



Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group meeting

Park Authority office, Grantown-on-Spey and on Teams

Wednesday 6 August | 10am – 12noon

Attendees

Alice Fogg (Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey), Alison Phillip (RSPB Scotland), Anne Elliott (NatureScot), Carolyn Robertson (Park Authority), Chris Donald (NatureScot), David Hetherington (Park Authority), Helen Senn (Royal Zoological Society of Scotland), Kelly-Anne Dempsey (River South Esk Catchment Partnership), Lorraine Hawkins (River Dee Trust), Neil Gunn (Wildlife Estates Scotland), Pete Cosgrove (Park Authority Board Member), Roger Knight (Spey Catchment Initiative), Shaila Rao (National Trust for Scotland), Steve Liddel (WildLand), Susan Cooksley (Dee Catchment Partnership), Sydney Henderson (Cairngorms Connect), William Hawes (Durrell Wildlife)

Apologies

Alison Hester (Scottish Environment, Food and Agriculture Research Institutions), Alistair Whyte (Plantlife Scotland), Claire Smith (RSPB Scotland), Colin Edwards (Forestry and Land Scotland), Deborah Long (Scottish Environment Link), Ian Wilson (National Farmers Union Scotland), Sarah Henshall (Park Authority)

1. Welcome and introductions

The meeting started with a round of introductions as this was the first meeting for several representatives and the Chair. All members of the group and their roles are listed on page 7. It was noted that Buglife has also been invited to join the group.



2. Actions from the previous meeting

Responsibilities of the group

Draft responsibilities and an aim for the group were shared and discussed at the previous meeting, and the following points were raised:

- **Strategic leadership and oversight:** it was felt these responsibilities should include helping to avoid policy incoherence, including related to farming and agriculture. In response, the revised wording below was shared:

Lead and shape the development and delivery of the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan 2027 – 2032, ensuring alignment with regional and national biodiversity and ecological restoration goals, while promoting coherence across relevant policies.

- **Securing investment:** it was felt this could include ensuring fundraising opportunities are not missed and activities within the Nature Action Plan are not directly competing for the same external funding. In response, the revised wording below was shared:

Support fundraising activities for the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan by cultivating relationships with potential donors, contributing to funding proposals, and coordinating efforts to maximise opportunities and avoid competition between activities in the plan.

- **Advocacy and public engagement:** it was felt these responsibilities could be strengthened to ensure impactful and more dynamic engagement with communities. In response, the revised wording below was shared:

Actively help to foster meaningful connections with stakeholders at all levels - especially local communities - to inspire collaboration and drive collective support for the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan.

Action:

- Members to share with Carolyn any comments on the revised wording (in italics).
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Links with land managers

At the previous meeting, there was a discussion about the importance of collaborating with other groups and forums to support effective engagement with land managers outwith the group. Pete updated the group on his dual role as Chair of both the Cairngorms Upland Advisory Group (CUAG) and the Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group (CNSG). He will work to strengthen links between CUAG and CNSG, as well as with the Cairngorms Agricultural Advisory Group (CAAG).

More information on CAAG here: <https://cairngorms.co.uk/the-national-park/the-park-authority/advisory-forums-and-groups/cairngorms-agricultural-advisory-group>

More information on CUAG here: <https://cairngorms.co.uk/the-national-park/the-park-authority/advisory-forums-and-groups/cairngorms-upland-advisory-group>

The homepage for the CNSG is here: <https://cairngorms.co.uk/the-national-park/the-park-authority/advisory-forums-and-groups/cairngorms-nature-strategy-group>

Draft vision for the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan

A draft vision, aim and outcomes were shared and discussed at the previous meeting and shared again in this meeting for the benefit of new members.

It was agreed that the draft vision - *Restore and regenerate biodiversity in the National Park by 2045* - needs to be developed. Some members felt, for example, that it could be more ambitious, inspiring, address the climate *and* biodiversity crisis, include people and be articulated more clearly.

The following members volunteered to form a temporary sub-group to develop some alternative visions for the wider group to consider: Kelly-Ann, Sydney, Steve, Anne, Roger, Alice

Action:

- Carolyn to co-ordinate a session with the 'vision sub-group'.
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3. Timeline for the new Cairngorms Nature Action Plan

A revised timeline was shared noting that it applies to both the new Cairngorms Nature Action Plan and the new National Park Partnership Plan. Both plans will be published in 2027 following a public consultation.

Pre-engagement and drafting

A draft freshwater chapter, which will serve as a structural template for all other chapters in the plan, along with a contents list for the full plan, will be developed and shared with the group in September. The following members volunteered to form a temporary sub-group to draft the freshwater chapter: Helen, Anne, Lorraine, Roger, Kelly-Ann, and Susan. Freshwater has been chosen as the initial focus because that section of the Cairngorms Nature Index (CNI) is now ready to be used.

A suggestion was made to consider using the IUCN Threats Classification Scheme alongside the Cairngorms Nature Index (CNI) to help categorise the drivers of decline. It was also noted that, as part of drafting the freshwater chapter, there should be a review of progress on freshwater-related actions from the previous plan, to establish what has already been achieved.

The group discussed the value of using existing insights from sources such as the National Park resident and visitor surveys, the Local Development Plan (LDP) and Local Community Action Plans. These insights can help identify what matters most to communities to inform the Nature Action Plan. It was noted that it's important to acknowledge what residents and visitors have previously shared, including their worries and concerns, to help people see the value of the Nature Action Plan in delivering solutions.

It was noted that it's important to ensure alignment and enable read across between the Nature Action Plan and other strategies, such as species action plans and potentially broader initiatives like 30x30.

There was an acknowledgement that the Nature Action Plan must be policy-driven but resilient to political change and it must focus on both people and nature. With an election next spring and the potential for shifting agendas, it was noted that issues related to water and people are likely to stay prominent and should remain central to the plan. Suggestions were made about designing the plan to be modular, making it more adaptable over time and ensuring the plan galvanises partners, including public agencies, regardless of political shifts.



A discussion was had about the need to identify the key stakeholders to involve during the pre-engagement phase and being clear on the purpose of that engagement. It was suggested that advice could be sought from CUAG and CAAG - the key question being: *How does their sector want to be engaged?*

Lastly, it was clarified that the 2019 -2024 Cairngorms Nature Action Plan remains current until the new plan is launched in 2027.

Actions:

- Pete to ask CUAG and liaise with the Chair of CAAG for advice re how to engage the sectors they represent with the Nature Action Plan, prior to public consultation.
- Carolyn to co-ordinate a session with the 'freshwater sub-group' to begin drafting the freshwater chapter.
- Carolyn to work with the Park Authority Comms Team to make it clear on the Park Authority website that the 2019 - 2024 Cairngorms Nature Action Plan remains current until the new plan is launched in 2027
- Carolyn to work with colleagues to analyse the resident and visitor survey data and LDP consultation data held by the Park Authority, and work with VABS to review Local Community Action Plans.
- Carolyn to share the results of the analysis above with the group to identify any gaps.

4. Cairngorms Nature Index

The group received an update on the Cairngorms Nature Index (CNI), building on the introduction from the previous meeting. The final draft CNI is still scheduled for publication in December, with the full CNI ready to support development of the Nature Action Plan from February.

The indicators are in the process of being shared with CUAG, CAAG and will be shared with the group to identify any major concerns or potential data issues or opportunities.

One member flagged that data sharing remains a challenge, and there was a suggestion that the group could potentially play a role in addressing data governance and improving data-sharing practices.



Actions:

- Carolyn to share the draft CNI indicators with the group
- Members to share with Carolyn any major concerns or potential data issues or opportunities regarding the indicators.

5. AOB

A discussion was had about wildfires following the recent wildfire on Cawdor, Muckrack, and Tulcan. It was noted that the Nature Action Plan provides opportunities to complement and strengthen wildfire management, e.g. the creation of 'fire ponds', and that meta population management is a mitigation for wildfires.

A monitoring methodology is being developed by the Park Authority to assess habitat recovery. It will take into account burn intensity, habitat type, land management practices and peatland restoration sites that experienced fire damage. Discussions are also ongoing between the Park Authority, landowners and NatureScot about wider monitoring to enable more informed decision-making post-wildfire and the research paper below was highlighted.

[Fire Severity and Habitat Type Determine Vegetation Change and Regeneration Time Following Wildfires in Scottish Uplands](#)

After extensive public consultation and stakeholder input, the Park Authority submitted wording to Scottish Ministers for a seasonal fire byelaw in the National Park and in June, the Park Authority Board approved an Integrated Wildlife Management Plan for the National Park here: <https://cairngorms.co.uk/documents/integrated-wildfire-management-plan-approved>

6. Next meeting

The next meeting will be in October (date TBC) with a focus on reviewing the draft freshwater chapter and the contents list for the full plan.



Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group members

- **Alice Fogg** - Chief Officer, Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey
- **Alison Hester** - Senior Scientist and Research Fellow, Scottish Environment, Food and Agriculture Research Institutions
- **Alistair Whyte** - Head of Plantlife Scotland, Plantlife Scotland
- **Anne Elliott** - Operations Officer, NatureScot
- **Carolyn Robertson** - Cairngorms Nature Manager, Cairngorms National Park Authority
- **Chris Donald** - Head of Operations, Central Highlands, NatureScot
- **Claire Smith** - Senior Conservation Officer, South Highlands & Cairngorms, RSPB Scotland
- **Colin Edwards** - Environment Manager, Forestry and Land Scotland
- **Deborah Long** - Chief Officer, Scottish Environment Link
- **Helen Senn** - Head of Conservation and Science Programmes, RZSS
- **Ian Wilson** - Regional Manager Highlands, National Farmers Union Scotland
- **Kelly Ann Dempsey** - Partnership Manager, River South Esk Catchment Partnership
- **Lorraine Hawkins** - Trust Manager, River Dee Trust
- **Neil Gunn** - Project Manager, Wildlife Estates Scotland
- **Pete Cosgrove** - Park Authority Board Member (Chair)
- **Roger Knight** - Director, Spey Catchment Initiative
- **Sarah Henshall** - Head of Conservation, Cairngorms National Park Authority
- **Shaila Rao** - Conservation Manager, National Trust for Scotland
- **Steve Liddle** - Director of Nature, WildLand
- **Susan Cooksley** - Partnership Manager, Dee Catchment Partnership
- **Sydney Henderson** - Interim Programme Manager, Cairngorms Connect
- **William Hawes** - Programme Director Scotland, Durrell Wildlife