
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: Review of Local Biodiversity Action Plan and Partnership

Prepared by: Matthew Hawkins, Senior Heritage Officer
Hamish Trench, Strategic Land Use Director

Purpose

To consider and seek the board's approval to review the local biodiversity action plan and development of a new delivery partnership for biodiversity

Recommendations

That the Board

- a) Agrees to review the Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan, to be guided by the principles considered at Annex I;
- b) Agrees to match the Local Biodiversity Action Plan boundary to the National Park boundary;
- c) Agrees in principle to establishing a 'Cairngorms Wildlife Partnership' to be a focus for partner collaboration and delivery of National Park Plan biodiversity actions.

Executive Summary

The current Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan (CLBAP) was published in 2002 and predates the CNP. Over the last 10 years the CLBAP has delivered on a wide range of biodiversity benefits. However the partnership responsible for managing the CLBAP has reduced in participants to three local authorities, SNH and the CNPA.

The need for a review of the CLBAP itself and the partnership has arisen from a number of directions including the reduction in budget contributions from partners and a desire to allocate resources more effectively, the change in the boundary of the CNP and opportunity to align the CLBAP with the National Park Plan.

Following the review the current CLBAP will be retained for reference because it includes basic information that is still valid. However the review will produce a more targeted and achievable action plan for the next five years. The partnership group also needs to be refreshed with a view to increasing its participation. This would allow broader representation and consequently greater collaboration and co-ordination on the delivery of biodiversity conservation across the National Park.

REVIEW OF LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN AND PARTNERSHIP - FOR DECISION

Introduction

1. The Cairngorms National Park is widely regarded as one of the most outstanding parts of Scotland for biodiversity. It supports a quarter of the 1150 UK Priority Species and over three quarters of the terrestrial, UK Priority Habitats. The Cairngorms National Park is a UK stronghold for many rare species and different habitats which are an essential part of the special qualities of the Park.
2. Developing the next National Park Plan brings an opportunity to:
 - a) Refresh the focus and priorities for biodiversity action
 - b) Reinvigorate collaboration and delivery through a higher profile partnership

Current Local Biodiversity Action Plan and Partnership

3. The Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) was written in 2002, so pre-dates the designation of the National Park and covers a wider area (following the former Cairngorms Partnership boundary). This plan is still relevant today in describing the habitats and important species, the issues and threats, and overall objectives.
4. The Cairngorms LBAP project is a partnership initiative with the CNPA as lead partner and employer. In recent years, Scottish Natural Heritage, Aberdeenshire Council and Angus Council have contributed annual funds to the project, with Highland Council also participating in the management group, which has been chaired by an independent chair, Kenny Taylor.
5. The partnership has developed and delivered a wide range of initiatives for biodiversity in the last 10 years. It has delivered work on aspen and its rare species, capercaillie and black grouse, forest habitat networks, farmland breeding waders, hoverflies and dragonflies, moths and butterflies, non-native fish, raptors, rare plants, red squirrels, water voles and mink, wetlands, wildlife recording. The partnership has also run a biodiversity grants scheme, training events, the Celebrating Nature/BioBuzz events as well as producing a number of biodiversity leaflets.

The Need for Review

6. There are several drivers leading to a review of both the plan and partnership:
 - a) A need to focus priorities and provide a clear mechanism to contribute to National Park Plan delivery;
 - b) Budget constraints among partner organisations means commitment to the existing LBAP project approach may not be secure long-term and equally, there is a need among all partners for more effective collaboration to share resources;
 - c) Expansion of the Park in 2010 means the Park and LBAP boundaries are much closer, meaning a rationalisation of the boundary to fit the Park is desirable;

- d) The considerable effort in biodiversity conservation from a wide range of partners in the Park remains dissipated and could be better co-ordinated, therefore delivered more effectively.

Reviewing the Plan

7. Alongside development of the National Park Plan officers have begun a review of the LBAP, reviewing the existing plan and seeking partner views on criteria for focus and priorities for delivery. We propose to retain the existing plan as a reference document given its substantial and still relevant analysis of habitats, but to develop a more focused five year action plan.
8. These initial discussions have led to the principles proposed for consideration in Annex I.
9. The current boundary of the LBAP follows the old Cairngorms Partnership area. It is consequently larger than the Park itself. We propose that the geographic scope of the LBAP Plan is brought into line with the National Park boundary. In practice, delivery and the partnership should be outward looking and work collaboratively with neighbouring LBAP partnerships where appropriate on cross-boundary projects.

Refreshing the Partnership

10. A wide range of organisations and individuals contribute to conserving and enhancing the biodiversity of the Park, including public bodies, NGOs, land managers, ranger services and community groups. Currently our delivery mechanisms in the Park do not bring together these organisations as effectively as we might in order to maximise the benefits of collaboration.
11. In October 2010 the Board considered potential changes to delivery mechanisms including a heritage trust. Members asked that further discussions with partners were held on options including a trust model, and other potential alliances between organisations. These options could embrace both natural and cultural heritage, and could take a variety of forms.
12. Discussions with partners indicate broad support for a reinvigorated partnership to be the focus for delivery of biodiversity action in the Park – to be the place for decisions on priorities, deploying collective resources, monitoring results and raising the profile of biodiversity work.
13. At this stage, we recommend that a well-defined focus on biodiversity would be most effective, rather than seeking to establish one group to cover both natural and cultural heritage. Over time, the partnership may reach a point at which it looks to set up its own delivery vehicle, such as a trust, at which point a wider remit could be considered.

14. The partnership would be expanded from the current membership to include key conservation bodies, land management, ranger service and community representation.
15. The name and focus of such a group should also be given consideration. The current Local Biodiversity Action Plan Group is well understood within professional circles. However although the term biodiversity has reasonable understanding within the general public, a 'Cairngorms Wildlife Partnership' could be better understood and provide a good basis for engaging a wider range of people over time.

Recommendations

16. **That the Board:**
 - a) **Agrees to review the Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan, to be guided by the principles considered at Annex I;**
 - b) **Agrees to match the Local Biodiversity Action Plan boundary to the National Park boundary;**
 - c) **Agrees in principle to establishing a 'Cairngorms Wildlife Partnership' to be a focus for partner collaboration and delivery of National Park Plan biodiversity actions.**

Next Steps

17. The next steps are:
 - a) Carry out review of priority habitat and species action with partners.
 - b) Prepare and consult on a revised Local Biodiversity Action Plan.
 - c) Engage partners in scoping the remit, nature and composition of a Cairngorms Wildlife Partnership.

Matthew Hawkins
Hamish Trench
6th January 2012

matthewhawkins@cairngorms.co.uk
hamishtrench@cairngorms.co.uk

Background Note

1. Local Biodiversity Action Plans are one of the UK's responses to deliver action on biodiversity following the international Rio Convention in 1992 and the more recent Nagoya UN Biodiversity Summit in 2010 of which the UK is a signatory. The European Union adopted the EU Biodiversity Strategy in 2010 as further commitment to preventing biodiversity loss by member states.
2. Biodiversity action is a devolved power delegated to the Scottish Government. The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, places a statutory duty on all public bodies to further the conservation of biodiversity. A Scottish Biodiversity Strategy was published in 2004 as a requirement of this Act. A new Scottish Biodiversity Strategy is due in 2012 and CNPA officers are engaged in its development.

ANNEX I

Principles for Review of the Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan

1. Deliver what is expected of the Cairngorms National Park nationally and internationally:
 - a) Focus action on the habitats and species for which the Park is nationally and internationally important
 - b) Focus action on habitats and species for which action is achievable and would make a difference.
2. Engage people in wildlife:
 - a) Support the benefits and opportunities wildlife creates for individuals, communities and businesses in the Park.
 - b) Engage people with iconic species that help to shape the identity of the Park.
 - c) Identify opportunities for volunteers to participate in direct conservation activity.
3. Implement an ecosystems approach:
 - a) Focus primarily on conserving and enhancing high quality habitats as the basis for biodiversity conservation, supplemented by targeted species action where necessary;
 - b) Set biodiversity management in the context of the range of environmental benefits delivered including species and habitat resilience, carbon and soil management, flood and water management, high quality landscapes, food and timber production and cultural services.
4. Respond and adapt to a changing climate:
 - a) Strengthen habitat networks to build resilience to climate change
 - b) Manage peatland and woodlands as effective carbon sinks