

## **Developing a Park wide approach to Ranger Services in the National Park**

**Prepared by:** Pete Crane, Senior Visitor Services Officer

**Purpose:** To update the Forum on the progress with arrangements that will lead to provision of a cohesive approach to ranger services that meets the needs of the National Park and to generate discussion. Comments are welcome, particularly on the issues and questions posed in paragraphs 11 and 12.

### ***Background***

1. CNPA Officers have been working with partners and stakeholders since March 2004 to formulate arrangements for the provision of a cohesive Cairngorms National Park-wide approach to ranger services which meets the requirements of the Cairngorms National Park.
2. There are currently 13 ranger services in the National Park (on the basis of organisations with staff that are called “rangers”), employing some 26 fte staff. All of the services except one is wholly or partly funded by the public sector but there are eight different public sector bodies involved in the current funding or management arrangements. Scottish Natural Heritage grant aid eight services and fund the work programme of two other services. Four services are managed by local authorities.
3. Three services (all local authority) have an area wide remit; one service is community based and the remaining nine services work on a defined geographic area of the Park – usually an estate. The current structure is complex and intricate. The Park Authority has no direct influence over any of the ranger services.
4. An Issues Paper outlining the current ranger coverage was presented to the ViSIT Forum in December 2004.
5. At it's meeting in March 2005 the National Park Board agreed that work towards a Park-wide provision should be undertaken with regard to the following principles: -
  - a) The existing Ranger Services in the Cairngorms do much valuable work but there is a need to ensure that they are working in the best interests of the Park in a way that collectively achieves the Park aims in a coordinated way. The Park Authority has a key role in ensuring that this takes place. CNPA should consider options for changes and position itself so as to have more direct influence over the activities of ranger services in the Park.

- b) The existing mix of private and public sector funding and management has considerable strengths and should not be lost. Any changes required should be introduced gradually, in a considered fashion, over a number of years and in a way that simplifies arrangements rather than adding additional bureaucracy.
- c) The four 'SNH' aims of ranger services should be adopted for the services within the Park with the addition of the words "and cultural heritage" to the second and fourth aims.
- d) Rangers should continue to service the needs of three principal customer groups: **visitors, land managers and local communities**. Where possible links with local communities should be strengthened.
- e) The principal Park-wide strategies that will influence the work of ranger services over the next three years are the **Sustainable Tourism Strategy, the Outdoor Access Strategy and Interpretation Strategy**. The work of rangers will also be important in delivering the **Local Biodiversity Action Plan** and in promoting the adoption of the **John Muir Award**.
- f) The work of ranger services should be regularly evaluated to ensure that it is effectively and efficiently meeting agreed outputs and contributes to the Park aims.
- g) The Park Authority should not consider applications for funding new ranger services until an overall ranger strategy for the Park has been agreed.
- h) Rangers should be clearly identifiable to the public and be conspicuously linked to the National Park in some way.
- i) Rangers should continue to have a strong local presence and be dispersed throughout the National Park.
- j) Ranger policy within the National Park should continue to have strong linkages with national policy and practice for countryside rangers in Scotland.
- k) As part of implementing necessary changes a concise Ranger Service Strategy should be prepared for approval by the Board. In the meantime CNPA staff should continue to provide support and coordination functions and liaise closely with existing ranger service managers and with rangers through their professional association.

6. The Board asked that the following options for change should be evaluated and appraised:-

| <b>Options for change in the future</b>  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• CNPA should influence Ranger Services' work programmes through liaison with SNH and coordinate other Services through concordats and service level agreements.</li></ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• CNPA should take on the funding role of SNH and coordinate other Services through concordats and service level agreements.</li></ul>                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• CNPA should directly employ the rangers that are currently employed by local authorities.</li></ul>  |

In making this decision the Board specifically rejected both the options of “no change” to the current arrangements, and that the CNPA should directly manage all the ranger services.

### ***Appraisal of Options***

7. Peter Scott Planning Services were appointed by the CNPA to undertake an appraisal of the options and make recommendations to the Park Authority. A small Advisory Group was formed comprising ranger managers from public and private sectors and SNH to ensure that the study was comprehensive in its scope. The group has met twice with the consultant. The study considered management and funding arrangements and assumed that current levels of funding for ranger services would be maintained.
8. All ranger services were contacted in the autumn of 2005 and data gathered. The report is currently in its final draft stage and will be available to all interested parties shortly.
9. The consultants found that while the current arrangements have a number of advantages (e.g. in providing effective public-private partnerships) there were also disadvantages for the Park overall (e.g. difficulty for Park Authority to match activities of rangers to major strategic initiatives, including the Sustainable Tourism Strategy).
10. The consultants recommendations to CNPA are likely to include:-
- a) CNPA should move to take on the discretionary grant funding role from SNH for private estates and charitable trusts, considerably simplifying the arrangements and more directly influencing the work programmes of these services to deliver the aims of the Park;

- b) CNPA should liaise with SNH to influence the two ranger services that are covered by long-term management agreements;
- c) CNPA should move to directly manage some ranger posts that are currently delivered through local authorities but there should be transition arrangements until capacity is built.
- d) CNPA should develop concordats to influence the ranger services that are currently delivered by other public bodies (e.g. Forestry Commission Scotland and Highlands and Islands Enterprise)

### ***Discussion***

11. The above bullet points are only consultant's recommendations to CNPA. Considerable further work and discussion is required before any decisions can be made. It should be noted that implementing any of these changes would require the agreement and cooperation of several partners including individual ranger service managers, SNH and the Scottish Executive.
12. Specific questions of interest at the present time are:
- a) Are changes of this nature more likely to meet the new challenges and expectations in a National Park?
  - b) Would changes of this nature make it easier to make the link between ranger services on the ground and the big Park-wide strategies such as the Sustainable Tourism Strategy?
  - c) Would changes of this nature make it easier to meet customers' expectations in a National Park? The specific customers of ranger services are visitors, land managers and communities.

**Pete Crane**  
**Senior Visitor Services Officer**  
**January 2006**

