

5. CONSERVING, ENHANCING AND MANAGING THE PARK



5. CONSERVING, ENHANCING AND MANAGING THE PARK

5.1 Introduction – Conserving and Enhancing the Special Qualities

This section identifies objectives that are specifically targeted at conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the Park, and ensuring the sustainable use of its natural and cultural resources. This is a theme which runs through the other sections of this Plan, whether considering the needs of communities, or recreation and enjoyment in the Park. Conserving and enhancing the qualities which underpin the Park's importance and attraction, as well as much of its economy and communities, must form the basis of successful long-term management.

This section sets out an approach to managing the natural and cultural heritage of the Park that recognises the interdependence between the special qualities and its management, and the important links to the socio-economic viability of land management.

5.2 Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Heritage

5.2.1 Landscape

The distinctive landscape character of the Park derives from the combination of mountain plateaux, extensive forests, open moorlands, straths, lochs and rivers, together with settlements and designed landscapes around estate houses. It is one of the most distinctive special qualities of the Park.

The landscape is a product of both the natural environmental conditions and the history of land-use, expressing both the natural and cultural heritage of the Park. Its conservation and enhancement will therefore be influenced by many different activities and processes, but should be guided by the following objectives.

Strategic Objectives:

a) **Maintain and enhance the distinctive diversity of landscape character across the Park.**

The distinctive landscape character is closely connected with the landforms, land management, habitats and species found here and is one of the key reasons people enjoy the Park. The landscape character also contains a historic record of use and society. Within the landscape there will be dynamic change and evolution but management and development of the Park should retain, and where possible enhance, the distinctive character.

While the Park contains two National Scenic Areas identified for their national significance, the designation of the National Park has highlighted the national importance and coherence of the landscape qualities throughout its area. Accordingly, landscape considerations will be included in all activities that could affect landscape character anywhere within the Park.

b) **Ensure development complements, and where possible enhances, the landscape character of the Park.**

New development and infrastructure, necessary to meet the needs of those living and working in the Park, should be designed to fit and complement the landscape character of its setting, and where possible enhance that setting. The settlement statements in the Local Plan should be informed by landscape capacity studies to ensure that location and design of any new development will complement and enhance the distinctive landscape character.

The potential impacts of public and private roads, masts, utilities, renewable energy developments (in and where relevant beyond the Park), road signs and all other man made artefacts should be assessed to ensure they do not detract from the landscape character.

c) Conserve and enhance the wild characteristics of areas within the Park.

Large areas of the Park, not restricted to the montane area, are valued for their innate qualities and the experience of wildness that many people come to the area to enjoy. This sense of wildness and quiet enjoyment should be safeguarded from encroachment by human infrastructure, inappropriate activities or insensitive management and use. New tracks, paths, roads, structures and motorised forms of recreation should not detract from the quiet enjoyment of the Park. Restoration of vehicle tracks and eroded footpaths should be pursued.

d) Raise awareness and understanding of the influences of natural processes, land management and culture on the landscape character.

The relationships between the natural and cultural processes that shape the landscape character and the context of the historic landscape, should be explained and understood. This should inform management and help enjoyment of the landscape. This will in part be encouraged by engagement with communities to identify why landscapes are valued. It will also be encouraged by identifying and maintaining special view points and popular views from roads.

Existing policy context

- European Landscape Convention
- National Scenic Areas
- Historic Landscape Assessment
- National Planning Policy Guideline 14: Natural Heritage
- Wildness in Scotland's Countryside, Policy Statement 02/03, Scottish Natural Heritage
- Landscape Character Assessments
- NPPG 14 Natural Heritage

Key implementation strategies

- Cairngorms Local Plan
- Integrated Land Management Strategy
- Natural Heritage Strategy

Cross-reference

- 5.5.1 Built and Historic Environment
- 6.7 Renewable Energy
- 7.2 Outdoor Access and Recreation

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The Montane Area – a national asset at the heart of the Park

The Park contains the largest expanse of high montane ground above the potential treeline in Britain. It is recognised nationally and internationally for the quality and diversity of its geology and geomorphology; its habitats including dwarf shrub vegetation and arctic-alpine species; its wildness and landscape. It is also relatively accessible and is valued by many for the mountain recreation opportunities.

The conservation of these qualities and the enhancement of the understanding and experience of the montane area is a theme that runs throughout this Plan. Key issues affecting the montane area include climate change, grazing pressure and infrastructure development. The management of different land-uses, the natural resources, tourism, outdoor recreation and interpretation must all contribute to ensuring that the montane area is seen in the future as a national asset in excellent condition.

There are many objectives throughout this Plan that will influence the conservation and

enhancement of the montane area, particularly those for nature conservation, land management, and outdoor access and recreation. The potential impacts on the special qualities of the montane area should be considered by all sectors in the Park in their policy, management and activities. In particular, application of these objectives in the montane area should:

- a) Improve long-term sustainability and restore the full range of montane habitats, through managing pressures from grazing, other land management and development;
- b) Demonstrate the highest standards in managing the impacts of recreation on montane habitats, soils and natural processes through sensitive path repairs, targeted advice and encouragement of the long-walk-in;
- c) Retain and enhance the sense of wildness in the montane area through restoration of high altitude vehicle tracks, removal of redundant infrastructure and managing the impacts of motorised access, organised events, aircraft noise and commercial infrastructure.

5.2.2 Nature Conservation

The Park's biodiversity, geology and landforms are of national and international importance. The extent and scale of habitats including the native pine woodlands, mountain plateaux, rivers, moorlands, heathlands, farmlands and wetlands hold a rich biodiversity that includes many rare and threatened species. Approximately 39 per cent of the Park is designated for a particular nature conservation interest. Their future condition should be enhanced through a landscape-scale approach that brings all habitats in the wider countryside of the Park into good condition and increases the connectivity between them.

There are 31 areas of the Park (including the rivers Spey and Dee) that are currently designated as being of European importance for nature conservation through the Natura 2000 designations of Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation. A total of 46 sites are designated as part of a national suite of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and a further six areas are designated as National Nature Reserves where management for nature conservation is given primacy. There are also 15 sites recognised for their geological importance in the Geological Conservation Review.

These designations carry special responsibilities for public authorities, land managers and users. While these sites represent examples of the best of the natural heritage in the Park, they cannot be managed in isolation from the surrounding land and habitats.

Accordingly, their future condition should be enhanced through a landscape-scale approach that

brings all habitats in the rest of the Park into good condition. This will be achieved through a strategic approach to management that targets habitat enhancement in key locations. This will increase the viability of the designated areas by increasing the connectivity between them. It will also improve the extent of high quality habitats and associated native plant and animal communities that is already unparalleled in Britain.

Natura 2000 – A Network of Special Sites

Natura 2000 is a European network of protected sites which represent areas of the highest value for natural habitats and species of plants and animals which are rare, endangered or vulnerable in the European Community.

The network includes Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) which support valuable habitats and species (other than birds) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) which support significant numbers of wild birds and their habitats.

The network is established through the 1992 Habitats Directive and the 1979 Birds Directive. Through these, Scotland has a responsibility to identify and protect SACs and SPAs. There are

currently 19 SACs and 12 SPAs in the Park, which together with other designated sites must be protected and managed positively for their nature conservation interest. The Park also has a number of wetlands of international importance listed under the Ramsar Convention. As a matter of policy, the government has chosen to afford these sites protection equivalent to Natura sites, although many have dual designation already.

The qualifying habitats in these designated areas usually extend outside the site boundaries. The objective of achieving favourable conservation status for them can only be secured in the long-term by safeguarding the habitats wherever they occur. This adds impetus to the need to manage all semi-natural habitats and native species in the Park to the highest standards.

Strategic Objectives:

a) **Conserve and enhance the diversity of habitats and species present throughout the Park through a landscape-scale approach to habitat networks.**

The habitats and species throughout the Park are special qualities which underpin its designation as a National Park. Many are of national and international importance and their conservation, and where possible enhancement, is key. However, it is the existing scale and proximity of habitats, such as semi-natural woodland, rivers, moorland and

montane areas that give the Park its particular importance. Nature conservation efforts should therefore seek to bring all habitats in the Park into good condition.

Management should take a strategic view to enhance the linkages between habitats, their scale and minimise fragmentation. Extensive and inter-connected networks of montane ground, moorland, forest, wetlands and semi-natural farmland habitats should be enhanced by spatial action plans, and protected from inappropriate actions that would detract from the network.

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b) **Ensure all designated nature conservation sites are in good condition.**

Within the network of habitats in the Park, some are designated as being of national or international importance for particular nature conservation features including biodiversity, geology and landforms. These sites should be exemplars of good management where the natural heritage interest is secure within a long-term management plan, devised in partnership with land managers. Public support and resources should seek to engage managers, local communities and visitors in understanding and caring for these sites.

All public bodies have responsibility to ensure that they safeguard designated sites when carrying out their functions. The use of targeted incentives will ensure specific actions to maintain and enhance the interests of designated sites. These will be complemented by incentives that promote the positive management of the connecting habitats between them.

c) **Engage all sectors in implementing international, national and local biodiversity targets.**

All partners in the Park have a key role to play in delivering aspects of European Union biodiversity objectives, the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and the Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP).

The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 sets a target to halt the decline of biodiversity in Scotland by 2010. This target reinforces the aim of safeguarding the contribution that biodiversity makes to the special qualities of the Park. The Cairngorms LBAP, published in 2002, identifies a range of management issues and opportunities to conserve and enhance the biodiversity of the area.

Building on this, all sectors involved in managing, living and working in the Park should be engaged in helping to deliver the aims of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, thereby conserving and enhancing the biodiversity qualities of the Park.

While biodiversity objectives apply to all native species and semi-natural habitats throughout the Park, some species require extra effort to protect and enhance them either because of their particular ecological requirements or because they are threatened with extinction. In the Park, species such as capercaillie, hen harrier, water voles, sea lampreys and freshwater pearl mussels, as well as a range of plants, require extra effort.

d) **Ensure that populations of species given special protection under the Habitat Regulations, the Wildlife and Countryside Act and the Nature Conservation Act are stable or, where appropriate, increasing.**

In addition to ensuring that the habitats necessary for those species given special protection are in good condition, a co-ordinated effort between public agencies, land managers, the police and public to address wildlife crime and irresponsible actions is required. These bodies need to develop partnerships with local communities to help prevent all forms of wildlife crime including poaching and illegal killing or taking of protected species. This will be supported by communications about the law, the nature of the species at risk, and advice as to how everyone can help to safeguard them.

e) **Promote access to appropriate policy and funding mechanisms to support nature conservation.**

Public policy and support for nature conservation should be targeted at all interests that can contribute, including land

managers, but also businesses, communities and visitors. The support should focus on the nature conservation interests and opportunities particularly relevant to the Park and should be accessible and easily understood. Public support should be based on compliance with good management practice.

f) Identify, prioritise and take action to address non-native species that pose a threat to the natural heritage and land management of the Park.

Non-native species can be introduced either deliberately or accidentally, and many have the potential to damage the existing species, habitats and ecosystems, as well as affecting the landscape and land management. Examples include non-native fish, riparian and aquatic plants that currently pose a threat to the river ecosystems and the associated fisheries. Mink which threaten water voles, and grey squirrels which impact on red squirrel populations are also potential threats. To tackle these threats resources and incentives for implementation and monitoring are needed.

g) Promote appropriate reintroductions of species and reinstatement of habitats and identify the likely impacts on existing species, habitats and ecosystems.

Consideration will be given to reintroductions of some species or the reinstatement of some habitats in key areas of the Park. These may include for example, freshwater pearl mussel (already being reintroduced into two sites), reinstatement of water vole habitat and reintroduction of the species after controlling mink. Some plant communities in floodplain areas should also be considered for reinstatement. Opportunities should also be taken to manage habitats to attract the recolonisation of species that have become extinct in the Park, including corncrakes. Where these or other species introductions or reintroductions are being considered, their potential impacts should be researched to inform decision making and mitigation measures.

h) Develop awareness and understanding of the interactions of land-uses, tourism, outdoor access and nature conservation amongst all interests.

To ensure success in conserving and enhancing the natural heritage of the Park, all sectors need to be aware that their actions can impact – positively or negatively – on the natural heritage. Opportunities for interpretation, training or demonstration should encourage greater understanding of the interactions and mutual interests between nature conservation and the activities of managers, residents and visitors in the Park.

i) Identify and carry out a research programme designed to provide the information and monitoring on the habitats, species and ecosystems required to guide future decision-making.

There is a specific need to address the monitoring and research on the status of species, habitats and ecosystems and the key influences including climate change scenarios and recreational disturbance.

j) Raise awareness of the outstanding geology and geomorphology in the Park.

The Park has an internationally important record of geology and geomorphology. To encourage its long-term conservation, and understanding and enjoyment of geology and geomorphology as part of the Park's special qualities, greater effort is required in raising awareness through interpretation and education.

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Existing policy context

- Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004
- Scottish Biodiversity Strategy
- Habitats Directive 1992
- Birds Directive 1979
- Deer (Scotland) Act 1996
- Geological Conservation Review
- NPPG 4 Land for Mineral Working

Key implementation strategies

- Natural Heritage Strategy
- Integrated Land Management Strategy
- Local Biodiversity Action Plan
- Cairngorms Local Plan

Cross-reference

- 7.2 Outdoor Access and Recreation
- 6.4 Sustainable Tourism

5.3 Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

The special qualities that we value in the Park, together with the resources we use for much of our economy and communities, depend on the functioning systems of soil, water and air; natural resources which must be sustained. Many of the objectives set out in other sections of this plan will affect these resources, but there are some objectives for sustainable resource use outlined here that should apply across all sectors.

Strategic Objective:

- a) **All management and development in the Park should seek to make the most sustainable use of natural resources, including water and energy.**

All interests in the Park including households, land managers, visitors and businesses should seek to minimise their impact on natural resources and ensure their use is as sustainable as possible. New development and infrastructure should incorporate the most sustainable systems of energy, water, materials and other resources in order to minimise its impacts on natural processes.

5.3.1 Soils

Soils, together with other factors such as climate, exert a strong influence on natural systems, land-uses, biodiversity, industry and infrastructure. The Park is exceptional because of its unusually large extent of rare, undisturbed soils compared to other areas of Scotland, particularly soils associated with the Caledonian pine forests and the montane plateaux.

The structure of soils is key to the drainage and nutrient functions that underpin habitats and land-use, and broader functions such as carbon storage in peat and its role in regulating climate change. For example while peat lands have their own intrinsic importance for their habitats and species, they also have an important function in regulating water flows in catchments, and as long-term carbon stores.

Strategic Objective:

- a) **Prevent degradation and erosion of vulnerable montane and organic soils, including peat.**

The structure and functionality of these soil types can be damaged as a result of excessive trampling by walkers and off-track cyclists; by tracking from motorised vehicles; by the construction of tracks; and by burning, excessive grazing and trampling by domestic livestock and wild deer. Receipt of public support for management must require compliance with soil conservation measures appropriate to the land holding.

Those soils which are particularly vulnerable, such as the montane and peat soils, should be conserved through management to ensure that the functioning structures are not lost. Management of existing developments in the montane zone, such as the ski areas, will require soil conservation actions to safeguard

against damage that can be caused as the result of the activities and supporting infrastructure. Management of outdoor access, recreation and farming, in addition to development through the Local Plan should also contribute to soil conservation.

5.3.2 Water

The watercourses and lochs of the Park generally have an excellent water quality, but there are pressures associated with settlement development and land management. There can be extreme fluctuations in quantity arising particularly from heavy rain and snow-melt. As well as providing part of the essential infrastructure for living and working in the Park, the water resource is an important habitat for many species and a popular recreation resource.

The rivers Dee and Spey are both classified as being of European importance for nature conservation and marshes, such as the Insh marshes, are also of international importance. Other rivers, such as the Feshie, are also recognised for their fluvial geomorphological interest. Management of the water resource needs to account for these varied uses and benefits, focus on water quality, quantity, hydromorphology and ecology, and be closely integrated with surrounding land-uses.

The management of floodplains is one of the key issues in the Park, as parts of many rivers have been cut off from their river systems by flood walls. This channels flow in a much more intensive way than is natural, leading to erosion of river beds and loss of finer sediments. It also leads to the loss of wetland habitats that help to support the diversity and viability of the river systems. Flood waters that cannot spread out in the upper catchments can cause severe flooding downstream.

Catchment Management – The Water Framework Directive

The 2000 Water Framework Directive establishes a new legal framework for the protection, improvement and sustainable use of water, including surface and ground water. Its purpose is to:

- prevent deterioration and enhance status of aquatic ecosystems, including groundwater;
- promote sustainable water use;
- reduce pollution;
- contribute to the mitigation of floods and droughts.

The Directive is implemented in Scotland through the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2004. This sets out an approach to River Basin Management Planning on which water management in the Park should build, by taking a catchment and ecosystem scale approach to secure quality and quantity.

Strategic Objectives:

a) Maintain and enhance the existing high water quality environment in the Park.

The water quality in the Park's rivers and lochs is generally excellent. Management of the watercourses, neighbouring land management and the water and waste infrastructure should aim to maintain, and where possible, enhance the quality and quantity of water to the benefit of landscape, biodiversity and human use including services, access and recreation.

b) Adopt a catchment-scale approach to water management that integrates land-use, nature conservation and flood management.

By managing watercourses in the context of the catchment area, there are opportunities to co-ordinate its management with surrounding land-uses and account for the up and down-stream influences and impacts. This offers benefits to water quality and quantity,

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flood management, fisheries, biodiversity, access and recreation. The catchment management approach currently developed for the rivers Spey and Dee provides a good basis on which to develop this approach in the Park.

c) **Encourage more sustainable patterns of water use by households, industry, agriculture and business.**

Managing the demand for water could have as much, if not greater environmental impact as managing its supply. Water supply can be a significant constraint to the development of communities. Water used wastefully is water lost from the environment and there is wasted energy in treating water that is surplus to requirements. All built development and activities using water in the Park should seek to minimise wastage and implement sustainable systems of water-use through efficient systems. Reducing both leakage from water supply networks and the demand for water should be encouraged.

d) **Promote sustainable flood management consistent with natural fluvial processes.**

Potential flooding should be managed through a process of identifying risks. As the implications of climate change become clearer, these should be taken into account. Until then, a precautionary approach should be adopted. Opportunities to reduce flood risk should be taken, within and beyond the Park, such as modifying the flow through management of floodplains, wetland creation, sustainable urban drainage systems, surface flow and upstream activities. The Local Plan should minimise the risk of flooding affecting or resulting from new development.

Existing policy context

- Water Framework Directive 2000
- SPP7 Planning and Flooding

Key implementation strategies

- Integrated Land Management Strategy
- Natural Heritage Strategy
- Cairngorms Local Plan
- Spey Catchment Management Plan

Cross-reference

- 5.4 Integrated Land Management
- 6.6 Housing
- 7.2 Outdoor Access and Recreation

5.3.3 Air

The air quality in the Cairngorms is high in comparison with many other areas of Scotland. The prevailing westerly maritime airflow and the absence of major industry in the area means there is little air pollution. As well as underpinning the natural heritage, the sense of 'fresh air' and lack of air pollution is a key quality that people come to the area to enjoy.

Strategic Objectives:

a) Maintain, and where possible enhance, the existing high level of air quality.

The air quality is a key part of the natural environment that people come to enjoy in the Park, and helps to sustain many of the habitats and species as well as contributing to the quality of life. Emissions from transport, industry and settlements should be minimised.

b) Retain dark night skies and minimise light and noise pollution.

As well as the physical quality of the air, the low level of light pollution means the Park is one of the best areas in the UK for dark night skies. The tranquillity of the area is also a particular quality that should be retained and enhanced. The low noise and light pollution contributes significantly to the sense of wildness and to people's enjoyment and perceptions of the Park.

Existing policy context

- Air Quality Framework Directive 1996
- UK Air Quality Strategy
- Air Quality (Scotland) Regulations 2003

Cross-reference

- 6.5 Transport and Communications

5.4 Integrated Land Management

Land and water management on farms, crofts, estates and reserves is a major influence on all four aims of the Park, and particularly the landscape, and the natural and cultural heritage qualities of the Park. It creates and maintains many of the important habitats, as well as sustaining businesses and creating employment. The ongoing conservation and enhancement of the special qualities of the Park will rely on a viable land management sector whose varied objectives contribute positively to the outstanding natural and cultural environment.

Integration is a familiar concept at a policy level across rural Scotland. However, the challenge and opportunity in the Park is to identify the practical ways in which both policy-makers and land managers can take a joined-up approach and work with others to the benefit of both land management and the National Park.

This section identifies strategic objectives for all land management sectors, aimed at ensuring an integrated approach across different activities. It then identifies further strategic objectives that are specific to particular land management sectors and resources.

There are potential conflicts inherent in identifying objectives for the management of different land-uses across the Park. In particular, the application of these objectives at an individual site level will require choices to be made within this overall framework, but this is the essence of

integrated management. More detailed spatial guidance will be developed where appropriate to help resolve conflicts and integration.

Strategic Objectives for all Land Management:

- a) **Maintain and enhance a viable land management sector that delivers private and public objectives and enhances the special qualities of the Park.**

The ongoing management of the land underpins many of the qualities for which the Park is valued. A vibrant land management sector that supports private enterprise and employment and provides active management is a key means to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the Park and deliver other benefits for the public.

- b) **Integrate support for all land and water management activities to deliver public benefits that conserve and enhance the special qualities of the Park.**

Land management can deliver many public benefits, such as access infrastructure, nature conservation or education. These are benefits that the public enjoy and use, but which have a cost attached to their provision and management. Currently there is a range of public support measures for land managers. In the future these should be targeted at delivering benefits that are relevant to the Park area, transparent in what they buy, straight-forward for managers to access and integrated across the varied land management sectors.

- c) **Develop and promote best practice in land and water management and its interactions with people and other land-uses.**

Land managers and public agencies should work together with local communities and other interests, to ensure that land and water management in the Park is an example of best

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practice. It should take into account the range of objectives and the interactions of different land-uses, outdoor access and local communities.

d) **Develop collaboration and communication between statutory agencies, land managers, non-governmental organisations, voluntary groups, communities and other interests.**

The interactions between land management, the natural heritage and the economy of the Park requires all sectors to work together, share information and be pro-active in developing understanding and best practice in land management. Agencies and land managers should share information and management plans with local communities and each other.

e) **Develop local supply chains and markets for local produce.**

The local consumption of local produce offers many benefits including enhanced viability of production, a greater share of the value captured for producers and businesses within the Park, and a reduced need to transport goods over long distances. Currently there are weak links in the supply chains for local processing and marketing which need to be addressed.

f) **Reduce waste, energy use and pollution from all land management activities.**

All land management activities should actively seek ways to minimise waste, energy use and pollution. Where pollution incidents do occur, managers should have the necessary plans and infrastructure to deal with them quickly and effectively and minimise adverse impacts.

Diverse land ownership and management

There is a wide diversity of land ownership across the Park. The majority of land is in diverse private ownership, with smaller areas owned by Non-Governmental Organisations (including the National Trust for Scotland and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) and public organisations (including the Forestry Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage).

Different owners and managers set varied objectives. For example, some land is managed primarily for nature conservation, whilst other areas are managed primarily for agricultural production, for sporting businesses or for recreation.

While the primary objective or context will vary, most land managers will be delivering several different objectives within one area. Managing this mosaic of uses, managers should therefore have regard to the objectives of their neighbours and potential implications beyond their own land holding.

The following sections 5.4.1 to 5.4.5 set out the objectives for the main land-uses within the Park. It is though, recognised that any one manager or land holding is likely to be involved in several of these activities within the context of their own aims and objectives. The diversity of ownership and management across the Park helps to support the varied landscape and special qualities that give the Park its character. However, greater integration is also required to achieve the vision of the Park.

5.4.1 Farming and Crofting

With approximately 570 farm holdings and 105 crofts covering over 70 per cent of the Cairngorms area, agriculture has a significant influence on the landscape and natural heritage of the Park. Much of this area is rough grazing and moorland, with the improved grassland and arable production generally being restricted to the straths.

The following objectives promote and support sensitive and sustainable forms of agriculture and crofting. These seek to produce good quality food in association with the conservation and enhancement of semi-natural habitats and their associated wildlife; the landforms and landscapes; and the re-creation of features such as dykes and hedges that have diminished.

Strategic Objectives:

a) Manage agricultural production to be consistent with, and enhance, the special qualities of the Park.

The farmland of the Park supports many valuable habitats, for example for breeding waders such as lapwing and oyster catchers. Farming methods should be consistent with the conservation of habitats and species present. These should actively seek to maximise the opportunities to create and support habitat networks, enhance the landscape and contribute to the natural heritage of the Park. This includes features that have diminished such as dykes and scrub where appropriate.

b) Maintain a productive and viable agricultural sector.

A productive and viable agricultural sector underpins many of the public benefits that land management delivers, particularly some farmland habitats. As well as support for

public benefits, it is important for long-term sustainability that agricultural businesses throughout the Park are producing a range of marketable goods.

c) Encourage the continued development of crofting.

Crofting tenure applies only to the Badenoch and Strathspey area within the Park, where it provides opportunities for small-scale and part-time land management and production in addition to the mainstream farming sector. Crofting in this area helps to maintain people living in rural locations and forms a part of the land-use pattern, particularly around settlements. Outside Badenoch and Strathspey, similar small-scale agricultural activity should be encouraged that will contribute to supporting rural communities and local production.

d) Make available land for those who wish to farm, particularly new-entrants.

The availability of land is a key constraint on the number of new people able to take up farming or crofting. This is the result of many factors including the viability of existing holdings, access to finance and the existing pattern of land holdings. Where possible, assistance in sourcing land for those wishing to farm should be encouraged in locations consistent with good management of the natural and cultural heritage.

Existing policy context

- Common Agricultural Policy Reform
- Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture
- Single Farm Payment Scheme
- Rural Development Regulation and Plan for Scotland
- Agricultural Environmental Impact Assessments

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Key implementation strategies

- Integrated Land Management Strategy
- Cairngorms Local Plan

Cross-reference

- 6.2 Economy and Employment

5.4.2 Forestry

The woodlands of Strathspey, Deeside, Donside and the Angus Glens form an extensive forest resource that is predominantly native and renewable. The extent of this forest, together with the close proximity and connectivity of individual woodlands combines to form one of the most valuable ecological networks in Britain, and is one of the widely recognised special qualities of the Park.

The conservation and enhancement of this network and its predominantly native character is important. It should be integrated with work to support the production, processing and local use of timber in pursuit of broader objectives, including sustainable design, construction and renewable energy. Public support and policy needs to encourage the wide range of benefits provided by forests, including timber production, landscape enhancement, nature conservation, sport, recreation, water management and carbon sequestration.

Strategic Objectives:

a) Maintain existing native woodland cover and expand to develop habitat networks that complement the landscape character of the Park.

The existing native woodland is an important special quality of the Park, forming a distinctive part of the landscape and biodiversity. The existing native woods should be conserved and expanded, irrespective of whether or not they are listed on the Native Pinewood Register. This is because they all make an important contribution to the Park's natural and cultural heritage.

Expansion should establish large-scale habitat networks that enhance their viability and help to encourage species that require large habitat areas in which to thrive. Networks will also enhance the landscape character and non-woodland habitats. In the long-term they could lead to links between the rivers Spey and Dee. Where expansion is through planting rather than natural regeneration, seed of local origin should be used.

b) Support multi-objective woodland management that includes timber production, fuel wood, recreation and nature conservation.

Woodlands can deliver many benefits for both managers and the wider community, ranging from the production of marketable timber to outdoor access and nature conservation. Management of woodlands in the Park should reflect this range of objectives and seek to deliver multiple benefits in each case. Public support for woodland management should focus on delivering these multiple benefits.

c) Encourage a mix of tree species, ages and woodland structure to complement the landscape character of the Park.

The current ratio of native and non-native woodland (approximately 85:15) is a distinctive characteristic of the Park's landscape. There should continue to be a mix of species, age and woodland structure that can deliver the objectives of production, recreation and conservation. The use of locally sourced seed should be promoted. Woodland structure should include dead-wood, a valuable resource for biodiversity.

d) Encourage a gradation of tree and scrub cover from valley floor to tree-line in targeted areas and the re-development of woodland types that have declined.

Woodland cover in the Cairngorms has

generally retreated to a lower altitude than its previous natural extent. In targeted locations identified as part of a strategic approach to a habitat network, the upper tree-line, including scrub cover such as juniper, should be encouraged to extend up to its natural altitudinal limit. This will bring benefits to landscape and biodiversity.

The broad-leaved woodland community component of the forest has been much reduced, and where it still exists is often under pressure from domestic and wild grazing animals. Forestry strategy should promote the regeneration of remnants, or replanting where appropriate, on suitable sites retaining soils and ground flora and enhancing riparian woodlands. This objective requires particular integration with deer management objectives.

e) Support the development of local markets, processing and supply chains for forest products.

The economic viability of forestry remains key to ensuring the varied benefits of woodlands in the long-term. Opportunities to link producers with processors and customers should be developed to ensure effective supply chains, and markets for timber and value-added products should be supported.

f) Promote community participation in woodland planning and management and an understanding of local woodland characteristics and distinctiveness.

Many communities have woodland nearby which is used for informal recreation and valued for its amenity. Woodland management also offers potential economic and social benefits to communities through local contracting, use and marketing of timber products, and education and interpretation. Communities should also be able to inform forest policy development and contribute to the objectives and planning for forest policy in order to maximise the local benefits.

Existing policy context

- Scottish Forestry Strategy
- Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme
- Scottish Forest Industries Cluster
- UK Forest Standard

Key implementation strategies

- Integrated Land Management Strategy
- Forestry and Woodland Framework
- Natural Heritage Strategy
- Cairngorms Local Plan

Cross-reference

- 6.2 Economy and Employment
- 6.7 Renewable Energy
- 6.9 Strengthening Communities
- 7.2 Outdoor Access and Recreation

The Caledonian Pine Forest

The Park contains the most extensive area of Caledonian Forest in Scotland. These native pine woodlands of self-sown Scots pine have regenerated from generation to generation, and are now the western-most link to the extensive boreal forest which formerly covered a much larger area of northern Europe. They usually also contain birch, juniper and other tree species and communities and provide a distinctive habitat that is home to several rare species, including capercaillie, crested tit and Scottish crossbill.

The Caledonian Forest is very important for biodiversity and is also a distinctive part of the Cairngorms landscape. Native pine woods are a priority habitat in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and Caledonian Forest is a notified feature in four Special Areas of Conservation within the Park. The conservation of the remaining Caledonian Forest through natural regeneration should be a key factor in guiding future expansion and habitat networks. Management should aim to reduce fragmentation, encourage regeneration and restore forest structure.

5. CONSERVING, ENHANCING AND MANAGING THE PARK...cont

5.4.3 Moorland Management

Just as woodlands are a characteristic part of the Park's landscape character, so are the extensive moorlands, defined here as the open areas below the montane zone, dominated by heather, juniper scrub, wet heath, blanket bog and semi-natural dry grasslands. This includes a significant area of lowland heath.

Moorland covers approximately 40 per cent of the Park so its management has a significant impact on the landscape and biodiversity resource, contributing to a number of the special qualities of the Park. Moorland management is closely connected with the cultural heritage of land-use in the Park and brings significant socio-economic investment.

Strategic Objectives:

a) **Maintain extensive moorlands as a high value and sustainable resource for nature**

conservation, sport, agriculture, landscape and recreation.

The grazing and trampling of deer and agricultural stock, combined with burning can have a significant impact on moorland vegetation, including heather regeneration. Through carefully planned grazing and muirburn regimes, the landscape, biodiversity and sporting benefits of moorland can be optimised. Active management of moorlands, including stock and game, disease and tick control, and infrastructure is needed to deliver the potential benefits which in turn support local communities and employment.

b) **Demonstrate and enhance the links between moorland management and biodiversity.**

The moorland habitat is an internationally significant biodiversity resource. The profile of this resource amongst managers and the public should be increased, so that moorland

Forestry and Moorlands – a network of habitats

In the Park as a whole, forestry and moorlands are both important components of the landscape, habitats and economy. In fact it is the particular combination of forests, moorlands and montane areas that contribute to the Park's special character. However, there are tensions between the objectives for each, not least because the two cannot occupy the same site. While the objectives give long-term encouragement to both land-uses, decisions on the appropriate locations for each can only be made on a more detailed assessment by managers of the characteristics and opportunities of particular sites.

The expansion of native woodland should focus on areas which will give the best advantages in terms of habitat networks and links, particularly among and between the existing core areas of

Strathspey and Deeside; the establishment of a full sequence of woodland types including oak/birch, pine/birch, and sub-alpine scrub; and the enhancement of the landscape character.

There are also places where it will be appropriate to fell woodland plantations and restore ground to moorland, particularly where inappropriate and unproductive forest planting has taken place in the past.

Overall, a mosaic of forest and open moorland is likely to deliver a valuable mix of benefits for biodiversity, land-use, recreation and landscape. Management decisions should be informed by the opportunities to develop a network that meets the needs of different land-uses and enhances the species valued as part of the special qualities of the Park. Spatial guidance to help target networks in the most effective locations will be developed.

management, and the understanding of it, can recognise and improve the opportunities to benefit biodiversity. Management for grouse should respect the full moorland ecosystem.

c) Manage the interaction of moorlands with surrounding land-uses to maintain the integrity of the moorland landscape, ecosystems and hydrology.

Individual moorlands cannot be managed in isolation. The extent of ecosystems and hydrology associated with moorlands means that they need to be managed on a large scale, and integrated with neighbouring woodland edges and other habitat networks.

Existing policy context

- Principles of Moorland Management (Scotland's Moorland Forum)
- The Muirburn Code

Key implementation strategies

- Integrated Land Management Strategy
- Natural Heritage Strategy

Cross-reference

- 6.2 Economy and Employment
- 6.4 Sustainable Tourism
- 7.2 Outdoor Access and Recreation

5.4.4 Deer Management

Red, roe and sika deer are present in the Park. They are a valuable part of the natural and cultural heritage of the Park and contribute significantly to the economic viability of some communities. They are a feature of the natural heritage that visitors associate with the Park and wish to see. Deer can have a beneficial impact on some habitats, but there are areas within the Park where deer populations are currently having a significant adverse impact on the natural heritage qualities which is a particular management issue to be addressed.

The management of deer populations interacts with a number of other land management activities. These include moorland management, forestry and farming, and with the management of other habitats and species. While the management of deer will vary across the Park according to species, different land units and conditions, the following objectives set out a framework to address deer management consistently.

Strategic Objectives:

a) Manage deer populations at densities consistent with the special natural heritage qualities of the Park, particularly native woodland, montane and moorland habitats.

Deer are an essential part in the functioning of many of the Park's habitats, and need to be present within the carrying capacity of the land. However, deer can have an adverse impact on some habitats through over-grazing and trampling. Management of deer populations should be based on regular assessments of habitat impact, co-ordinated at the level of biological populations and maintained at levels that do not cause significant adverse impact to habitats.

b) Encourage co-ordination of deer management across the Park.

As deer move across ownership and management boundaries throughout the Park, their management needs to be co-ordinated. There are opportunities to develop the existing collaboration of Deer Management Groups to include managers, communities and public agencies, to further co-ordinate the planning and implementation of management and address issues at a scale appropriate to deer populations.

5. CONSERVING, ENHANCING AND MANAGING THE PARK...cont

c) **Maintain and enhance the socio-economic sustainability of the deer resource.**

Deer management contributes significantly to the economy of the Park and provides employment, direct and indirect, often in the more remote areas. The skills and expertise of deer managers are important to the management of the Park and their roles often support communities in remote areas.

d) **Make accessible, research and use the best available data on habitat impacts, population models and good practice to inform deer management planning.**

Deer management should be based as far as possible on sound data and evidence. Existing sources of data should be collated and be easily accessible to managers and others, to develop greater understanding of the issues and impacts of management, and promote informed debate.

e) **Where deer fencing is considered appropriate, minimise the impacts on public safety, deer welfare, biodiversity, landscape, cultural heritage and recreation.**

Deer fencing can serve a useful purpose, but its potential negative impacts should be considered and minimised. Decisions on whether fencing is appropriate should refer to the Joint Agency Statement and Guidance on Deer Fencing adopted by public agencies in 2004 as a starting point. Fencing should only be used as part of a wider management plan and should remain in place only as long as necessary. Further guidance on appropriate use of fencing should be developed.

Existing policy context

- Deer (Scotland) Act 1996
- Deer Commission for Scotland Long Term Strategy
- Deer Commission for Scotland Best Practice Guidance

- Joint Agency Statement and Guidance on Deer Fencing

Key implementation strategies

- Strategic Deer Plan
- Integrated Land Management Strategy
- Forestry and Woodland Framework

Cross-reference

- 6.2 Economy and Employment
- 6.4 Sustainable Tourism
- 7.2 Outdoor Access and Recreation

5.4.5 Fisheries Management

Atlantic Salmon, Sea Trout and Brown Trout are the principal species for which river fisheries are managed in the Park. Significant lengths of the Spey, Dee, Don, North and South Esk are within the Park and make up an important fishery resource in the Scottish context. The surrounding land-uses, water abstraction and use, river engineering and interactions with non-native species all have a significant impact on the quality of the fishery resource.

Strategic Objectives:

a) Encourage co-ordination of fisheries management at river system and catchment level.

The issues affecting river fisheries within the Park, including the proliferation of invasive weed species, non-native fish and the need for broader integration of fisheries management with the positive management of riparian habitats, surrounding land-uses and recreation requires co-ordination at the scale of catchments and river systems between river managers and with other interests.

Building on the existing work of District Fishery Boards, management should support the implementation of Catchment Management Plans through regulation and incentive schemes, education, awareness and targeted initiatives for specific issues.

b) Encourage removal and minimisation of physical barriers that impede passage of fish and affect river flow.

There are a number of barriers and physical deterrents to fish migration within rivers which can also alter the river habitat and structure through erosion and deposition. Where not required for current use, these barriers should be removed and their impact on the river flow minimised, in consultation with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. Fisheries should be managed as a part of naturally functioning dynamic river systems.

Cross-reference

- 5.2.2 Nature Conservation
- 5.3.2 Water

5.5 Conserving and Enhancing the Cultural Heritage

5.5.1 The Built and Historic Environment

There is a rich built heritage and archaeology in the Park, including building traditions in estates, farms and country houses, military barracks, roads and bridges, designed landscapes and planned settlements. There are local traditions of design and materials across the Park that give a distinctive local character to different areas. The historic environment reflects the long interaction between people and place in the Park. New development and management of the settlements in the Park should be based on a sound understanding of this heritage.

Strategic Objectives:

a) Develop a sound knowledge and understanding of the archaeological, historic and built environment resources.

There is a wide range of archaeological and built heritage across the Park that contributes significantly to the cultural heritage and character of the Park, but knowledge of the range and state of these resources is patchy and not easily available.

b) Conserve and enhance the resources of the archaeological, historic and built environment.

The physical heritage needs greater repair and maintenance to secure its long-term conservation and enhancement. It also requires the maintenance of traditional skills to care for these resources, many of which have declined.

c) Promote awareness and interpretation of the value of the archaeological, historic and built environment.

A greater awareness of the range and value of the built and historic environment is important to underpin the long-term conservation and enhancement and future development. It also plays an important role in understanding the history of the Park and how the qualities we value today came into being.

d) New development and management of public space in settlements should complement and enhance the character, pattern and local identity of the built and historic environment.

The existing settlements and their surroundings have distinctive local character and identity. New development should complement and demonstrate an understanding of this. It should enhance the local identity, public space and surrounding environment.

5. CONSERVING, ENHANCING AND MANAGING THE PARK...cont

Existing policy context

- World Heritage Convention
- 'Passed to the Future' Historic Scotland (2002)
- Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas (1998)
- Planning (Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings)(Scotland) Act 1997

Key implementation strategies

- Cairngorms Local Plan

Cross-reference

- 5.2.1 Landscape
- 5.3 Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

5.5.2 Culture and Traditions

There is a wealth of culture and tradition associated with the long history of people living in the Park area. Many of these traditions and cultures remain a strong influence on the identity of the Park and its communities. The cultural traditions in the Park range from language and arts to sports and music. All express the connections between people and places and reflect the development of society in the Park.

Strategic Objectives:

- a) **Develop a sound knowledge and understanding of the cultural traditions associated with the Park's places and communities.**

Knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritage and traditions in the Park is often patchy, or specific to particular individuals, communities or places. There is a need to develop a sound knowledge of the

cultural heritage of the Park. This includes arts and crafts, language, folklore, dance and other traditions in order to inform improved communication and co-operation between those involved in conserving and promoting cultural heritage in the Park.

- b) **Support and promote the diverse cultural traditions of communities within the Park.**

The diversity of cultural traditions within the Park forms a key part of its identity. As well as being closely linked with community life, the cultural heritage of the Park is also one of the qualities visitors to the area can enjoy. The promotion of local cultural heritage and traditions by communities and others should be supported.

Existing policy context

- UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001)
- National Cultural Strategy 'Creating Our Future... Minding Our Past'
- Cultural Policy Statement (Scottish Executive 2004)
- National Plan for Gaelic

Cross-reference

- 6.9 Strengthening Communities