

Strategic Environmental Assessment Statement of Enjoying the Cairngorms - Cairngorms National Park Outdoor Access Strategy 2007-2012

INTRODUCTION

1. This Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Statement accompanies the completed Outdoor Access Strategy. It records how the SEA has informed development of the plan, including how opinions expressed on the Environmental Report have been taken into account in finalising the plan. This Statement is published as the 'Post-Adoption SEA Statement' required by section 18(1)(a)(iii) of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.
2. The Outdoor Access Strategy has been developed to ensure that a consistent and Park-wide approach is taken to the delivery and future management of non-motorised outdoor access. It sets out:
 - a. A Strategic approach that suits the special circumstances of the Cairngorms National Park;
 - b. Defines policies and priorities on matters relating to outdoor access;
 - c. Analyses and explain the most appropriate mechanisms for undertaking work related to outdoor access;
 - d. Provides a framework for planning the allocation of resources; and
 - e. Provides the strategic context for the Draft Core Paths Plan.
3. The SEA process developed in conjunction with the consultation on the Outdoor Access Strategy has been a key tool in ensuring that the plan as a whole contributes to the effective management pressures on sensitive natural and cultural heritage sites and land management operations (e.g. by encouraging access away from sensitive sites).

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF THE OUTDOOR ACCESS STRATEGY

4. The Outdoor Access Strategy has been subject to a process of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), as required under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. This has included the following activities:
 - Taking into account the views of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Ministers (Historic Scotland) regarding the scope and level of detail appropriate for the Environmental Report;
 - Preparing an Environmental Report on the likely significant effects of the draft plan on the environment, including consideration of:
 - baseline data relating to the current state of the environment;
 - links between the plan and other relevant strategies, policies, plans, programmes and environmental protection objectives;
 - existing environmental issues within the National Park;

- the plan's likely significant effects on the environment (positive and negative);
 - measures envisaged for the prevention, reduction and offsetting of any significant adverse effects;
 - management alternatives available within the plan;
 - monitoring measures to ensure that any unforeseen, environmental effects can be identified and appropriate remedial action taken.
- Public Consultation on the Environmental Report alongside the Draft Core Paths Plan April to June 2008;
 - Taking into account the Environmental Report and the results of consultation in completing the plan; and
 - Committing to monitoring the significant environmental effects of implementation of the plan. This will also allow identification of any significant, unforeseen, adverse environmental effects and appropriate remedial action.

HOW ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS HAVE BEEN INTEGRATED INTO THE OUTDOOR ACCESS STRATEGY

5. The four aims of the National Park:

- To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area;
- To promote sustainable use of natural resources of the area;
- To promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public;
- To promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities.

These are reflected in the vision of the Outdoor Access Strategy and the Action Themes, Policies and Action Areas. This vision clearly sets out an agenda for the Plan to deliver positive environmental benefits. The special qualities of the Park are closely linked to the natural and cultural heritage of the area. As such many of the Policies, and in particular Policies six (managing outdoor access at sensitive sites) and seven (organised outdoor access events), provide robust protection to a wide range of environmental interests.

Addressing the environmental issues

6. The Environmental Report identified the key environmental trends and issues affecting the area (Environmental Report, Fig. 5.2). These issues are shown below with those within the scope of the Outdoor Access Strategy shown in bold and italics.

Figure 1 Key trends & issues in the Cairngorms

Resource	Key Trends	Key Issues
Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some continued habitat loss, fragmentation & deterioration • Vegetation limited by grazing pressure • Continued introductions and spread of non-native species • Increase in native woodland cover 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecosystem integrity and connectivity • Impact of non-native species • Impact of climate change • Impact of recreation • Impact of development • Incomplete data
Designated Nature Conservation Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing account of external impacts to sites (Nature Conservation Act 2004) • Recent expansion of Natura 2000 designations • Review of NNR designations • Significant percentage of designated sites currently in unfavourable condition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management practices • Long-term security of management objectives • Integration with wider land-use • Identification of where recreation may be contributing to unfavourable condition of sites
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ageing population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implications for community dynamics • Implications for development patterns • Implications for human resources
Historic Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land-use change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of new development • Extension of forest cover • Agricultural changes from CAP reform • Impact of visitors

Figure 1 Key trends & issues in the Cairngorms

Resource	Key Trends	Key Issues
Landforms & Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase in woodland cover • decline in heather moorland cover • increase in research on landscape • poorly designed and located built development including communications and utilities infrastructure • poorly designed and managed forest plantations • growing impacts of ATV tracking • Limited understanding of people's perceptions of landscape values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of development • Recreation pressure • Connectivity of land cover • Impacts of tracks and footpaths • Renewable energy developments • Perceptions of 'wildness'
Soil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • soil erosion on higher slopes and plateaux 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • impacts of recreation • lack of information on soil use and development • grazing and trampling by herbivores
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acidification (atmospheric) • Decline in native fish stocks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • diffuse pollution from agricultural ground • river modification • catchment processes & flood management • availability for consumption • Impact of recreation
Air	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change- increasing temperature and precipitation expected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atmospheric pollution
Outdoor Access & Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing range of outdoor recreation activities • New public right of responsible access • More managed path networks • Increased level of upland path provision and repair • Diversification of ski centres into summer activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development increasing or reducing access opportunities • impact of access on habitats and species • landscape impact of access infrastructure • accessibility of environment for all

Figure 1 Key trends & issues in the Cairngorms		
Resource	Key Trends	Key Issues
Energy & Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increasing demand for renewable (particularly windfarm) sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> potential impact of transmission pylons and windfarm developments use of non-renewable energy sources
Built Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> abandonment or conversion of farm steadings significant demand for new housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> decay of listed buildings impact of development on settlement character

How the Environmental Report has been taken into account

- The Environmental Report assessed the Action Themes and their Policies for their likely environmental effects. It also assessed each of the Action Area Priorities and a brief commentary was provided for each one. As a result of the assessment a number of modifications were made to both policies and priorities.
- A number of the changes identified were to enhance the positive environmental effects of the plan – to make the most of the opportunity to contribute towards the aims of the National Park and the objectives of the Plan e.g. to ensure that the natural and cultural heritage would be sufficiently protected or to strengthen positive actions to enhance these resources.

How comments from the public consultation and from consultation under Section 16 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 on the Environmental Report have been taken into account

- The Environmental Report was published for public consultation alongside the Draft Outdoor Access Strategy in July 2006. The Environmental Report was included in the package of documents sent out to consultees, and to those who requested a copy of the plan, as well as being available to download from the Cairngorms National Park Authority website.
- During the consultation only the Consultation Authorities responded specifically to the Environmental Report. The comments made in the responses to the Environmental Report are detailed in the table below, with a note on how these have been addressed. Full copies of consultation responses are available on request.

Figure 1 How comments on the Environmental Report have been taken into account

Comment	How it has been addressed
Historic Scotland	
<p>Environmental Report is well presented and provides a clear account of the steps undertaken during the assessment process. Have some concerns about path improvements adversely affecting the historic environment but consider that these can be captured during the planning process.</p>	<p>Noted for both future SEA assessments and planning applications</p>
Scottish Environmental Protection Agency	
<p>SEPA consider the whole of the Environmental Report to be of a very high standard and meets the regulations</p>	<p>Noted</p>
<p>SEPA considers that reference should be made to the EC Water Framework Directive and Water Environment (controlled activities)(Scotland) Regulations 2005 (CAR). Also considers specific linkages should be made to National Waste Strategy, National Waste Plan and Area Waste Plans</p>	<p>Noted for future SEA assessments</p>
<p>SEPA notes that section 5 outlines the environmental baseline and refers to more detailed information available in the state of the Park report. SEPA notes the summary could be further improved by including information on current trends, are they permanent or temporary, and the limitations of the data.</p>	<p>Noted for future assessments and monitoring</p>

Figure 1 How comments on the Environmental Report have been taken into account

Comment	How it has been addressed
SEPA considers the coverage of the objectives to be appropriate however SEPA does consider that there is further scope for improvements particularly in targets and indicators set	Noted for future SEA assessments
Scottish Natural Heritage	
Section 4.31- welcomes the inclusion of a statement about impacts on Natura features but recommends this section is expanded to include that there may be some indirect impacts and indicate if there are any likely significant impacts. A statement should included defining “significant” in Natura terms	See section 11 of this statement
Key facts concerning earth heritage and landform should be expanded to include the distinctiveness of the Parks landscapes and their wild land qualities	Table 6.2 of the Environmental Report has been amended to include this fact
In our view the potential environmental effects of creating new access infrastructure and of promoting increased recreational use of access infrastructure have not been considered in sufficient detail in the assessments	Noted. Assessments have been checked to ensure new access infrastructure is properly assessed.

Figure 1 How comments on the Environmental Report have been taken into account

Comment	How it has been addressed
<p>SNH considers that there is potential for a variety of environmental effects on SEA objectives 1-6, which are not well considered in the Environmental Report. The best way of tackling this issue is to add a new policy to the Outdoor Access Strategy concerning managing the impacts of access in sensitive sites</p>	<p>Addressed through Policy 6 in the Outdoor Access Strategy.</p>

EFFECTS ON NATURA INTERESTS

11. The National Park contains 32 sites designated as either Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Areas (SPA) (see Annex I) under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994. There is an obligation in law to prevent any activities being undertaken which are likely to have an adverse impact on the qualifying feature of interest, unless the activity is in the overriding public interest and there is no alternative available. It was the decision of the competent authority that the Outdoor Access Strategy was not subject to the requirements of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive as the Outdoor Access Strategy would not have a direct impact on any designated sites.

REASONS FOR COMPLETING THE PLAN IN ITS FINAL FORM

12. Consideration of the environmental effects of the plan has been integral to the process of developing the Outdoor Access Strategy. The assessment has shown that the plan as a whole is unlikely to have an adverse impact on the environment, and although a number of potential effects remain uncertain at this strategic level, the plan is likely to have a positive effect on the environmental resources in the area. Assessment has led to changes and amendments, to ensure the plan includes mitigation of potential adverse effects and to maximise the positive effects. Based on the assessment and the changes made, the completed plan offers an effective way to meet both the aims of the Park and the vision and objectives of the Plan, including measures to minimise adverse environmental effects and to actively seek environmental enhancement.

MONITORING THE SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF IMPLEMENTING THE OUTDOOR ACCESS STRATEGY

13. The Outdoor Access Strategy sits within the framework of the National Park Plan which is also subject to the SEA process. Therefore some of the significant

environmental effects will form part of the approach to monitoring the State of the Park (see Section 8 of National Park Plan). A further sub-set of indicators are required to monitor those SEA objectives significantly affected by the Outdoor Access Strategy. The two principles which guide the approach to monitoring are:

- The need for a simple but robust approach that is easy to use;
- The need for a collective approach amongst all partners involved in implementing the plan.

Both the policies and the priorities have a significant effect on the SEA objectives 7 (responsible access for all) and 11 (maintaining a sustainable and healthy population). Therefore the focus for the monitoring of the significant environmental effects of the Outdoor Access Strategy should focus on these two SEA objectives. The National Park Authority has lead a process with partner organisations to identify appropriate indicators and these are shown below..

Number of complaints made to the Local Outdoor Access Forum: and
Number of health walk groups operating across the National Park.