

**Cairngorms National Park
LAND MANAGEMENT FORUM**

**Victoria and Albert Halls, Ballater.
Wednesday 21st September 2011**

MEETING NOTE

Present:

Alison Espie	Chartered Environmentalist
Alison McKnight	Smiths Gore
Alister Laing	Scottish Agricultural College (SAC)
Allan Bantick	Scottish Wildlife Trust
Angela Douglas	CNPA Board
Bob Wilson	Scottish Woodlands
Carol Robertson	Scottish Native Woods
Catriona Rowan	Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum
Christine Skene	CNPA
David Frew	National Trust for Scotland
Duncan Ferguson	Spey Fishery Board
Eleanor Mackintosh	CNPA Board
Fiona Morris	CNPA
Hamish Trench	CNPA
Ian Cowe	Forestry Commission
Ian Francis	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Scotland
Jamie Williamson	Alvie & Dalraddy Estates
Jeremy Roberts	RSPB Abernethy
Johnnie Grant	Rothiemurchus Estate
Justin Irvine	James Hutton Institute
Michael Bruce	Glen Tanar Estate
Mark Bilsby	Dee District Salmon Fishery Board & River Dee Trust
Nicolle Hamilton	BASC
Paul Timms	Management & Natural Heritage Services
Penny Lawson	CNPA
Pete Cairns	Northshots
Rhoderick Noble	CKD Galbraith (Chair)
Rob McMorran	University of the Highlands and Islands
Robin Leslie Melville	Land Management (Scotland) Ltd
Rod Andean	Strutt and Parker LLP
Scott Petrie	Scottish Land and Estates Ltd
Simon Jacyna	Scottish Agricultural College Elgin
Stefania Pizzirani	Forest Research
Steve Brown	Forestry Commission Grampian Conservancy
Vicky Hilton	The Crown Estate
Will Boyd-Wallis	CNPA

Welcome

Rhoderick Noble welcomed all to the second Land Management Forum meeting, a joint initiative between Scottish Land and Estates (formerly Scottish Rural Properties and Business Association) and the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA).

Apologies

Alexander Bennett, Ali Loder, Allan Wright, Andrew Barbour, Andrew Campbell, Andrew Hamilton, Clive Meikle, David Edwards, David Howat, Graham Sinclair, Ishbel Crawford, Jamie Farquhar, Jim Dewar, Jo O'Hara, John Risby, Jonny Hughes, Malcolm Wield, Mark Nicholson, Martin Price, Miff Tuck, Patrick Thompson, Paul Corrigan, Richard Cooke, Richard Gledson, Roddy Willis, Sally Thomas, Simon Blackett, Thomas MacDonell.

1. Introduction

Will Boyd-Wallis reiterated the welcome and introduced the theme of the meeting – “Expanding the woodland resource - why, how, where/where not?”.

The Forum was reminded of its remit:

- To develop new ideas and opportunities to benefit the environment, economy and communities
- To help improve viability and sustainability of land based businesses
- To share and compare information and experience
- To provide practical advice

As a background to the theme, Will outlined the current status of woodland in the Park area, the Scottish Government target for an increase in woodland and forests to 25%, and a list of the reasons for expansion. He suggested points to consider regarding where expansion could be most beneficial for 1)Profit, 2)Nature and 3)People, e.g. access to timber transport links, topography, soils, species, linking habitat networks, riparian woods, montane woods, linking with communities, landscape issues, etc. On the issue of ‘where not’ to plant he aimed to prompt discussion by listing just three areas: good quality productive farmland, top quality moorland and deep peat soils. Finally on the issue of potential inhibitors to woodland expansion he cited: competing land uses, consultation processes and grant systems as the main contenders.

2. Caledonia

Pete Cairns gave an inspiring audiovisual presentation based on his book ‘Caledonia’, highlighting the landscape and wildlife value of the Caledonian forest as an outstanding asset of the Park and a product of the multiple benefits that land management delivers.

3. Woodland Opportunity Mapping

Stefania Pizzirani of Forest Research presented outcomes from the recent Nortosia project which used GIS to map areas of the Park with potential for woodland expansion under different scenarios. The maps presented illustrated which areas might theoretically be suitable for woodland expansion where productivity is the main objective, and alternatively where biodiversity is the main objective. The overall aims of the CNP and an example target of 5-10% expansion were assumptions in producing the maps. Possible applications of the mapping tool in formulating plans for woodland expansion and its ability to be very flexible, incorporating a range of data types and objectives, were illustrated. The maps can also help to assess impacts of different management options and in fine-tuning policy, and provide a useful way to visualise spatial information, providing a common language for discussion.

4. Woodlands and the National Park Plan 2

Hamish Trench gave an update on the development of the new National Park Plan for 2012 to 2017. The consultation on the draft plan runs from 19 September to 9 December and CNPA are seeking engagement from as many people as possible. There is a programme of events and other mechanisms for the consultation, including meetings covering all communities in the Park. Participation from Forum members themselves and help with promoting the consultation is welcomed, and support is available from CNPA to encourage this through the activities of member organisations. The leaflet 'Your Views' gives an easily read summary of the main proposals in the draft plan and how to respond.

Attention was drawn to the guiding principle of multiple benefits from land management contained in the draft plan, and to the SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) for woodland and forestry. These are intended to prompt ideas, and it was stressed that views of consultees are an essential part of the final plan, and that the draft plan does not form an early version of the final plan, but rather is a document to stimulate consideration and discussion.

Further info: <http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/park-authority/our-services/consultations/>

5. Discussion

The main points of the discussion are summarised below:

What balance is desirable between native and commercial species in CNP?

The CNP Forest and Woodland Framework recognises that we have room for both. It recommends retaining non-native productive species whilst recognising the potential for native species to be commercially viable, especially Scots Pine.

A pragmatic rather than purist approach to genetic provenance should be taken.

Disease risk is an important reason to retain a good mix of species.

Non-native, fast growing species are important for high quality timber and also for cashflow management as Scots Pine can only be harvested in winter.

Overall, maintaining flexibility is essential.

Different models of silviculture can be used, eg plant/thin/clearfell, or low-input/low output models with continuous cover. Wind can be a significant constraint.

What are the barriers to achievement of woodland expansion?

SRDP being over bureaucratic makes the application process difficult and therefore costly to implement. A simpler system is needed.

The recent EIA for Abernethy for a large area of woodland expansion and restoration highlighted conflict between the Natura priority habitats of native pinewoods and moorland. This prompted involvement by SNH who have produced a guidance paper on the issue. The paper is generous in its recommendations for the amount of land most suited to woodland, but points to a need for collaboration on how much land in the park area should be allocated to woodland. Such an agreement would strengthen individuals' cases for woodland expansion. RSPB offered to share

their experience of negotiations to help other members facing similar challenges of balancing Natura interests.

There was a perception that EIAs are being required for even small woodland plans; FCS clarified that they decide on a case by case basis whether an EIA is needed, rather than the requirement being based on area alone.

The point was made that in practice, decisions about forestry come down to individual land managers' objectives, preferences and commercial factors which may conflict with scientific advice and strategic/policy recommendations. The Land Use Strategy section of the new draft Park Plan provides an analysis of the benefits of differing land use across the Park and seeks to draw from land managers' experience and input to the consultation. Mapping tools provide a 'top-down' approach, sometimes relying on data that has not been fully 'ground truthed', but combined with land managers' aspirations modelling can provide strong evidence for agreeing future land use change.

The recent announcement from the European Committee banning the use of Asulam for bracken control will be a major inhibitor to the maintenance and expansion of continuous cover woodland. FCS, ConFor and others e.g. Moorland Forum are seeking to address this.

It was confirmed that planting on deep peat (>50cm) should be avoided as peat stores around four times more carbon than trees. It would also be likely to increase fire risk by drying the soil. The GIS mapping tool should be used to select out peat areas. Registering with the Woodland Carbon Code was highlighted as a growing potential investment opportunity. Further info: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf-d-8ejezp>

Woodland expansion on to good quality productive farm land should not be encouraged, as highlighted by previous consultations which confirmed the importance of productive agricultural land to the Park's communities and economy, despite its relatively small area. It was suggested that much of the tenanted farmland is unlikely to be put forward for tree planting. In terms of targeting funding, the demise of the Locational Premium Scheme was regretted.

Expansion of montane scrub to enhance biodiversity is encouraged in the new Park Plan, but in line with the 'bottom up' approach favoured by many Forum members, feedback is needed on how much is wanted, where, and what the barriers are.

It was noted that plenty of woodland expansion is already underway, and that approximately 6000-7000 ha of new planting / regeneration in new areas is in the process of being developed across the park.

There can be a mismatch between Government objectives for woodland expansion and other Government or agency requirements, and land manager's objectives. This was illustrated by real examples, and it was felt that the grant system was weighted against commercial productive woodlands, something which is becoming of concern to the timber industry. The question of how to provide an economic incentive by placing commercial value on management for public good and ecosystem services was discussed. CNP could be an appropriate place to test ways of doing this. A longer timescale for funding support for both commercial planting and regeneration (20 years rather than 5) would be more realistic to stimulate plans for expansion then maintain momentum.

Other issues

Land abandonment will become more of a threat due to demographic factors.

Although the SRDP application process was strongly voiced as being a bureaucratic barrier, some felt there have been some improvements in relation to forestry, eg requirements for seed provenance, stocking density and reducing the threshold for applications requiring assessment by RPACs.

It is hoped that Draft RDR (Rural Development Regulation) (due 12th October) will present a positive outlook for the future CAP (Common Agricultural Policy).

General discussion

There is an opportunity for forum members to feed in to the Scottish Government Woodland Expansion Advisory Group (Chaired by Andrew Barbour) which will be making recommendations to ministers. Further info: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-8LAHDJ>

More technical information at Forum meetings was requested, eg on the threat of climate change-induced drought to Sitka and the impact of woodland expansion on deer management. Members were invited to specify what information would be most helpful for future meetings. The importance of also retaining a focus on the aesthetic/emotional appeal of forests was pointed out in relation to their own intrinsic value and their economic value for tourism, and it was agreed that we need to combine commercial, biodiversity and landscape viewpoints in a long term stewardship approach.

There was discussion of applications of the Nortosia GIS mapping tool and expression of a willingness for it to be shared with the private sector. CNPA and Forest Research will look into developing the models further with the private sector on a more site-specific basis.

National Park Plan 2

It was suggested that Forum members could work together on responding to the consultation, and that a specially convened meeting would be the best mechanism. If this idea is widely supported, CNPA with input from other Forum members will arrange a Forum meeting in November for this purpose.

Some of the achievements of the first Park plan were outlined and those wanting further detail were referred to the latest CNPA Progress Report. Further info: <http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/park-authority/national-park-plan/monitoring-and-reporting/>

Given the long term view of most land management, the 5 year timescale of the Plan was questioned. It was explained that the plan covers much more than just land management, it guides more immediate actions and works towards a longer term vision. NB The National Parks Act also requires the plan to be reviewed every five years.

The importance of using the correct language to reflect the role of land managers in actually implementing the plans was stressed, and CNPA confirmed that this essential role of land managers and other partners is fully recognised.

6. Brief Updates

River Catchment Management

Christine Skene, Spey Catchment Partnership Officer, outlined the various advantages of riparian woodland expansion.

Mark Bilsby (Dee District Salmon Fishery Board) gave an overview of the Upper Dee Riparian Scheme which aims to plant trees along 50km of the tributaries of the Dee, primarily to reduce summer water temperatures which are rising and becoming a serious threat to salmonids. A ground up, partnership approach has been successfully used and a LIFE + bid for funding has been submitted.

Woodfuel

Ian Cowe, Biomass Development Officer at FCS, is now available through a jointly funded post to provide free, one to one business development support to anyone within CNP and Grampian with an interest in producing or using woodfuel. Contact Ian on 01224 441664 or ian.cowe@forestry.gsi.gov.uk .

Wildfire

The widespread occurrence of wildfires this spring has heightened attention and action on prevention and control. Will Boyd-Wallis indicated that a number of Estates were combating the risk by erecting a variety of signs, he sought views on this approach and asked if there is an appetite for CNPA assistance with developing a generic approach across the National Park.

Michael Bruce (Glen Tanar Estate, Chair of the South Grampian Wildfire Group and the ConFor representative on the Scottish Wildfire Forum wildfire) detailed developments. To illustrate the extent of the problem he described some incidents in Highlands & Island FRS area. In 6 days in early May there were 76 wildfires, several fires were over 2,000 hectares in size. 1800 retained fire crew, plus unknown numbers of private land owners staff, were involved in controlling them. Every single available fireman and fire officer were deployed and the rest of the work of the HIFRS stopped. This illustrates the importance of access to private sector fire-fighting resources alongside the Fire and Rescue Service and the scale of the problem. The Ranger Service on Rothiemurchus Estate had extinguished some 10 – 20 small fires before they had the chance to expand.

Land abandonment, and woodland expansion are leading to an increase in surface fuel-loads which are will increasing the risk of landscape scale high intensity fires. Land managers need to build fire planning into all management plans. It was recommended that a Fire Danger Rating System (FDRS) should be more universally available and free at the point of use to land managers to assist preparedness. The Met Office have developed a Fire Severity Index, but this is not calibrated for use as a Fire Danger Rating System and is currently only available in England and Wales. Michael Bruce advocated caution in that any FDRS that is developed will still need interpretation from fire managers.

Wildfire groups in the National Park (Badenoch & Strathspey and North & South Grampian) serve a very important role in retaining fire-fighting networks. CNPA currently assist the B&SWG by facilitating meetings and updating the contacts database. CNPA offered similar assistance to the SGWG who may need secretarial support in due course on the retirement of the SGWG long-serving Secretary Irvine Ross. CNPA offered to help communicate a collective fire prevention message, and can advise on the interpretation of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code in relation to access users and fire.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next full forum meeting is due to take place in February/March 2012.

There will also be a smaller meeting/workshop arranged during the National Park Plan Consultation Period specifically to gain input from land managers and others on the Park Plan.