Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum

Paper 3 – Recreation, access and infrastructure update report

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Purpose

This paper provides an update on the main areas of work both undertaken and planned. LOAF Members are invited to discuss the items presented

1. Statutory Duties

Casework

- Most access cases since the last update have been locked gates, several of which are already been investigated.
- Only other issue raised was a complaint about the long-term closure of a Right of Way route. This is on Forestry & Land Scotland land at Glen Doll and is due to windblow not being cleared after the devastating storms 4 years ago. Currently being assessed with input from Angus Council access officer (Note – the planning authority remains the access authority for Rights of Ways).

Wildfire closures

- During and in the aftermath of the Glenmore and Abernethy wildfires section 15 powers were utilised to close areas of land and paths. The GIS / access team produced online maps and posters based on partner landowner information. As areas opened this was reviewed on a weekly basis. Closures were in place for around 3 months.
- National Access Forum likely to discuss and produce some standard guidance regarding access closures during / following wildfires.

2. Development and management of core paths, paths and wider visitor infrastructure

Speyside Way

- Signage – new waymarking signage to be installed between Aviemore and Kincraig to replace rotten posts, following completion of an audit.

Carrbridge Path

- The Access Team are working with the Community Council to submit a planning application for the preferred route option.

Accessible Paths

Following the production of the toolkit, a grant fund was launched via the Cairngorms Trust.

- Three applications were received during the first round, two of which were funded (upgrades to all-abilities paths at Nethy Bridge and Carrbridge) both small amounts <£500.
- Fund re-opened with mid-October closing date. Four applications received, although some of these aren't eligible.

Snow Roads Installations

- Works have been completed at Still to improve the steps into the structure, covering the gabion baskets with Caithness Slab
- A tender has been let and bids received for works to upgrade the path to and around the Watchers, it is anticipated works will start in early November

Community path day

A successful day was held in Kingussie with representatives from 14 path groups. The morning consisted of updates, networking and presentations, followed by an afternoon of site visits. Well received and planned to become an annual event.

3. Managing for visitors

Path Promotion

Path leaflets: New path maps being produced for Nethy Bridge and Braemar. New Nethy leaflet at draft stage.

Campervans

- New page on website with campervan information and interactive map of facilities - Cairngorms National Park | Campervans and motorhomes
- New campervan leaflet in progress – at final draft stage.

Wildlife disturbance

Several areas of ongoing work regarding working to reduce recreational disturbance to wildlife:

- Beavers – new signage in progress for siting at beaver lodges, new interpretation panel planned for Lily Lochan (Rothiemurchus)
- Capercaillie – work in Deeside to map mountain bike trails and Caper areas, similar work in Strathspey to map caper areas for orienteering groups
- Slavonian grebes – potential project at Loch Vaa to reduce recreational disturbance

4. Cairngorms Fire Management Byelaw

Background

While not directly part of statutory access duties the introduction and implementation of the new Cairngorms Fire Management byelaw that was in place from 1 April to 30 September 2026 has clear links with outdoor access and the work of the Local Outdoor Access Forum. As such providing a formal update to the LOAF on the first year's activity is considered appropriate.

Preparatory activity

A number of areas of preparation were required prior to the byelaw coming into force including: -

- Production of an engagement and enforcement procedure to guide how staff would implement the byelaw.
- Staff and partner ranger service training.
- Production and installation of both road and site based signage alerting the public to the byelaw.
- Communications activity to alert the public to the byelaw which included: -
    - Press releases and media interviews
    - Social media activity
    - Production of assets for use in campaigns eg videos, screen graphics
    - Production of assets for partner use – posters, table talkers, beer mats
- Provision of advice to landowners on the implications for their properties and how and when exemptions might be used.

Engagement and Enforcement activity

In preparation for the incoming byelaw additional funding was allocated to allow an increase in the number of Park Authority rangers by approximately 2 full-time

equivalents for the summer season. This was however split across 4 part-time posts to give more staff at weekends when problems more commonly occur. With this additional resource the ranger team carried out 1394 patrols between April and September compared with 1117 in 2025.

During these patrols rangers still came across a number of fires and barbecues but during the byelaw period this number totalled 34 compared to 98 in 2025, 191 in 2024 and 168 in 2023. Also encouraging was the fact that virtually all those engaged with this year agreed to put out their fire / barbecue whereas in previous years a number would refuse to do so assuming they still had the right to have a fire / barbecue.

While most people did respond positively to this engagement, two cases were reported to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service for non-compliance, and it is now for the Procurator Fiscal to decide whether they wish to proceed with these cases.