
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: The Role of CNPA in Coordinating Ranger Services

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Purpose

To update the Board on progress to date in coordinating ranger services and to decide on our future funding support and development of strategy.

Recommendations

That the Board

- a) Note the effectiveness of the unique partnership approach adopted for managing ranger services in the National Park, and approve £148,600 of expenditure for ranger grant 2011/12.
- b) Approve the development, with partners, of a focussed strategy to guide the work of all ranger services in the National Park.
- c) Approve the transfer of £27,000 for Atholl Estates Ranger Service from SNH to CNPA for use as grant-aid in 2011/12.
- d) Note the situation in Aberdeenshire and the intent to develop, with partners, options to enhance the ranger presence to promote responsible behaviour. Any proposals that require additional funding to be approved by Board.

Executive Summary

This paper outlines the background to our approach in working with partners to provide ranger services across the National Park. The ongoing need for ranger services and CNPA support is discussed, and evidence is presented indicating the effectiveness of rangers in delivering the National Park Plan. Approval is sought for expenditure for 2011/12 and the case is made for development of a focussed strategy to guide the work of ranger services over a three to five year period. The implications to ranger services of the recent boundary change are discussed and the case for taking on the grant function for Atholl Estates ranger service is presented. The issues associated with ranger cover for dealing with outdoor access issues in Aberdeenshire are presented.

THE ROLE OF CNPA IN COORDINATING RANGER SERVICES FOR DECISION

Background

1. Rangers provide countryside management services, encouraging people to enjoy their visit to the countryside, to understand and appreciate the area, and to behave responsibly. Their role is often referred to as 'connecting people with place' and as 'adding value to a visit'. Many services promote and organise the maintenance of paths and other countryside facilities. They also have a strong educational and environmental role and work in partnership with local communities. Rangers often work proactively to prevent potential conflicts between visitors and other land management activities.
2. The Cairngorms National Park Authority does not directly employ any rangers; instead CNPA provides grant-aid to most ranger services in the Park and works with all the services to develop a coordinated approach across the Park. This partnership approach, involving public private and voluntary sectors, is unique among UK National Park authorities.
3. At September 2010 there were 11 ranger services operating in the National Park which receive financial support from public bodies and CNPA grant-aids eight of these services (See **Table 1**). All 11 ranger services were in existence prior to designation of the National Park and are managed and funded by a range of partners including local authorities, private estates, an NGO and one community group. With the expansion of the Park boundary in October 2010 a further three ranger services are operating at least partly within the National Park – the Atholl Estates ranger service, the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) ranger service at Killiecrankie, and the Perth and Kinross ranger service.
4. The ranger services cover the whole of the Park with some services dedicated to particular estates while others (typically the local authority services) cover more extensive areas of land, owned and managed by other people. There is one community-based ranger service (seasonal) at Nethy Bridge. In general terms the pattern of ranger services has developed over time so as to ensure that all the land is covered and that land managers have a strong degree of ranger support in areas of greatest need.
5. Following several years of discussion with partners and planning, CNPA took on the grant-aid role for ranger services in April 2009. Grant-aid was previously administered by SNH who agreed that we were best placed to coordinate the work of rangers across the Park. The ranger grant transferred from SNH's budget to CNPA budget in 2009 as uplift to our annual settlement so that taking on this new work was largely cost neutral. The current grant amounts to some £148,600 per annum but it is not 'ring fenced' in our budget.
6. On receipt of applications we offer discretionary grant-aid to ranger services on the basis of agreement of a work programme that helps deliver the National Park Plan and simultaneously meets the needs the aims of the employing organisation. It is

important to remember that rangers are generally employed to meet the objectives of their employer and our grant support influences that work.

Table 1: Rangers Services in National Park at September 2010

Ranger Service	No of Rangers FTE per annum	Funding
Highland Council	2	Highland Council & CNPA Grant
Angus Council	2	Angus Council & CNPA Grant
Aberdeenshire Council	0.4	Aberdeenshire Council and CNPA Grant
Explore Abernethy	0.7	Explore Abernethy & CNPA Grant
Rothiemurchus Estate	2	Rothiemurchus Estate & CNPA Grant
Glenlivet Estate	1.4	Crown Estate & CNPA Grant
Glen Tanar Charitable Trust	1.6	GTCT & CNPA Grant
Balmoral Estate	2.6	Balmoral Estate & CNPA Grant
Forestry Commission Scotland	1.0	FCS
Mar Lodge, National Trust for Scotland	1.5	NTS & SNH through a national concordat
Cairngorm Mountain	1.9	HIE
	17.1	

7. In taking on this grant-aid function the Board agreed that the main priorities in the National Park Plan where we should expect to see ranger services play a significant role were:
- a) Promoting High Quality Opportunities for Outdoor Access
 - b) Raising Understanding and Awareness of the Park
 - c) Conserving and Enhancing Biodiversity and Landscapes

These priorities fit well with the national ranger aims developed by SNH of welcoming people to the countryside, increasing understanding and care of natural and cultural heritage, and sustainable management of the outdoors.

8. The Board were reluctant to consider any increase in ranger services through additional CNPA grant-aid until we had developed our co-ordination role and been able to identify gaps or overlaps in provision.

Policy

9. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) sets national policy and guidance for ranger services in Scotland and we have agreed to work within that framework. The management of rangers is identified as a key action in the National Park Plan in the Priority for Action on Awareness and understanding of the Park: “Develop a cohesive approach to management of ranger services that meets needs of visitors, land managers and communities and of the National Park.”.

10. Ranger services contribute to a number of Scottish Government outcomes including:
 - a) We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations
 - b) We live longer, healthier lives
 - c) We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others

Consultation

11. In developing this paper staff have consulted with:
 - a) Ranger Service managers
 - b) Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum
 - c) Tourism, Business and Awareness and Understanding Delivery Team
 - d) Inclusive Cairngorms

Issues

CNPA Role in Coordinating Ranger Services

12. Prior to April 2009 SNH grant aid for ranger services in CNP was administered by seven different officers (working from four offices) so it was difficult to coordinate effectively work. We took on the grant-aid role for eight services, with a single point of contact, 18 months ago and have completed one full years programme and are half way through the second year. A condition of grant-aid is that the ranger services use the National Park brand image to help position their work within the context of the Park.
13. The partnership approach is highly cost effective. **Annex I** shows the rangers services employed in UK National Parks. If CNPA were to directly employ rangers in the way that all other Park Authorities do, our current expenditure would fund only 3-4 FTE posts, the smallest number in any UK National Park. However, our partnership approach, funding the rangers through grant-aid, directly influences the work programmes of 12.7 ranger FTE posts while we coordinate the work of 17.1 posts. The partnership approach also means that rangers are generally employed by the land managers and, as such, are well integrated with work on the ground in ways that would be challenging for CNPA staff: local solutions to local problems with local ownership.
14. While rangers do not spend much time in the mountain core, ranger services do cover the key access points. There is more work to be done in making sure that visitors accessing the core montane area get the same messages and we have started bringing the rangers covering these areas together to agree common approaches.
15. There are of course some disadvantages of our approach. CNPA does not have direct day-to-day management influence over the services so we cannot effectively deploy rangers to deal with situations as and when they arise. And perhaps the visibility of the rangers is less prominent than it might otherwise be. However, we consider any challenges in this style of partnership working are outweighed by the benefits.

16. **Annex 2** shows a summary of some of the key outputs achieved by ranger services in the first year of our grant aid. It is important to note that site-based rangers cover nearly a quarter of CNP and their work contributes to the experience of some 580,000 visits. The 2010 visitor survey also indicates the importance of rangers to visitors with 28% indicating that they had visited a ranger base.
17. We consider that the work of rangers directly enhances the experience of visitors and that this has helped generate some of the positive feedback obtained in recent visitor surveys. **Tables 2 and 3** show visitor attitudes and ratings for areas of work that are partly delivered by ranger services. These findings indicate that ranger services are making a key practical contribution to the National Park Plan.

Table 2: Visitor Attitudes from 2010 Visitor Survey (figures in brackets from 2004)

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Don't know
Information about this National Park is easy to find/access	25% (7%)	59% (31%)	7% (11%)	- (14%)	- (4%)	8% (33%)
The National Park seems well-managed and cared for	20% (15%)	68% (59%)	8% (9%)	1% (2%)	- (0%)	3% (14%)

Table 3: Visitor Rating of Countryside Facilities, many of which are maintained by ranger services (figures in brackets from 2004)

	Very good	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor	Not visited/ applicable
Signposts	19% (27%)	67% (49%)	8% (9%)	3% (4%)	- (1%)	4% (11%)
Condition of paths and tracks	15% (20%)	57% (52%)	13% (7%)	1% (2%)		13% (20%)
Picnic areas	8% (15%)	46% (42%)	10% (8%)	1% (2%)		35% (32%)
Information boards	11% (18%)	59% (53%)	14% (8%)	1% (2%)		14% (19%)

18. We consider that without ranger services operating effectively across the National Park that we, as the outdoor access authority, would be faced with more access problems. Many problems are simply resolved locally by the relevant ranger service, especially when they work proactively.
19. During consultation in preparation for this paper there was general consensus that the three areas of work listed in paragraph 7 are still relevant but several interested parties considered that we should further emphasise the educational role that ranger services need to play in delivering these priorities.
20. Ranger managers indicated the need for long-term stability of funding and greater clarification on what we want rangers to deliver. Several people suggested that CNPA should work with partners to develop a strategy for ranger services in the National Park to provide greater clarity on the partnership over the next three to five years. The development of a ranger strategy would allow us to include key actions from the new Sustainable Tourism Strategy (due early 2011) and the second National Park Plan. It would also help us to develop more formal arrangements with the ranger services that we do not grant-aid. This work would also fit with our Corporate Plan achievement of 'developing a ranger transition programme to consolidate the family of ranger services in the National Park.'
21. The 'day to day' management of ranger services and the majority of the costs are borne by the employer. Ranger managers have indicated that reductions in our grant aid would lead to a reduced provision. Any reduction would also likely lead to reduced visitor experience, reduced education about CNP, increased access issues

and a loss of confidence and reduced commitment to the National Park by key partners.

22. Making the financial commitment in advance of notification about the funding settlement for CNPA does carry some risk. However, if the recommendation below is agreed, we would still be within the parameters agreed by the Finance Committee that total forward commitment should not exceed 30% of the budget. This is the last significant commitment that would be required before the funding settlement is notified. In view of the core importance of ranger service work to the Park and the value for money achieved through the partnership approach, it is recommended that a one year commitment is made now at the rate agreed for 2010/11.

Recommendations

23. **That the Board:**
- a) **Note the effectiveness of the unique partnership approach adopted for managing ranger services in the National Park, and approve £148,600 of expenditure for ranger grant 2011/12.**
 - b) **Approve the development, with partners, of a focussed strategy to guide the work of all ranger services in the National Park.**

Atholl Estates Ranger Services

24. The expansion of CNP in October added the SNH grant aided ranger service managed by Atholl Estates. In line with the previous arrangement, SNH have indicated that they are prepared to transfer £27,000 grant to our budget on 1 April 2011. As with the 2009 transfer this would be uplift to our total budget so that taking on the grant-aid function would largely be cost neutral.
25. If we are to continue the lead role in coordinating ranger services it there is a strong case to bring Atholl Estates Ranger services under the same grant-aid and management arrangements as all other grant-aided services. This approach would be welcomed by Atholl Estates.
26. Perth and Kinross Council Ranger Service operate in the new area of CNP from Cairnwell to Lair but their presence on the ground is relatively small and we consider that work in this area can be covered in the development of a ranger strategy. There is no requirement for CNPA funding support. The same process would apply to the National Trust rangers at Killiecrankie.

Recommendation

27. **That the Board**
- a) **Approve the transfer of £27,000 for Atholl Estates Ranger Service from SNH to CNPA for use as grant-aid in 2011/12.**

Outdoor Access issues in Aberdeenshire

28. Aberdeenshire Council operate 0.4 FTE rangers in the Deeside and Strathdon area of the Park. Services on Mar Lodge, Balmoral and Glen Tanar cover some of the key

areas where visitor-related issues arise but this leaves a significant area to be covered by 0.4 of a post.

29. A Board paper in March 2010 reviewed the issues surrounding informal camping in the National Park. Two particular problems areas were identified – at Clunie Flats, on Invercauld Estate, south of Braemar, and near Loch Morlich in Glenmore Forest Park. The current ranger service arrangements have generally not been able to manage these issues to the satisfactorily for a variety of reasons.
30. In order to make sure that the situation at Invercauld did not go un-addressed for another summer season, CNPA provided a small grant to Invercauld Estate for seasonal ranger cover to promote responsible access and monitor the problem on their land. **Annex 3** provides details of the problems encountered this summer. A review of the work will be undertaken in the near future.
31. At their meeting in August, the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum advised that the problems with ranger cover and outdoor access and visitor management issues in the Aberdeenshire part of the Park were a concern. Several solutions have been suggested, all involving an enhanced ranger presence ‘on the ground’. We feel that if CNPA were to contribute to these solutions it would involve an increase in rangers and would need Board approval. In taking this forward we feel that any proposals should:-
 - a) Be developed with partners
 - b) Look again at the existing arrangements to see if they can be modified to resolve the problems
 - c) Be flexible so that problems across land ownerships can be addressed
 - d) Be well integrated with our overall approach to ranger services.

Recommendation

32. That the Board

- a) **Note the situation in Aberdeenshire and the intent to develop, with partners, options to enhance the ranger presence to promote responsible behaviour. Any proposals that require additional funding to be approved by Board.**

Next Steps

33. If the recommendations are approved the next steps would be to:

- a) Issue letters to ranger managers indicating that funding support will be available on receipt of applications and agreement of work programmes.
- b) Develop a ranger strategy with partners and present this to the Board in autumn 2011 for approval along with a three year funding proposal for ranger grants.
- c) To confirm the transfer of £27,000 for Atholl Estates Ranger Service with SNH to take effect from April 2011
- d) Undertake further discussions with Aberdeenshire Council and partners about options available to enhance ranger service support for management of outdoor access and visitor-related issues.

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