FINAL CUAG minutes – Thu 29 Aug 2024

Venue: in person in Park Authority office, Grantown and online attendees.

In attendance in person: Peter Cosgrove (Chair & Park Authority Board), Colin McClean, Fiona Holmes, Andy Ford, Grant Moir (latter part of meeting only) (all Park Authority), Leslie George (SGA) Iain Wilson (NFUS), Graeme Taylor (NS), Will Anderson (ConFor),

Online attendees: Claire Smith (RSPB), Richard Cooke (ADMG), Stephen Young (SLE), Stuart Smith (JHI), Rory Kennedy (GWCT).

Apologies: Mike Cottam (Park Authority) Peter Clark (BASC)
Dave Windle (NE Mountain Trust), Alison Hester (JHI), John Grierson (AoCC/LOAF), Hannah Grist (Park Authority Board), John Risby (SF), Tim Kirkwood (Cairngorms Connect), David Frew (NTS), Richard Gledson (ECMP), Colin Stuart.

Minutes of last meeting:
No comments, all accepted.

Actions from last meeting :

- CUAG to let Park Authority know of any fire hot-spot locations
- NatureScot to report in more detail on this at next CUAG meeting (date set for 29 Aug 2024)
- NatureScot to share draft scope of review when it's available
- NatureScot to share example copies of their fire plans with CUAG
- Park Authority to contact NFU Mutual and investigate insurance for wildfires in native woodlands further

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PART 1 - UPDATES:

1: Climate Adaptation Fund

The Park Authorities Andy Ford gave a summary of the grants awarded to date from the Climate Adaptation Fund. More information can be found by following this link:
https://cairngorms.co.uk/climate-adaptation-fund/

2: Cairngorm Farming Advisory Group

No meetings since the last one in March 2024; there is now an agriculture focussed newsletter being produced by the Park Authority and CUAG members are welcome to put forward articles to be considered for inclusion.

PART 2 - DISCUSSIONS:

1: Integrated Wildfire Management Plan (Colin McClean)

CUAG memberst should expect the next iteration of draft text in mid-October

Discussion of impressions of sections drafted so far:

- More details requested in the plan about resilience and fuel loads – Colin responded that these sections are coming but are still to be drafted.
- Influence of access in terms of likelihood of fires starting and ease/difficulty of fighting
- How to build resilience into landscape, how to be more proactive
- How to effectively employ firebreaks, and what about designated sites?

Colin shared thoughts that originally he'd envisaged sitting down with land mangers and have two way discussion to identify where to site fire breaks but having investigated the issues surrounding this it's now likely that in the plan there'll be a list of good practice guidance and that land managers will to take it from there, thus making their own decision about their land, but this might not be CUAGs expectations, so what do CUAG think?

Discussion thereafter included:

- consideration of neighbours and 'duty of care' to not let any fire go off your ground therefore best to have firebreaks around your property
- how to make most of features we have got like tracks, so then get rid of middle strip and control vegetation each side for instance
- how can CUAG, and this fire plan process, contribute to upskilling/education of 'new' landowners?
- Can we understand more about where new landowners might be getting their land management advice from and influence this with respect to wildfires
- Remember this is a good practice guideline vs do this here; CNPA has to pitch this report somewhere in middle of general good practice and dictating actions to be done in specific locations! That's what the Park Authority are asking CUAG for advice on, how and where to pitch the report
- How to we get fire considered at any time in process of managing land, i.e. consider it if for instance you're changing land use, from open moor to woodland
- Perhaps the role of the Park Authority should be proportionate to the risk… but CNPA should do more collaborateive work, putting folk with less knowledge in touch with those that do it.
- Should we resurrect the old fire groups that used to exist?, we need coherent group facilitated to keep up momentum
- Perhaps add wildfire related things into the DMGs remit as these fora are already set up
- Do we, and how do we, involve agriculture sector? Need for this depends where you are, only really relevant for farmed land bordering onto sporting estates.
- Some kind of monitoring will be required, and will be included in the plan.
- Wider conversation about the difference between training in wildfire management and actual experience.

Reminder that the Park Authority board passed a motion to consult on fire byelaw in September (but depends on ScotGov restrictions on spend on communications).

Colin McClean asked are CUAG broadly happy with the way the Integrated Wildfire Plan is forming up, and the consensus answer was yes.

2: Cairngorms Nature Action Plan (Sarah Henshall)

Brief outline of purpose and achievements from current Cairngorms Nature Action Plan (CNAP):

CNAP is one of the delivery mechanisms of the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP), it gives clear priorities and an action plan for achieving nature conservation delivery within the Park. The CNAP is shepherded by the Cairngorms Nature Steering Group (CNSG).

It's nearly time to draw up a new plan, but the last 5yr plan (with Covid in the middle), achieved 79% of all actions are completed and remainder all have significant progress made.

Highlights of this work included:

- Landscape scale delivery worked well, with good partnership working that also helped secure funding from other sources.
- Species work made good progress, particularly pine hoverfly, beaver and wildcat.
- Involving people more, with a ramp up of the Big Weekend and getting our increased Ranger team, achieved lots.
- The Cairngorms Nature Index (CNI) was developed from the CNAP indicators.

Lessons learnt from the last CNAP included:

- Species recovery is difficult to measure but utilising the 'species recovery curve' model helped, although there is still a lag time between completing action and seeing an increase in population;
- Partnership working encouraged others to take forward delivery so it's not just the Park Authority who are acting.

Areas for improvement included:

- How to empower individuals and communities to deliver the CNAP
- Combining species specific actions into a wider landscape approach

The new CNAP will be developed over next 6-12months. It is likely to focus more on ecological networks plus ecosystem and landscape restoration.

Discussion followed about:

- The relationship between CNSG and CUAG as there is plenty of overlap; could they be merged? No, too broad a scope then, perhaps the Park Authority can improve links between CNSG and CUAG?
- where predator control fits into picture of species protection/recovery?
- How input of CUAG in a landscape scale land management sense can be helpfuL

ACTION: Park Authority to bring next draft CNAP to CUAG for help and advice

3: NatureScot (NS) species licensing review (Graeme Taylor)

Timescales have changed because of a new minister coming into post so now late Autumn / early Winter before any draft is likely.

Likely to now include a 'register of licences' to help NS deal with large numbers of Freedom of Information (FoI) requests (which currently are about 3 per week)

Expect a questionnaire out to stakeholders soon about what should be included in the licensable purpose, evidence required, and what to put in register of licences.

Discussion followed about:

- Query if anything in review about changing the criteria for getting a licence to protect wildlife?
- The need for licences to control predators to protect wildlife since there's a 'nature emergency'
- There being a degree of subjectivitiy over what meets acceptable practice when fulfilling a 'licensable purpose'
- That it's the purpose that's being licences not the person applying

4: AOB

Discussion about possible agenda ideas for future CUAG meetings:

- Have a guest speaker on certain topics;
- Using the NPPP as a structure for discussion of topics;
- Getting the Park Authority to share ongoing issues so CUAG can chip in with thoughts/advice;
- More information about the success, or not, of diversionary feeding;
- Getting some of the newer landowners in the Park to come along and share their visions for their new landholding.
- How we get more discussion going around the meetings for the topics considered

Also, there was a short discussion on format for CUAG meetings, where the hybrid in person and online format is difficult for all and not favoured, perhaps consider alternating all online, or all in-person and moving the location of the inperson meetings about, i.e. go to Ballater?

END