



## For Information

**Title:** Update on the Integrated Wildfire Management Plan

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### Strategic Context

1. National Park Partnership Plan 2022 - 27 Fire Management actions (A7), are to:
  - a) Develop an Integrated Wildfire Management Plan for the National Park, including strategic firebreaks.
  - b) Develop and agree a National Park approach on campfires and barbeques (covered in Fire Management Byelaw, Paper 2).

### Purpose

To update the Board on the development of an Integrated Wildfire Management Plan for the Cairngorms National Park. This paper discusses progress in the preparation of the Integrated Wildfire Management Plan.

### Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

- a) Note progress on development of the Integrated Wildfire Management Plan and next steps.

### Strategic policy consideration

2. The risk of damaging wildfires is increasing across much of upland Scotland. Changing climate patterns towards warmer, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers are becoming apparent. The James Hutton Institute assessment of climate change projections for the Cairngorms, commissioned by the Park Authority, indicates that the National Park will experience further warming over the coming decades, as well as seasonal and spatial shifts in precipitation distribution and a substantial increase in the number of consecutive dry days between May and October.



3. Wildfires threaten manmade assets like houses, windfarms, fences and other built infrastructure, and natural assets like forests, peatlands and immobile species.
4. The financial cost of wildfires can be high. Estimates for the cost of the Saddleworth Moor wildfire in 2018 run into many millions of pounds for fire fighting and environmental damage.
5. The likelihood of ignition and the impact of wildfire are changing in the National Park as visitor numbers increase and changing land management practices increase fuel loads in some places. Public concern around the wildfire issue has risen in recent years. In light of these changes, the Integrated Wildfire Management Plan (IWMP) takes a strategic approach to assessing the likelihood of wildfire, the impacts and opportunities for mitigating and managing escalating risks.

## **Stakeholder engagement**

6. Throughout 2023, the Park Authority has consulted widely with estate managers, those practising muirburn, wildfire groups, land management partnerships, Scottish Fire and Rescue, rangers and other stakeholders to identify the current situation, key issues, grounds for collaboration and opportunities for strategic, integrated planning at landscape scale.
7. A proposed structure and content to address issues and highlight opportunities was discussed with key stakeholders including South Grampian Fire Group, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Chair of the Scottish Wildfire Forum. This was presented at a wildfire meeting attended by public and private sector interests following the Cannich wildfire in June 2023. It was subsequently discussed and agreed with the Cairngorm Upland Advisory Group (CUAG), East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership, Cairngorms Connect and with individual estates and upland managers in the Park.
8. Following agreement of the approach to structure and content, the Park Authority has worked closely with stakeholders in drafting the first two sections of the IWMP. The conclusion of discussions on byelaws will feed into these drafts, at which point they will be ready for comments as final drafts.



## **Content and structure**

9. The IWMP will consist of three sections. Section 1 outlines prevention measures i.e. minimising the risk of wildfires starting. Section 2 outlines the response to a wildfire i.e. a level of preparedness and ability to put out fires that do start. Section 3 explores how we build an acceptable level of wildfire resilience into a changing landscape.
10. Section 1 (Prevention) will include assessments and recommendations for risk assessments of land holdings in relation to wildfire; ranger services and land manager patrols; communication and awareness raising; and signage. The conclusions of the byelaw discussion will feed into recommendations and options for prevention and minimising the risk of ignition.
11. Section 2 (Response) will include basic fire plans for each landholding; an assessment of fire management skills in the National Park and any potential training requirements; the availability and distribution of the Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and equipment resource; infrastructure; the role of helicopters and insurance necessary to cover costs; communication; and models of collaboration between landholdings.
12. Section 3 (Building Resilience) recognises there are different land management objectives in the National Park, which the IWMP must work with, not look to change. Whilst mature woodland can suppress fire, natural regeneration and increased vegetation height increases fuel load. Rewetted areas can act as natural firebreaks but may only have limited effect on intense and widespread wildfires. This section of the plan will explore opportunities for a Park wide approach to both man made and natural firebreaks and other means of building resilience into the landscape.

## **Next steps**

13. Chapters 1 and 2 will be concluded following final feedback from Deer Management Groups, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, wildfire groups and Cairngorms Upland Advisory Group in Autumn 2024.
14. Concurrently, Chapter 3 will be drafted with input from land managers and stakeholders. A draft chapter 3 will be tabled at formal groups and discussion forums by October 2023. Work on the IWMP will be presented the UK Wildfire Conference in Aberdeen on 13 November.



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15. At the board meeting in November a draft of the IWMP will be presented for discussion and agreement for public consultation in early 2025. The paper in November will consider resource implications, strategic risk implications and success measures for the Park Authority.