

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: The State of the Park Review 2011

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Purpose

To update the Board on the development and purpose of the State of the Park Review and to seek agreement on the purpose and scope of the review as well as proposed National Park 'Health' Indicators.

Recommendations

That the Board:

1. consider and agree the format of the proposed State of the Park Review;
2. consider the scope of the proposed National Park 'Health' Indicators and their role in communicating the state of the Park.

Executive Summary

The State of the Park Review 2011 is a key part of the National Park Plan process and an opportunity to present the National Park in a full context. The Review will be published in June 2011 alongside the draft National Park Plan, and with the National Park Plan's 2010/11 Progress report.

An attempt to provide a comprehensive and total account of the National Park becomes complicated, inaccurate and for most people, uninteresting or difficult to understand. Instead, the State of the Park Review is proposed as a slimline report, with a selection of relevant information about the overall health of the National Park in the context of the four National Park aims.

A set of National Park 'Health' indicators have been proposed to provide a sense of the health or state of the Park across all four aims. These have been selected to provide a simple and easily understood barometer of the overall condition of the Park aims and attempt to reflect some of the most important elements of each aim.

Although the State of the Park Review was originally intended to be a five-yearly production, the more focussed style proposed and the use of a few health indicators, mean that it could be used more frequently and more widely in future.

THE STATE OF THE PARK REVIEW 2011 FOR DECISION

Background

1. In 2006, prior to publication of the first National Park Plan, the CNPA published a State of the Park report that set out, as far as was possible, everything we knew about the National Park. Since then, there has been a commitment to publish a review in 2011.

The First State of the Park Report

2. The first State of the Park Report represented a substantial body of work and provided a reasonable snapshot of information about the Park at that time. While much of the information in the State of the Park Report is still relevant, other parts were already inaccurate or out of date when it was published.
3. Because of this, the Report itself has been of little practical use to the CNPA since 2006. We doubt that it will have been of much interest to other partners or the general public as it is neither an easy-read document, nor is it an authoritative account of the Park. If one is interested in a particular subject then specialist press or websites can provide more useful information.

Changes Since 2006

4. Since 2006, the CNPA and other partners have focussed new research towards getting the most relevant and useful data to inform ongoing work. Examples include:
 - a) the updating of the Cairngorms Visitor Survey over 2009/10;
 - b) the Economic and Social Health of the Park Report published in 2010;
 - c) extending the North East Biological Records Centre to cover the National Park;
 - d) developing ways of assessing the qualities of wildness in the Park.
5. In addition to these, other partners, particularly in the public sector, have been able to provide nationally collected data to closely match the National Park Boundary. Although raw data on population, health, deprivation was available 5 years ago, it was not published in an easily used form for the National Park.
6. It has become clear over the last few years that whilst the Cairngorms National Park is one of the most heavily studied and examined places in the UK, only some of that information is useful to either the CNPA, or to other partners or people working in or interested the Park. It is not possible to provide a single document with an authoritative statement about all aspects of the National Park because of both the volume of information available and the pace of change. On the other hand, it is clear that there continues to be a lot of interest in the Park from all sides and sectors, and some easily digested and communicated information would help everyone.

Making the most of the State of the Park Review

7. The limitations of the current State of the Park Report have led us to propose a different form for the Review in 2011. Instead of trying to say little about everything to do with the Park, we propose a much more focussed report, published in an easily accessible form that provides a summary of the state of the Park and how it is changing over time. Annex I provides an incomplete draft of the content for information.
8. The review would be based around the four aims of the National Park and would use a limited number of National Park 'Health' Indicators to illustrate change in each aim. For each aim the same format of chapter would be used with:
 - a) **Health Indicators**
A quick written and visual summary of the indicators and what they mean;
 - b) **Facts and Figures**
A selection of other useful and interesting bits of information relevant to the aim;
 - c) **The Main Changes since 2006**
The most significant changes in or to the Park since the last State of the Park Report was published
 - d) **Highlights of Policy and Action**
A brief summary of the work in the Park that has made a difference
 - e) **Where to find more information and links to useful publications**
A signposting section with links to websites and documents that can provide more detail or relevant information
 - f) **Conclusions on the State of the Park**
Conclusions that draw on the indicators and other sections to provide an overall summary on the state of the Park in relation to that aim.
9. The content of each section would be selective in order to minimise the amount of information. It is envisaged that the State of the Park Review would be published with the glossy 2010/2011 National Park Plan Progress report, and would take a similar easy-read and designed form. This would both minimise costs associated with its publication, but should also provide a more instantly informative and accessible report.
10. A further advantage of this format is the possibility of using the aims and indicators associated with them to report on the health or state of the Park on an annual basis in reports or on an ongoing basis on the web.

Recommendation

11. **That the board agree the scope and format of the State of the Park Review**

State of the Park 'Health' Indicators

12. A series of possible National Park 'Health' Indicators were proposed in the May 2010 Board Paper on the National Park Plan. Since then they have been developed

and populated with data and are included in Annex I both in detail for each aim and in a single summary table on page 6 of Annex I.

13. The proposed health indicators are obviously a snapshot and present a selective picture. They are intended provide a sense of the state or the health of the National Park and to illustrate change in an easily understood and consistent way. They are not intended to provide information about all things to do with the Park. The indicators that are presented in Annex I have been selected because they match some of the following criteria:
 - a) The data already exists and is easy to obtain and update
 - b) The data is available for the Park Boundary or another appropriate boundary
 - c) Wherever possible the data is comparable with national and regional data
 - d) The data is updated frequently enough to show change
 - e) The data or indicator can be explained and communicated easily
14. Obviously, the indicators have their limitations. For example, the condition of features of designated sites is a reasonable one for those features, but may not reflect the condition of those same important features outside the designated sites or the wider health of the associated ecosystem.
15. However, the CNPA and other partners are constantly searching for ways of improving our understanding of these issues and of identifying robust data. There are numerous small and ad-hoc surveys that can provide more detailed information about individual places or sites in the Park, but few that apply across the Park or are comparable across it.
16. In general, our focus to date has been on making the best use of information that is already available from existing and new work programmes, rather than using resources on the generation of data for its own sake. It is anticipated that the implementation of the next Park Plan from 2012-2017 and will improve our ability to use and develop further indicators.
17. Currently, we have chosen four indicators for each aim. That is simply because we have tried to select as few as possible that can provide a sense of overview of the different elements of each aim in order to make presentation as simple as possible. It would be possible to include more indicators for each aim over time, but while there's no limit to the amount of information that could be relevant, presenting much more to a casual reader could become confusing.

Recommendation

18. **That the board consider the scope of the proposed National Park 'Health' Indicators and their role in communicating the state of the Park**

Policy Context

19. This paper is concerned with the state of the National Park. It has implications for the National Park Plan, other CNPA plans, and indirectly, the plans and work of other partners and agencies. It links to the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework.

Implications

Financial Implications

20. There are no direct financial implications arising from consideration of this paper. Budget for preparation and publication of the State of the Park review is included within the current and draft operational plans for this year and next.

Presentational Implications

21. The state or health of the National Park is a fundamental one to the National Park and the role of the Board. General debate about the National Park often takes place with reference to particular flash points of management or policy, but rarely in the context of the overall state of the National Park or with a sense of time. The State of the Park review is intended to help provide a broad sense the state of the Park, and to provide a clearer context for other discussions.

Implications for Stakeholders

22. There are no particular implications for stakeholders from this paper. The purpose of the State of the Park review is to help inform the development of the next National Park Plan which may have a direct influence on stakeholders. Some stakeholders provide the information that the proposed health indicators are based on.

Next Steps

23. The State of the Park Review text and content will be finalised in the next two months to allow formatting and design for publication by June 2011. It will be published with the draft National Park Plan, the 2010/11 National Park Plan Progress Report and the Local Development Plan Main Issues Report.

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