

CNPA ISSUES BRIEFING

Abernethy Forest expansion plans – The RSPB has ambitious plans to expand its forest at the Abernethy National Nature Reserve by ‘scattered, low density’ planting of up to 60,000 native broadleaf trees and juniper to the south of the pinewood forest. No pine are to be planted in this area as they are successfully regenerating naturally. Further South in upper Strath Nethy they also have plans to plant ‘low density, pioneer’ planting of Scots Pine to further assist the expansion of the Pinewood. All seedlings are sourced from Abernethy seed. Planting and ground preparation is by hand. The plans, supported by SNH, FCS and CNPA, came into being after several years of consultation and discussion. However, opponents to the plans say that “mass planting” will destroy the unique naturalness of the forest and break its historic link to the woodlands originally established thousands of years ago after the last Ice Age.

Deer Management – The CNPA continues to work with deer managers and deer management groups across the National Park to help them to achieve best practice. Both SNH and the Association of Deer Management Groups have provided a ‘benchmark’ setting guidance for deer management groups to prepare meaningful deer management plans that reflect the public interest. In the Cairngorms National Park, deer management and indeed venison is an important part of the economy, its land use, culture and history but it is important that deer are managed sustainably to ensure the Park’s valuable habitats don’t suffer as a result of overgrazing.

Moorland management Partnership – With moorland management issues (e.g. hill tracks, raptor persecution, mountain hare control) regularly in the press, CNPA and six estates in the National Park have agreed to work together to collaborate on a project which will demonstrate best practice in moorland management across a landscape scale. This project will focus on integrating moorland management with other land use and seek to benefit a wide range of habitats and species including raptors. **Raptor Persecution** – Cases of raptor persecution have occurred in and close to the National Park, including birds that have featured in Raptor Track, (www.raptortrack.org) the website supported by the CNPA and designed to tell the stories of individual raptors living in the Park. Minister for the Environment, Climatic Change and Land Reform, Dr Aileen McLeod was in the Park last month to chair a meeting with Park landowners, SNH and CNPA which discussed raptor conservation as well as how best to collaborate to deliver landscape scale benefits for objectives including moorland management, woodland expansion and peatland restoration.

Lynx reintroduction

There has been media interest recently in the subject following press releases by an English-based NGO called the Lynx UK Trust. They indicated their intention to apply soon for licences to release lynx at several locations around the UK, including near Huntly in Aberdeenshire, as part of a series of trial reintroductions. Whilst biologically feasible (there is sufficient woodland habitat and deer to sustain a viable population in Scotland), lynx reintroduction is a complex matter and any successful reintroduction would first require extensive dialogue with those people who live and work in the countryside.

Beaver reintroduction

There are no wild beavers resident in the National Park. They are widespread in the Tay catchment, having escaped from private collections, but as yet have not reached tributaries within the Park. An official trial reintroduction has recently been completed at Knapdale in Argyll. Scottish Natural Heritage will submit a report to the Scottish Government by the end of May, based on the findings of the scientific monitoring programme of beavers at Knapdale and in the Tay. The Scottish Government will then decide on the future of beavers in Scotland.

White-tailed eagles in Strathspey

White tailed eagles are a former native species of the Cairngorms National Park which were wiped out by humans in previous centuries. For the past two years a pair has been observed in Strathspey, which may yet settle down and nest. This is the first time they have spread into Strathspey following their reintroduction to the east coast. RSPB, Scottish Natural Heritage and local farmers have been meeting to discuss the implications. There are some concerns that sea eagles can predate livestock – particularly as the lambing season is underway.

Fresh Water Pearl Mussels – A report titled 'River Spey water quality and effluent chemistry' (James Hutton Inst) states that the freshwater pearl mussel population has halved in the River Spey and examines the contribution of nutrients within the river to the decline. A survey in 1998-9 found 10 million of the mussels, the reports say, but SNH suggests that five million have been lost. The Hutton report considers a number of point sources of nutrients from sewage treatment works and diffuse sources such as farmland. The report highlights phosphorous in particular and highlights that concentrations of phosphorus in the sewage works discharge “are generally too high and of greatest immediate concern.” The report recommends that environmental standards for phosphorus set for the Spey under the water framework directive are “set considerably higher than they should be, possibly by 1-2 orders of magnitude.” Other pollutants in sewage may also be implicated, as may low water flows. The Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Society say this reinforces their arguments against more housing developments in the Cairngorms National Park, as more housing means more sewage discharges.

Speyside Way: Work continues on the extension of the Speyside Way and the route to Kinraig is now complete and the plan is to have the full extension to Newtonmore within the next three years. This project has a long history with the Minister for the Environment, Stewart Stevenson MSP confirming the Path Order in June 2012, which allowed the route to cross Kinrara Estate ground immediately south of Aviemore. This is the first time such powers have been used and confirmed by Ministers in Scotland.

Glenmore

A masterplan for the future enhancement and management of the Glenmore and Upper Rothiemurchus forests – the emerging master plan includes several proposals, including providing clearer visitor information, reducing the amount of signage, improving the management of car parking and the possibility of upgrading or moving the current visitor centre. The development of an over-arching master plan has become more pertinent since the Commission’s recent acquisition of an area of Rothiemurchus forest. The work is a partnership effort involving the CNPA and FCS and others.

More National Parks for Scotland?: The Scottish Campaign for National Parks and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland are calling for the Scottish Government to create more National Parks in Scotland, referring to this as “unfinished business”. The Scottish Government has already stated that in the current economic climate, their priority is to focus on Scotland’s current National Parks and the contribution they are making to meet local needs and national objectives.

Renewables/Windfarms – The CNPA encourages renewable energy of a scale and character that is compatible with the National Park, particularly biomass and hydro. We are working with a steady flow of pre-application enquiries and applications for small scale hydro and single wind turbines. We are also promoting the significant opportunities of biomass. The CNPA routinely gets consulted on large, commercial windfarms outside the Park – in responding to these the CNPA assesses each proposal on its merits and its impact on the setting of the Park. There is an increasing number of wind farms proposed around the Park and the CNPA has to seriously consider the cumulative impact of these. On Allt Duine (near Kincaig) a change of national policy context last June and the establishment of Wild Land Areas, resulted in an opportunity to submit further information and retain our objection. Another energy company is looking at the potential to develop a windfarm just outside Grantown which would also be right on the edge of the Park.

An Camas Mòr (background) – In June 2010, the CNPA resolved to approve, in principle, plans to create a new community on the outskirts of Aviemore with permission granted for up to 1,500 houses, with a review to take place when the development reaches 630 units. Comprehensive conditions are attached to the approval including the requirement for a Section 75 Agreement to ensure the delivery of affordable housing, off-site compensatory habitats, paths, etc. The Board decided in Dec 2012 that no decision notice should be issued until the outcome of the LP legal challenge was known – which went in our favour – so in August 2013, and taking into account any new material considerations, the Board resolved to grant permission for the development. The Section 75 took longer than envisaged to complete which give the CNPA an opportunity to further review the conditions and minor revisions were agreed by the Board on 6th Dec 2013. Following completion of the Section 75, planning permission in principle was issued on 12 March 2014. Highland Council received the Masterplan application from An Camas Mòr LLP in May 2014 and the CNPA called it in on 2 June 2014 for consideration but it has since been withdrawn (see below). Since the developer Springfield pulled out, we are not yet aware of any confirmed new developer interest, although we have been made aware of discussions with potentially interested parties.