to improve on consultations and engagement process
- Creating opportunities to consult is different to meaningfully consulting
- Consultees need to see that the process is something they want to be involved in – that they will be listened to
- A feeling by some that the Park Authority aren't doing enough to listen to those that work in the park as opposed to those that are just resident in the park
- How you get to a consensus position is difficult in a consultation process
- Park Authority very clear that a consultation needs to allow people to follow through the process with 1) this is what we asked, 2) this is what you said, 3) these are the changes we made

2. Integrated Wildfire Management Plan (IWMP)

Update on progress with creating this; first and second sections largely drafted, third section waiting for outcome of Park Authority consultation on a fire byelaw.

With regards collaboration between landholdings and coordinating an effective response to wildfire there is only one formal fire group in the South of the park and everyone else has informal arrangements based on regular contact with neighbours.

Currently the IWMP proposes that every landholding should have a simple document with basic mapped information on what kit and resources available with accompanying contact details.

CUAG discussion included:

- Land holdings with large fuel loads should have enough kit for firefighting – it's a duty on them and they shouldn't rely on neighbours with different objectives
- Suggestion that those with highest fuel loads have the least staff – countered with evidence that often they have more staff, but staff that aren't necessarily practiced in muirburn so therefore have fewer firefighting skills

ACTION NatureScot to share example copies of their fire plans with CUAG

- Debate about the need for a formal or informal approach to dealing with wildfires
- Can using existing DMGs give some helpful and more formal structure to the approach
- Experience from managing wildfires in Ayrshire relied heavily on good liaison amongst a group of partners across a network and included regular practice exercises with Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS).
- Also, getting helicopters out ASAP made the ultimate difference in managing to control wildfires

Insurance – understanding from Park Authorities investigations that insurance against wildfire damage isn't available for native woodlands, but you can get it for commercial plantations and managed moorland.

But 2 x landholdings within CUAG do have insurance cover for wildfire on their native woodlands, via NFU Mutual.

ACTION Park Authority to contact NFU Mutual and investigate insurance for wildfires in native woodlands further

Further discussion included:

- Politics of the situation, with different land management objectives and the current muirburn proposals at parliament, polarising the topic
- SFRS have a limited amount of kit and do look for help from private estates
- Wildfire is bad news whatever your land management objectives are, so people need to recognise this and still provide mutual aid
- Wildfires need to be up the political agenda due to climate change making them far more likely, so ScotGov and SFRS are likely to have to put more energy and resources into managing them
- Reminder that these sorts of difficulties is what the Park Authorities IWMP is trying to fix, but that the IWMP is NOT about trying to influence any individual land holdings management objectives

END