



For information

Title: Active Cairngorms and end of season visitor report

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Strategic context

1. The Active Cairngorms Action Plan is one of a series of plans that sit below the National Park Partnership Plan and describe in more detail specific activities that will be undertaken by the Park Authority to support the delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan objectives. In particular this is the plan that describes the main activities that will be undertaken by the Park Authority to achieve the following Park Plan objectives:
 - a) Nature
 - i. A7: Fire Management
 - ii. A13: Species Recovery
 - b) People
 - i. B9. Mental and physical health
 - ii. B10. A Park for All
 - iii. B11. Volunteering and outdoor learning
 - c) Place
 - i. C5. Visitors to the National Park
 - ii. C7. Transport to and around the Park
 - iii. C8. Accessible path and cycle network
 - iv. C9. High-quality visitor experience
 - v. C10. Cultural Heritage

Purpose

2. The Active Cairngorms Action Plan complements the Sustainable Tourism and Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plans, which collectively describe the Park Authority and partners work in relation to the tourism industry and the management of visitor impacts on the Park. This report is intended to give Board members oversight of progress towards the plan's objectives while also providing an overview of visitor related activity over the preceding summer season.



Recommendations

3. The Board is asked to:
 - a) Note the progress towards delivery of the objectives contained within the Active Cairngorms Action Plan
 - b) Note the report on the visitor focussed activities of the Park Authority and partner ranger services during the 2024 summer season

Stakeholder engagement

4. A number of the actions within the Active Cairngorms Action Plan are delivered in partnership with local stakeholders. In recognition of the Park Authority's statutory role as access authority, a number of actions which relate to outdoor access are considered by the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum prior to and during implementation. In addition, a number of the actions that relate to visitor impacts and the management of visitors are considered by the Park Authority led "Managing for Visitors" group. This group meets fortnightly through the main season and monthly in winter and includes a range of stakeholders from the land management, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and public sectors.

Strategic risk management

5. The activity described in this report assists in mitigating strategic risk no. 11 – "Unrealistic expectations of what the Park Authority and its partners can achieve in the face of the significant risks...".

Implications

6. There are no strategic resource implications arising from this report as it describes past activity. However, the continuation of those activities and delivery of many of the targets in the lifespan of the Active Cairngorms Action Plan (2024-2028) does have resource implications. These are considered as part of the annual budget setting process.

Success measures

7. This report and the accompanying appendices provide Board members with details on progress towards delivering the activities in the Active Cairngorms Action Plan.



Background

8. The Active Cairngorms Action Plan 2023 - 2028 was approved by the Board in November 2023. The Plan aims to make it easier and safer for people to enjoy the National Park, be more physically active, learn about, care for and appreciate the National Park and includes actions related to both residents and visitors.

Active Cairngorms Action Plan Progress

9. Annex 1 provides an update on progress towards each of the objectives included within the plan. Following the structure of the plan itself, these updates are separated into sections reflecting the seven priority areas for action:
 - a) Managing for visitors
 - b) Minimising impacts on sensitive species and habitats
 - c) Ranger services
 - d) Public health in the outdoors
 - e) Volunteer Cairngorms
 - f) Youth and outdoor learning
 - g) Paths, trails and outdoor access duties

End of season visitor report

10. Reflecting changes in visitor patterns and in a change from previous similar plans, Active Cairngorms also saw the introduction of a series of actions around influencing visitor behaviour such as further development of ranger services and actions to reduce the risk of disturbance of sensitive species and habitats. These form the first three priorities of the in the Active Cairngorms Action Plan and so standard progress reporting is covered in Annex 1. However, through the Park Authority ranger service and partner ranger services that make up a wider “family of ranger services”, much richer data is collected on the engagement activity they undertake and a summary of this is also included to give Board members a more detailed picture of this area of activity.

Park Authority Ranger Patrols

11. The Park Authority currently employ five permanent rangers (three based in Badenoch and Strathspey and two based in Deeside) but for the summer 2024 season employed a further 11 seasonal rangers mainly from April to the end of October and four trainee rangers from June to September. These included rangers based locally who covered the Angus Glens area while Badenoch and Strathspey



based rangers also patrolled in Moray and Perth and Kinross ensuring all areas of the Park were covered. 1398 patrols were undertaken by the Park Authority rangers in 2024 – an increase of 13% over 2023.

Partner Ranger Services

12. In addition to the direct employment of rangers, the Park Authority also support 14 ranger services with activities such as training to assist in the consistency of ranger provision and messaging. Six partners who operate in some of the most highly pressured areas of the Park also receive financial support towards their ranger services – Atholl Estate, Rothiemurchus Estate, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Abernethy, Balmoral Estate, Glen Tanar Charitable Trust and Angus Alive (Glen Doll). Across the full family of ranger services around 50 rangers were employed during summer 2024 although numbers at any one-time varied due differing recruitment and employment patterns.
13. Those partner ranger services, as well as the Park Authority's own rangers gather patrol data using a nationally agreed framework that assists in quantifying the level of resource being invested as well as identifying any visitor behaviour issues and any emerging trends. Summaries of patrol data from both the Park Authority ranger patrols and partner ranger service patrols are given in Annex 2.

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