

Cairngorms Research Seminar

21-22 October 2015, Aviemore

Summary Note

1. Background

Delegates: 77 delegates attended the event as per attached delegate list.

Presentations: all presentations are available to view at <http://cairngorms.co.uk/working-partnership/national-park-strategies/research/>

Purpose of Event:

- Connect research and management in the National Park
- Connect researchers working in the National Park
- Inform future management and plans

2. Research needs and opportunities: Themes

The Cairngorms National Park Research Strategy identifies headline research priorities. Presentations and workshop discussions at the event highlighted the following research opportunities that would help inform National Park Partnership priorities of landscape scale conservation, visitor experience and rural development:

2.1 Conservation

- Interactions of capercaillie and recreation behaviour
- Pros and cons of capercaillie restocking
- Predator effects and interactions – in particular pine marten
- Socio-economic impacts of native woodland expansion
- Constraints to montane woodland expansion
- Implications of montane woodland expansion for grouse management
- Implications of tree diseases and management responses
- Effectiveness of peatland restoration techniques and monitoring
- Compatibility of designated site targets and dynamic ecosystem restoration goals
- Deer and moorland management impacts and benefits
- Effects of agri-environment prescriptions
- Historic data held in estate records
- Values of alternative land use scenarios
- Invasive Non-Native Species baseline and threats
- Comparative studies between Cairngorms and South West Norway

2.2 Visitor Experience and Rural Development

- Active Cairngorms – baseline data on activity levels, identification of inactive groups and monitoring changes in activity levels
 - Monitoring change resulting from Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy
 - Alternative options for monitoring visitor feedback and trends (quicker feedback than 5 yr visitor survey)
 - Factors and trade-offs in recreation behaviour change
 - Local housing need (community level assessments)
 - Community development counter-factual study – what would happen without support mechanisms
 - Impacts of A9 dualling (construction phase and long term) – on population, economy, housing, communities, tourism
 - Effectiveness of environmental education/outdoor learning approaches
- 2030 International Sustainable Development Goals potentially provide a context in which to set research

3. Research and knowledge exchange - How

Both workshops on conservation and visitor experience & rural development identified common themes to pursue about how research in the National Park is carried out, co-ordinated and communicated:

- Strong effort to connect across disciplines is needed;
- Big opportunity to take a place-based approach to connecting natural and social science, encouraging researchers to build on each-others' work in relation to the Park, or parts of the Park;
- Potential for meta-analysis studies to ensure knowledge from existing work is captured, used and built on;
- Must recognise complexity even within National Park –varying causes, factors, relationships therefore question of how to make place-based research widely applicable to other areas;
- Opportunity to develop more social and political science research on governance and management approaches;
- Opportunity for research to be built in as part of adaptive management approaches;
- Clear potential for research that delivers demonstration/case study outputs given both management framework and stakeholder networks in place in the Park;
- Opportunity to combine local/practical knowledge into both research and management – and develop/evaluate resulting approaches;
- Opportunities to connect effectively with people and organisations on the ground – proposal for small themed events connecting researchers with managers in particular sectors;
- Could hold open day events in places that have been focus of research to communicate and findings and discuss management implications, eg Glenlivet Estate;
- Desire to be able to communicate research outputs in a straight-forward and timely way to inform practice;
- Opportunities to deliver research meeting Cairngorms needs through new Scottish Government Research Programme;

- New Scottish Government funded Knowledge Exchange Centre due to start April 2016 could provide good framework for a Cairngorms level focus;
- Common desire through all workshop discussions for some form of research hub for the National Park that provides a framework for co-ordinating and communicating relevant research.

4. What does a Cairngorms research hub look like?

The workshops on day 1 identified a clear demand amongst both researchers and practitioners for some kind of co-ordination point for research in the Park. In fact this was felt to be a necessary basis for aligning research with management needs, for connecting research across disciplines and for sharing/communicating research outputs. Workshop 3 therefore asked the question '*what does a Cairngorms research hub look like?*'

Key points from discussion:

- The hub should be a web-based co-ordination point that includes
 - The National Park Research Strategy and current research priorities
 - Links to national policy priorities/initiatives
 - Data and evidence requirements for current management priorities
 - Information for researchers (guidance on contacts, connections, opportunities, communicating outputs etc)
 - Summary of existing research outputs
 - List of potential topics for short-term research (MSc or undergraduate dissertations)
 - A spatial presentation of existing/current research projects would be useful and encourage a place-based focus. Could also be organised by thematic approach
- NB the definition of 'managers' is intended to be broad and refers to a wider range of individuals and organisations from government agencies to land managers to businesses and communities.
- The hub needs to be easy to use as a gateway to information for both researchers and managers in the National Park.
- This sort of hub needs a long-term capacity to maintain its functionality.
- Need to consider how to handle data consistently and impartially.
- Hub could also link to historic records and archives.
- Potential to monitor trends over time subject to long term data series and consistency.
- Potential to use the hub to help demonstrate impact of research.
- Ensure planning and development evidence and data is linked in to the hub.
- The Spanish Sierra Nevada Global Change Observatory is a good model (though it was noted that this required significant resource input).
- Hub should be accompanied by a programme of knowledge exchange including events targeted at key sectors eg land management, tourism, community development.
- Associated networking could include 'science tourism' – eg programme for visiting scientists in low season

- Hub could also be used to promote citizen science opportunities and share data. Use of hub could require MoU approach to 'signing up' committing to work in certain ways in relation to communications, stakeholder involvement etc.

5. Next Steps

- Scope outline proposal for research hub and investigate resource options to create capacity for development phase;
- CNPA to enhance research web pages on ongoing basis and consider e-news formats for improving communications;
- Establish simple process for submitting research summaries for posting on CNP website;
- Explore intern/secondment opportunities among research partners to provide capacity;
- Cairngorms Nature team to investigate potential to develop Atlas of Living Cairngorms and other connections into the Scotland's Environment Web as a means of delivering data co-ordination and sharing.