

Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan – Q&A

The Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan received its largest ever response, with over 1,400 responses to the public consultation. Since the consultation closed in December we have been reading through all responses from individuals and organisations, and looking at what revisions should be made to the draft to try and ensure we have the best long-term plan for the Cairngorms National Park.

We are building on a strong base, with at least 75% of respondents (and a similar proportion of residents) in favour of the Nature, People and Place sections of the plan. There are, however, some issues where there were divergent views. The information below tries to set out some answers to commonly asked questions about the draft plan.

Q: What impact will woodland expansion targets have on agriculture and food security?

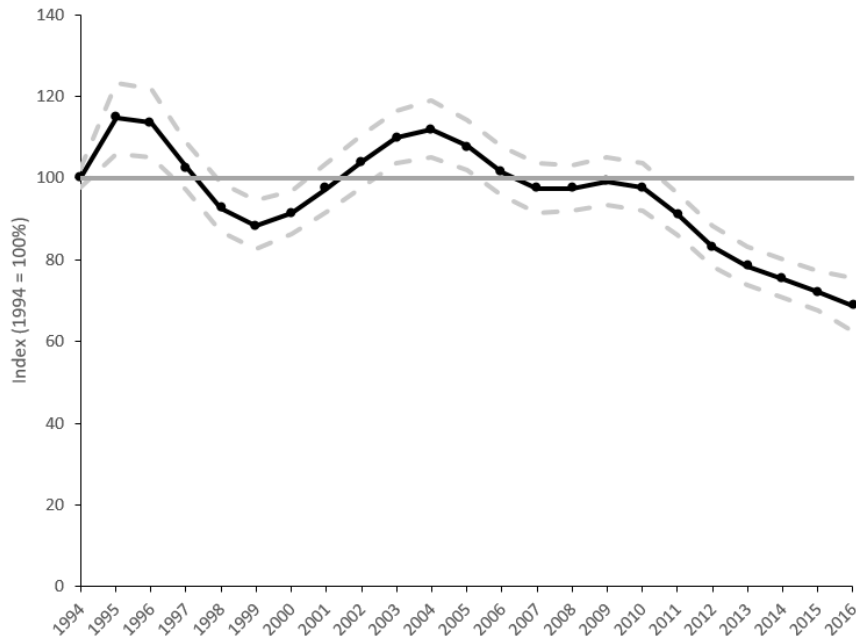
A: The draft woodland expansion targets we have set out would see the area of woodland cover in the National Park rise by a total of 6% (from 17% to 23%) over the course of the next 25 years. This still leaves over three quarters of land as open habitat by 2045. There is also a policy (p24) in the [Cairngorms NP Forest Strategy](#) against wholesale conversion of agricultural land to woodland which will be reiterated clearly in the Park Plan. The draft plan sets out a variety of measures to support agriculture and rural jobs, and we do not believe that the woodland expansion targets will threaten these objectives. There is plenty of room for woodland to expand. It is also worth pointing out that the Park Authority has no power to plant trees on land: this will be a decision for individual landowners following Scottish Forestry processes and has been happening at a rate of around 1,000 ha per annum for the past five years in the Park.

Q: Will the plan threaten rare and endangered species?

A: No, the plan will not threaten rare and endangered species. The graph below shows the decline in species in Scotland. It shows that we are losing biodiversity in Scotland. The Park Plan is about reversing biodiversity loss. It is not just about maintaining or increasing abundance of certain species in the Park. We need to have a more ecosystem based approach. Ecological restoration is at the heart of the draft plan and we are taking steps to ensure we have the appropriate habitats to allow our species to thrive. For instance, having more woodland will be good for range of species, including the endangered capercaillie. Restoring our rivers will help salmon and freshwater pearl mussels, amongst other species. There will be plenty moorland remaining to support species which rely on open habitats, like curlew. Peatland restoration, which re-wets moorland, should increase the capacity of moorland to support waders.

However we recognise that increasing species diversity in the Park may have an effect on abundance and distribution of current populations. By far the majority of species in the Park will benefit from landscape scale restoration, however there are some which need immediate and focussed attention. These are agreed through the Cairngorms Nature partnership and described as priority species in the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan. For example, curlew, mountain hare and golden eagle are currently recognised as priority species.

Nature of Scotland Report - New terrestrial Indicator: 133 bird, 9 mammal, 204 moth and 25 butterfly species: 1994-2016



Q: Is the draft plan all about rewilding?

A: The draft park plan doesn't mention rewilding; however, it does talk about ecosystem restoration as we are in the [UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration](#). This is recognition of the fact that we are in a biodiversity and climate crisis and that all forms of land management can contribute to meeting those twin challenges. The status quo is not an option. We need to restore peatlands, expand woodlands, conserve soil carbon on farmland, restore rivers and ensure we have resilient, functioning ecosystems that can mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change and contribute to restoring the state of nature. In order to make this happen, we will need people on the ground to deliver the work, including gamekeepers, deer stalkers, ecologists, rangers and many others.

Q: Does the plan intend to eliminate all deer in the National Park?

A: No. The Cairngorms has a large population of red deer in the open range. Counts carried out this year indicate around 33,000 red deer in the areas counted. The draft plan aims to reduce the density of red deer across the National Park to between five and eight red deer per km², slightly below the 'upper limit' set out in the national [Deer Working Group Report](#). This will enable peatland restoration and woodland expansion etc to proceed at the scale necessary to meet our targets, reducing grazing impacts on a range of different habitats.

There are five Deer Management Groups in the National Park who, alongside NatureScot and over 40 similar groups across the country, have overall responsibility for the conservation and control of open range red deer in Scotland. Deer numbers in three of

these areas sit within or below our proposed target, whilst two others that have just been counted sit well above the national 'upper limit' of 10 deer per km². We believe that achieving average densities of between five and eight per km² – and trying to mitigate impacts on ecological restoration targets – is one of a number of measures that will help us meet peatland restoration, woodland expansion and habitat recovery targets for the National Park.

Q: Will jobs be threatened in the National Park by changes in land management?

A: We are going to need skilled people out on the ground to help deliver the National Park Partnership Plan. We have set out a [range of measures to support people and jobs](#) across the National Park, and we believe that there will be significant opportunities over the next 25 years for gamekeepers, deer stalkers and other land managers, as well as additional jobs in peatland restoration, river restoration, species management, habitat enhancement etc. This is not an either/or plan. The jobs and opportunities created through ecosystem restoration and a developing nature-based economy are an addition to the existing land economy, not a replacement. A diversifying and growing sector will still retain people working on the land across the National Park and this will include those working in more traditional activities. There will be changes and we have strong plans developing through our work on the [Cairngorms 2030: Heritage Horizons](#) projects to work with and support rural economies and communities through any transition. But to reverse biodiversity loss and tackle the climate crisis we will all need to change and adapt. There are good examples all across the Park of employment being maintained or increased where ecosystem restoration is taking place.

Q: Were residents in favour of the draft plan?

A: Over the past few months we have read through over 1,400 responses to the draft plan (a new record for a park plan consultation), including over half of responses from residents and 13% from land managers. Inevitably, these responses contained a broad range of opinions on both sides of a number of key issues. It was encouraging, though, that around 75% of all respondents – including a similar proportion of residents – were in favour of the Nature, People and Place objectives we proposed initially.

Q: Will the park plan change following the consultation?

A: Yes. The Park Authority has read through all 1,400 responses and is making changes in light of those responses, in line with overall Scottish Government policy. A final plan will be proposed to the Park Authority board in June. It will then go to Scottish Ministers for final approval, before being published in full (alongside all the supporting evidence we've gathered, including consultation feedback) in the summer.