

Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group Meeting Lecht on 24th June 2013

Present Will Boyd-Wallis (CNPA)
Giles Brockman (FCS)
Stephen Corcoran (CNPA)
Andy Ford (CNPA)
Debbie Green (SNH)
George MacDonald (SGA)
Nick Mardell (Community Development Officer)
Pete Mayhew (RSPB)
Martin Price (chair)
Justin Prigmore (CNPA)
Shaila Rao (NTS)
Sue Scoggins (SNH)
Andy Wells (SLE)

Apologies: Ian Wilson (NFUS)
Mark Bilsby (DFT)

1. Minutes of last meeting

Content agreed and action points discharged. MP mentioned a possible human dimensions project related to the Year of Natural Scotland 'Big 5' initiative looking at golden eagles and relationships with people. This could be a collaborative project covering the CNP and Sutherland.

2. CNAP Launch Event

AF thanked all for their involvement in the Celebrating Cairngorms Nature (CCN) event in Aviemore on 18th May. Despite the poor weather, the launch of the Action Plan went very well with good partner engagement and an excellent contribution from the minister, Richard Lochhead, who stayed for two hours despite the weather. There was a feeling from the Strategy Group that, in future years, the event would benefit from enhanced advertising and publicity to engage more people (attendance was in the low hundreds).

It is proposed that CCN becomes an annual event, led by the CNPA as it is a key communication tool for the CNPA and Cairngorms Nature (CN). Discussion on whether the event should move around the CNP each year or remain in Aviemore: pros and cons for either. Aviemore was a good location for linking with a wider audience but we might lose momentum if it was not held there every year. We could also consider having "satellite" events around the CNP. The CNAP has an action for a partner event every 2 years (a seminar?) as well. We do need to be clear what support partners can provide if we have an annual event, as some partners were concerned at the resource implications.

AF thanked GM for his help at the Blair Atholl Games, with the CN tent successfully focusing on the wildlife of the CNP.

3. CNAP Work Plan

AF set out the key areas of work for CNPA in delivering the CNAP (Paper 1) in the life of the action plan. There was a discussion by partners round the table in adopting something similar for their respective organisations. GM and AW both thought they should focus on raising awareness, informing and engaging their members (SLE and SGA respectively) with regard to CN, and then work on achieving the aims of the CNAP. RSPB were feeling a little overwhelmed with the number of actions – especially because as an organisation they have no new resources coming in – they would work hard to fit in action within their current work programme. MB highlighted the need to bring the Fishery Trusts/Boards together to discuss CNAP and many other issues.

Jun 13 AP1: MB to set up a meeting of all the river trusts/boards by September (CNPA can help facilitate this)

There was a discussion about analysing the risks in delivering the actions and the targets. Some work needs to be done on highlighting which targets are going to be the most challenging to deliver. CN staff would coordinate monitoring of the CNAP targets with partners, and develop some type of “traffic lights” system for this purpose.

Jun 13 AP2: CNPA to undertake risk analysis of CNAP

Jun 13 AP3: All partners to provide a list on-going work during 2013 for CNAP to AF and define by December 2013 their priorities for delivering CNAP actions in 2014

Jun 13 AP4: All partners (with help from CN staff) to develop CNAP partner action plans including resources allocated

A few other issues were briefly discussed:

- Montane Scrub Project, first meeting held 17 June, very positive feedback from broad range of partners representing owners and interested parties in the Northern Cairngorms
- The urgent need to develop the CN website and other communication/engagement activities
- Coordination of Land Management advice and promotion of new native woodland schemes (a new Land Management adviser is to be recruited in CNPA to help this).

Jun 13 AP5: Include communication and engagement as an agenda item at the next meeting

4. Spatial Targeting

AF set out some key principles and areas of work in Paper 2. This work would identify at a landscape scale where important habitat types (or species) are in the CNP and the opportunities for expanding/restoring habitats.

Partners felt it is important to inspire land managers and other partners about opportunities for action and what areas should be a focus for habitat creation. The mapping needs to be at a general scale and not too detailed. It was noted that this could be quite challenging if a GIS is used, as this would use spatially-referenced data. Other graphic approaches may be better.

The Strategy Group need to be clear about what will change over 20 years or so, and where the trade-offs are likely to be. It should be clear why one habitat type is being promoted over another, and what the benefits are of doing so. Analysis will need to be done on the impacts of losing one habitat type and gaining another to ensure there are clear net benefits. It would make sense to focus on the scarce and threatened habitat types first, and prioritise a drive to enhance and enlarge these first.

It was suggested that CN needs two different documents to help deliver habitat actions and spatial targets:

- a) A detailed and comprehensive data set of habitat types, with rationale, evidence, challenges for use with working 1:1 with land managers; and
- b) An inspiring document pointing out the directions we want to go, and highlighting benefits and opportunities.

These can be used together to inform priorities and help engage with land managers. It might be possible to develop a spatial mapping tool that could be publicly available for land managers to use in their decision making process on how they can manage their land for multiple benefits.

Jun 13 AP6: CN staff to liaise with other organisations who have undertaken spatial targeting, and compile published examples, to identify good models and lessons learnt

Jun 13 AP7: CN staff put together a poster, paper or presentation on spatial targeting for the Cairngorms Research Day in Aviemore on 14th November

5. Capercaillie Management Framework

JP presented Paper 3 and set out the aims and objectives of the Framework and the interactions between SOAC and Natura legislation.

Discussion focused on some of the issues implicated in the decline of capercaillie: predation (especially pine martens but also foxes and corvids); climate change; reintroductions/reinforcement of populations; and recreation.

GB noted that capercaillie numbers on the Forest Estate (Glenmore and Inshriach) were increasing in areas with no predator control, increased recreation pressure and large scale habitat changes (forest restructuring, enhanced field layer and conversion to native woodland) with the latter linked to a programme of high levels of deer culling.

The issue of where to focus conservation efforts was then debated. Given that capercaillie populations are in a critical state, should effort be concentrated on the core population (Badenoch & Strathspey) which contains most of the individuals, or should work focus on the periphery areas where the population is declining very rapidly and could soon be extinct (Deeside in particular)? Getting the balance of effort right was going to be critical. The Strategy Group generally supported the framework and suggested it needs to have a broader perspective, including Deeside and Moray.

Jun 13 AP8: JP to widen scope of Framework and include Deeside

The next step is to discuss the framework within the CNPA focusing on the areas of access, planning and Natura. A broader view would then be sought from a range of partners across the CNP and Scotland.

Jun 13 AP9: JP to involve community and land owner perspective in consulting on the Framework and any working group

6. OpenNESS presentation from Jan Dick CEH

JD explained that the OpenNESS project, funded by the European Commission (see <http://www.openness-project.eu/>), aims to work collaboratively with stakeholders in each case study area to identify the problems they face in “operationalising” the Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services concepts in their specific policy and decision-making context.

JD suggested four ideas aiming at various issues and levels of natural resource management in the CNP:

- Planning to delivery of ecosystem services within a given area (suggested Strathavon)
- Payment for ecosystem service funding to enhance woodland and water quality (Tomnavoulin, Glenlivet)
- Predicting influence of climate change on ecosystem service delivery
- Identifying promoting and impeding policy options to enhance woodland

The SG discussed these options and mentioned a few others to consider as well: Montane Scrub Project and Capercaillie Management Framework. SG suggested that JD develop the option on ecosystem services (or SG thought better to call it “natural services”) funding in Tomnavoulin; and the Capercaillie Management Framework.

Jun 13 API0: JP to liaise with JD on linking OpenNESS project to the Capercaillie Management Framework

June 13 API1: AW to liaise with JD on linking OpenNESS project at Tomnavoulin site

JD noted that an OpenNESS workshop will take place at Loch Leven on 21-24 October, and invited Strategy Group members to attend.

Jun 13 API2: All partners to inform JD if wishing to attend workshop in October

7. Updates

Futurescapes: PM gave an overview of the RSPB Futurescapes projects and passed round summary sheets on the two project areas in the CNP: B&S Farmed Floodplain and the Cairngorms Caledonian Pinewood.

8. Date of Next Meeting

Late September or early October.