
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: Wildlife Estates Scotland Initiative

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Purpose

To update the board on the development of 'Wildlife Estates Scotland', seek endorsement of a pilot scheme in the Cairngorms National Park and consider how CNPA can best support it.

Recommendations

That the Board welcomes the proposed pilot for 'Wildlife Estates Scotland' in the Cairngorms National Park and considers how best CNPA can support its implementation.

Executive Summary

The private land management sector, led by the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association (SRPBA) and Scottish Estates Business Group (SEBG), is developing an accreditation scheme for sporting estates known as 'Wildlife Estates Scotland'. Based on an existing scheme endorsed by the European Commission, the scheme seeks to ensure best practice in game and wildlife management and to demonstrate the economic, social and environmental outcomes delivered by sporting estates.

Although being developed as a national initiative, it is proposed to use a pilot focused on the Cairngorms National Park to help develop the scheme and test its implementation. Given the significant influence of sporting land use on a large area of the National Park, the scheme has the potential to bring significant benefits to the Park, not least a better framework for engaging private sporting estates in a more co-ordinated approach to delivery of biodiversity conservation and other public benefits.

The scheme is due to be launched later this year, and the Cairngorms National Park pilot is anticipated to begin in March 2011.

WILDLIFE ESTATES SCOTLAND INITIATIVE - FOR DECISION

Background

1. The Scottish Rural Property and Business Association (SRPBA) and Scottish Estates Business Group (SEBG) are leading development of an accreditation scheme for sporting estates. Known as Wildlife Estates Scotland, the scheme is derived from the Wildlife Estates initiative that the European Landowners Organisation operates across Europe, endorsed by the European Commission.
2. A concept note explaining the scheme is attached at Annex 1. In summary, the objectives of the scheme are to:
 - a) Engage the private and public sectors in collaboration to halt/reverse the loss of biodiversity;
 - b) Promote and implement contemporary best practice in game and wildlife management;
 - c) Improve the political and public understanding and perception of estates, their management practices and what they deliver in terms of economic and public benefits;
 - d) Provide a framework within which management initiatives designed to resolve conflicts and secure a sustainable balance between different interests and species can be developed and promoted;
 - e) Provide and disseminate robust information about wildlife management for educational and policy purposes.
3. Over the last six months, CNPA has assisted SRPBA and SEBG, alongside SNH, in developing the concept to this stage. The scheme is scheduled to be launched in November 2010. It is proposed that the detailed operation of the accreditation will be shaped through a pilot focused on the Cairngorms National Park.
4. Wildlife Estates Scotland will be led by the land management sector itself and the project board is made up of the relevant land management organisations. A steering group will advise on implementation of the scheme, particularly through the pilot phase. At present it is intended that the steering group will comprise:
 - a) Scottish Rural Property and Business Association (SRPBA)
 - b) Scottish Estates Business Group (SEBG)
 - c) Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)
 - d) Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA)
 - e) Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT)
 - f) Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

Proposed Pilot in Cairngorms National Park

5. Level one of the scheme requires estates to sign up to ten commitments. Level two is a significantly more detailed assessment of the estate's sporting and wildlife management plans and activities. To date, a working draft of the level two assessment criteria and process has been developed based on the European model. It needs further development to ensure it is robust, appropriate to Scotland and practical for both estates and scheme administrators to run. It is proposed to develop this further through a pilot scheme focused on the Cairngorms National Park.

6. The pilot in the Park will target approximately ten estates in order to ensure a spectrum of sporting interests and tenure arrangements, in order to test the breadth of the scheme's applicability. For the same reason, it is likely that a second geographical area will be selected as a pilot to include lower ground estate businesses.
7. The steering group will scope and oversee the implementation of the pilot scheme, which at present is anticipated to begin in March 2011.

Contributing to National Park Plan Delivery

8. While the drivers for establishing this scheme are national in context, and the scheme is intended to be developed for Scotland as a whole, it also offers particular benefits to the Cairngorms National Park. It offers the potential of more joined-up and robust delivery of biodiversity outcomes through the private estate sector, better articulation of the range of economic, social and environmental outcomes delivered by estates, and better monitoring and reporting on delivery.
9. In particular, the scheme will contribute to the following National Park Plan outcomes:
 - a) *Species and habitats identified as the highest priorities will be protected and under active conservation management;*
 - b) *All designated sites will be in favourable condition or under positive management to bring them into favourable condition. This will be enhanced further by the appropriate management of the surrounding land to increase the ecological integrity and viability of these sites;*
 - c) *A diverse, viable and productive land management sector will continue to provide high quality primary produce such as food and timber, whilst delivering public benefits which are compatible with the Park's special qualities and will make a growing contribution to employment and the local economy;*
10. Over time, this approach has the potential to provide an effective framework for demonstrating sustainable management of land beyond designated sites, as part of a more integrated approach to the management of the Park as a whole.
11. As the scheme evolves, there is also potential to develop further opportunities in the Park, for example, connections to the National Park brand.

How Can CNPA Best Support the Pilot?

12. In addition to participation in the steering group the most effective ways through which CNPA could support implementation of the scheme through the CNP pilot include:
 - a) Promoting the scheme and its benefits to land managers, partner bodies and the public;
 - b) Assisting the practical implementation of the pilot through our relationships with land managers; and
 - c) Offering specific training to land managers to help implement the commitments of the scheme through the CNP Land Based Business Project.

13. As the design of the pilot develops over the coming months, we will be able to identify the most effective opportunities to help establish an effective pilot which also delivers benefits to the National Park.

Recommendation

14. **That the Board welcomes the proposed pilot for 'Wildlife Estates Scotland' in the Cairngorms National Park and considers how best CNPA can support its implementation.**

Consultation

15. SRPBA and SEBG have led consultation with national partners and interest groups to discuss the concept and direction of this initiative. Following the national launch, further consultation both nationally and within the Cairngorms National Park in relation to the pilot is scheduled. The CNP Land Management Forum on 25th November provides an opportunity to promote and discuss the pilot with a range of partners together.

Implications

Financial Implications

16. There are no direct financial implications arising from this recommendation for CNPA beyond commitment of staff time within the limits of the current operational plan. CNPA may be asked to make a financial contribution to the operation of the pilot in the next financial year which will be considered through our operational planning process once our budget is known.

Presentational Implications

17. There is a clear need to build confidence in an accreditation scheme of this kind, which must be based on robust criteria and assessment. CNPA, as other partners, will be looking to ensure that positive outcomes can be clearly demonstrated by participants in the scheme.

Implications for Stakeholders

18. This initiative is led by the private land management sector. CNPA can help to bring together the necessary public sector interests in the Park to support an effective pilot scheme.

Next Steps

19. The Steering Group is due to be established on the launch of the scheme during November. Arrangements for the pilot would then be developed, with the intention that the pilot begins during March 2011.

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