
CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

Title: Water borne access and sensitive species
Prepared by: Adam Streeter-Smith, Outdoor Access Officer
Purpose: To seek advice on:

1. **Support for a Park wide approach to messaging and management of water borne access**
2. **To advise on the core messages for Park wide advice on water borne access**
3. **To advise on framework for agreeing site specific advice and infrastructure improvements**

Background

1. Land managers in the Cairngorms have reported an increase in the number of people enjoying the Parks lochs and rivers on paddle boards, inflatable canoes and boats and in the water as “wild swimmers”. This forms part of a welcome national trend, which encourages people to enjoy the outdoors and become more physical activity. Both outcomes of the Active Cairngorms Strategy.
2. Currently it is also the Year of Coasts and Waters (see [Year of Coasts and Waters 2020-21 | VisitScotland](#)) meaning collectively agencies are celebrating the value of water and water based activities.
3. However, with access rights come responsibilities. Following lockdown land managers are reporting anecdotal evidence that increased levels of these activities may be having an impact on sensitive species such as Golden Eye and Osprey.
4. To date the CNPA, as the Access Authority, has dealt with these issues on a case by case basis such as developing local guidance on Loch Vaa for wild swimmers and fisherman and supporting RSPB advice for commercial users of Loch Insh towards protecting nesting Ospreys. Given reports of this increased usage we think now is the time to consider if Park wide guidance should be developed to ensure people and nature can thrive together.

Developing Park wide advice

5. Currently both the paddle code (see [1/3 A4 leaflet \(outdooraccess-scotland.scot\)](#)) and the Using Inland water Responsibly guidance (see [Microsoft Word - Inland Water Guidance March 2010.doc \(outdooraccess-scotland.scot\)](#)) tend to focus on:
 - Avoiding disturbing fishing
 - Protecting access and egress points and

- Parking.
6. Many of the lochs and rivers of the Park such as Loch Morlich are suitable for such activities so it is proposed that generic advice and associated resources such as posters, films and social media posts are developed to promote key messages.
 7. Such messages could include:
 - How to avoid interfering with others enjoyment:
 - How to swim, paddle board or kayak safely and use a buoyancy aid:
 - How to avoid disturbing sensitive or protected species.

Do members support a Park wide approach to messaging and management of water borne access?

What are the core messages for Park wide advice on water borne access?

Supporting site specific guidance

8. Recognising that some designated lochs in the Park, such as Loch Kinnord and Loch Garten, are reporting increased numbers of paddle boarders and inflatable boat users there is a need to develop site specific advice to mitigate against impacts on species such as Golden Eye and other wildfowl.
9. As the Access Authority we are of the view this is justified and competent under the auspices of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act and Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC).
10. Page 106 of the Code, “Nature Reserves and other Conservation Areas” states that “access rights extend to these places but remember that they are carefully managed for nature conservation and to safeguard rare animals and plants. Take care to avoid damaging the site or disturbing its wildlife, or interfering with its management or enjoyment by others. Depending on your activity, you might be requested to follow a specific route or to avoid exercising access rights in a specific area: following such local guidance can help to safeguard the natural heritage of these areas.”
11. In order to agree the site specific advice it is proposed to test education and infrastructure improvements (see annex 1) to determine what interventions are required to mitigate against disturbance and improve the visitor experience. Such actions could include:
 - Assessment and consolidation of the number and quality of available access and egress points at a given site.
 - Visitor management monitoring and engagement with users
 - Improved facilities for water users at key water access and egress points to promote responsible behaviour and enhance visitor facilities.
 - Increased ranger service coverage:

- Identify zones to avoid during the bird breeding season.

Does the LOAF agree with the framework for agreeing site specific advice and infrastructure improvements?

Annex I

DRAFT considerations for time limited site based advice:

If most of the answers are “yes” then an enhanced programme of time limited site based advice for the public can be supported.

Test	Y/N
Is the loch designated?	
Are the species affected schedule one?	
Is there a monitoring framework in place to determine how popular the loch is for water borne access?	
Is there strong evidence over time of impact on breeding, roosting and feeding success?	
Have alternative approaches to visitor management been tested such as on site guidance and education, buoys, zoning or increased ranger presence?	
Are there suitable alternative locations nearby?	
Can water borne access be facilitated at a manageable location?	
Has the LOAF been consulted on the proposal?	