

# Active Cairngorms Action Plan 2023-28



Cairngorms  
National Park  
Pàirc Nàiseanta a'  
Mhonaidh Ruaidh





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This document is available in other formats on request. Please contact the Cairngorms National Park Authority on +44 (0) 1479 873 535 or go to [cairngorms.co.uk](http://cairngorms.co.uk).

Cover image of child and parent enjoying a woodland path © Rachel Keenan

Contents page image of Loch Morlich © Louise Took

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# Foreword

**It's vital that everyone gets the chance to enjoy the National Park's outdoors, easily and safely, whatever their age, ability or background. To have the opportunity to be more physically active and to learn about, care for and appreciate this wonderful area.**

The Cairngorms National Park is a unique and beautiful place, home to iconic landscapes, endangered species and more than 18,000 people who call it their home. A place where people and nature can thrive together. This plan for sustainable recreation, outdoor access, ranger services, youth and volunteering within the National Park outlines how the Park Authority will deliver the key priorities of the National Park Partnership Plan.

The pandemic period really changed how visitors enjoy the Park, as well as reinforcing perceptions of what residents thought about where they live, both in terms of how much people value their nearby greenspace, and how crucial it is for us to manage these areas sustainably for the benefit of people and wildlife.

This plan sets out ambitious actions for the many ways residents and visitors can get out and enjoy the National Park for our health and wellbeing. For example, our Volunteer Rangers have contributed 4600 hours of their time to helping keep this place special for everyone to experience.

Everyone is an ambassador for the National Park's amazing outdoors and, by acting responsibly, whatever outdoor activity we are doing, we can make a real difference to the nature and people around us.



**Sandy Bremner**  
Convener

# Ro-ràdh

Tha e deatamach gum faigh a h-uile duine an cothrom tlachd fhaighinn bho bhlàr a-muigh na Pàirce Nàiseanta, gu furasta agus gu sàbhailte, ge bith dè an aois, an comas no an cùl-raon. Gus cothrom fhaighinn a bhith nas gnìomhaiche gu corporra agus ionnsachadh mun raon iongantach seo, a bhith a' gabhail cùram agus a' cur luach air.

'S e àite air leth brèagha a th' ann am Pàirc Nàiseanta a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh, far a bheil seallaidhean-tìre suaicheanta, gnèithean ann an cunnart agus còrr air 18,000 neach a' fuireach. Àite far am faod daoine agus nàdar soirbheachadh còmhla. Tha am plana seo airson cur-seachad seasmhach, ruigsinneachd a-muigh, seirbheisean maoir, òigridh agus obair shaor-thoileach taobh a-staigh na Pàirce Nàiseanta a' mìneachadh mar a libhrigeas Ùghdarras na Pàirce prìomh phrìomhachasan Plana Com-pàirteachais na Pàirce Nàiseanta.

Dh'atharraich a' ghalar mòr-sgaoilte mar a tha luchd-tadhail a' faighinn tlachd bhon Phàirc, a bharrachd air a bhith a' daingneachadh bheachdan air na bha luchd-còmhnaidh a' smaoinneachadh air far a bheil iad a' fuireach, an dà chuid a thaobh mar a chuireas daoine luach air na raointean uaine faisge orra, agus cho deatamach is a tha e dhuinn na raointean sin a riaghladh gu seasmhach airson buannachd dhaoine agus fiadh-bheatha.

Tha am plana seo a' mìneachadh gnìomhan àrd-amasach airson an iomadh dòigh anns am faod luchd-còmhnaidh agus luchd-tadhail faighinn a-mach agus tlachd fhaighinn bhon Phàirc Nàiseanta airson ar slàinte agus ar sunnd. Mar eisimpleir, tha na Coimheadaichean Saor-thoileach againn air 4600 uair den ùine aca a chuir a-steach gus an t-àite seo a chumail sònraichte airson a h-uile duine.

'S e tosgaire a th' anns a h-uile duine airson a' bhlàr a-muigh iongantach aig a' Phàirc Nàiseanta agus, le bhith ag obair gu ciallach, ge bith dè an gnìomhachd a-muigh a tha sinn a' dèanamh, faodaidh sinn fìor eadar-dhealachadh a dhèanamh air nàdar agus na daoine mun cuairt oirnn.



**Sandy Bremner**  
Neach-gairm



# Introduction

The Cairngorms National Park is the largest National Park in the UK at 4,528 sq km (6% of Scotland's land mass) and is home to one quarter of the UK's rare and endangered species.

Around 18,000 people live in the National Park across the areas of Aberdeenshire, Angus, Highland, Moray, and Perth and Kinross, with nearly two million visitors enjoying this special place every year. People have visited this special place for generations, attracted by the landscape, nature and extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation.

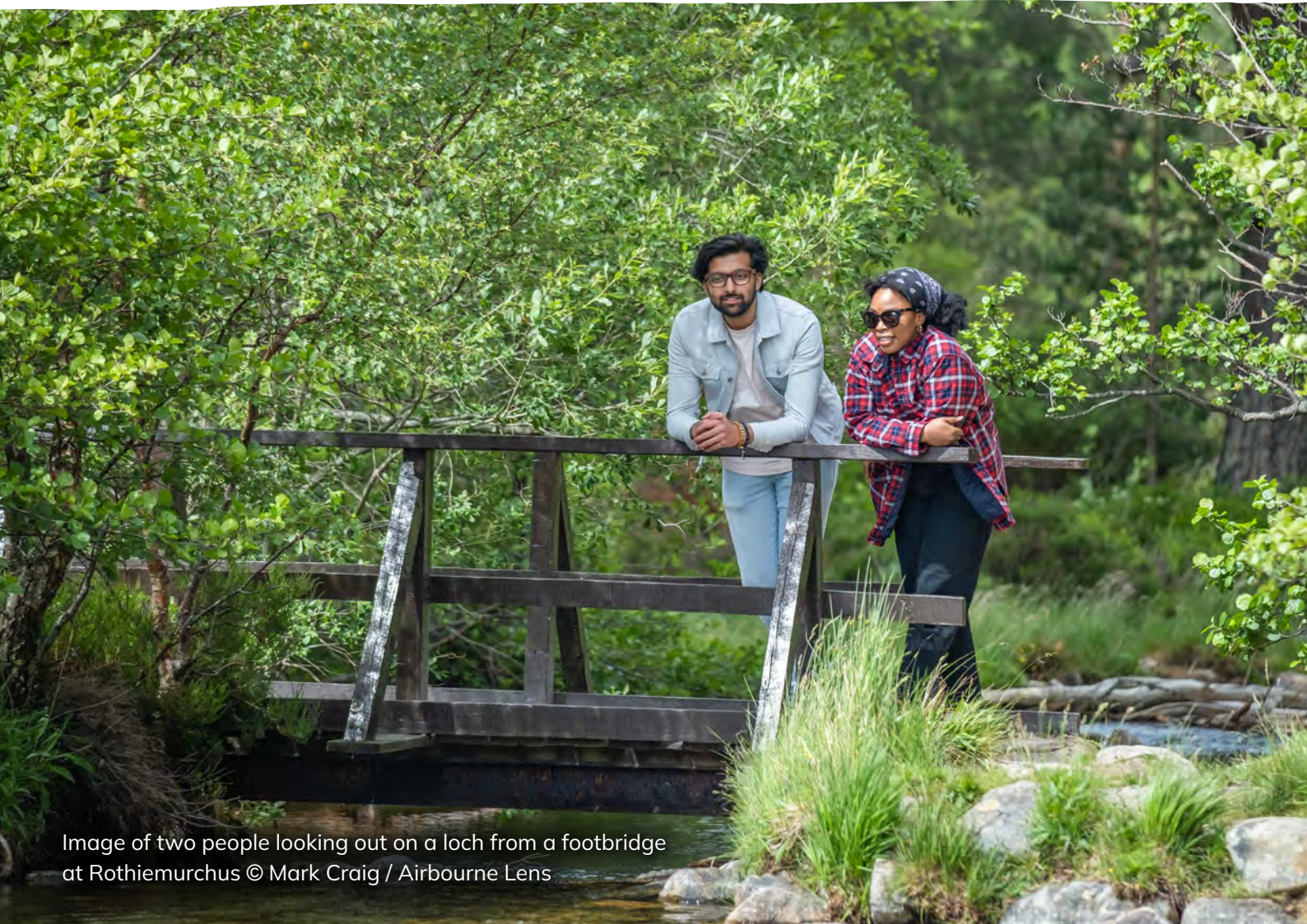


Image of two people looking out on a loch from a footbridge at Rothiemurchus © Mark Craig / Airbourne Lens

# Strategic context

This document is the Active Cairngorms Action Plan for 2024 – 2028, and it sits within the wider context of the National Park Partnership Plan 2022 – 2027.

Launched in August 2022, the Partnership Plan sets out how all those with a responsibility for the National Park will coordinate their work to tackle the most important issues.

In particular, the Partnership Plan:



Sets out the vision and overarching strategy for managing the National Park.



Guides the work of all public bodies and other partners to deliver the aims of the National Park.



Provides the strategic context for the Local Development Plan.



Is the Strategic Regional Land Use Framework and Regional Spatial Strategy for the National Park.



Is the Economic and Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the National Park.





The Partnership Plan is arranged in three sections: Nature, People and Place, with each section setting out the outcome that we want to achieve by 2045 (the year Scottish Government has committed to achieving net zero). Each of these sections is supported by a set of objectives, actions for the next five years and a comprehensive set of policies. The actions within the Active Cairngorms Action Plan add value to the National Park Partnership Plan.

The Active Cairngorms Action Plan will support the delivery of Cairngorms 2030 an ambitious programme to deliver by 2030 a National Park where people and nature thrive together.

Alongside this Active Cairngorms Action Plan sit a Sustainable Tourism Action Plan and a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan, which set out a strategic approach to investment in, and maintenance of, tourism and visitor infrastructure in the Cairngorms National Park. The Local Development Plan 2021 will guide the form of any built development and ensure it is in the right place. The Wellbeing Economy Action Plan (still in development) will promote an economy that works for all the people of the Cairngorms. The Strategic Active Travel Plan includes a range of actions to influence how people travel to and around the National Park.

# About this action plan

**The Active Cairngorms Action Plan aims to make it easier and safer for people to enjoy the National Park's special qualities, whatever their age, ability or background. It also encourages people to be more physically active and to learn about, care for and appreciate the National Park.**

Nearly two million people visit the National Park every year and around 18,000 people live here. The provision of high-quality outdoor facilities and activities is vital to our visitors and is a major contributor to the National Park's economic success, and to the health and wellbeing of its residents and visitors. The Active Cairngorms Action Plan will help our visitors enjoy the National Park's special qualities in a sustainable way, safeguarding and protecting our most sensitive species and habitats – for example, by identifying actions to reduce the impact of recreational disturbance on sensitive species and habitats.

Suitable promotion of the wide range of recreational opportunities available in the National Park is key to influencing visitor behaviour and supporting people's wellbeing. Our aim is that people living in or visiting the National Park know the health benefits of physical recreation and are enabled, supported and inspired to be more active.

Through volunteering we want people to engage with and feel part of the solution to safeguarding the National Park's special qualities against climate change and biodiversity loss.

Learning about the Cairngorms and the way it is managed will increase understanding and appreciation of the National Park. This will nurture an ethos of respect and a commitment to caring for the countryside that we live in, visit and work in.





# Plan structure

The plan will help us deliver the strategic objectives in the Partnership Plan as follows:

## Nature



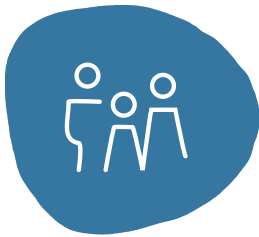
**Outcome – A carbon negative and biodiversity-rich National Park with better functioning, better connected and more resilient ecosystems**

A7: Fire management

A13: Species recovery

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## People



**Outcome – A wellbeing economy that works for all the people of the Cairngorms**

B9: Mental and physical health

B10: A Park for All

B11: Volunteering and outdoor learning

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## Place



**Outcome – A place that people want to live in, and visit that works for all**

C5: Visitors to the National Park

C7: Transport to and around the Park

C8: Accessible path and cycle network

C9: High-quality visitor experience

C10: Cultural heritage

# Priority actions







**Seven priority areas for action have been identified for the Active Cairngorms Action Plan:**

- **Managing for visitors**
- **Minimising impacts on sensitive species and habitats**
- **Ranger services**
- **Public health in the outdoors**
- **Volunteer Cairngorms**
- **Youth and outdoor learning**
- **Paths, trails and outdoor access**

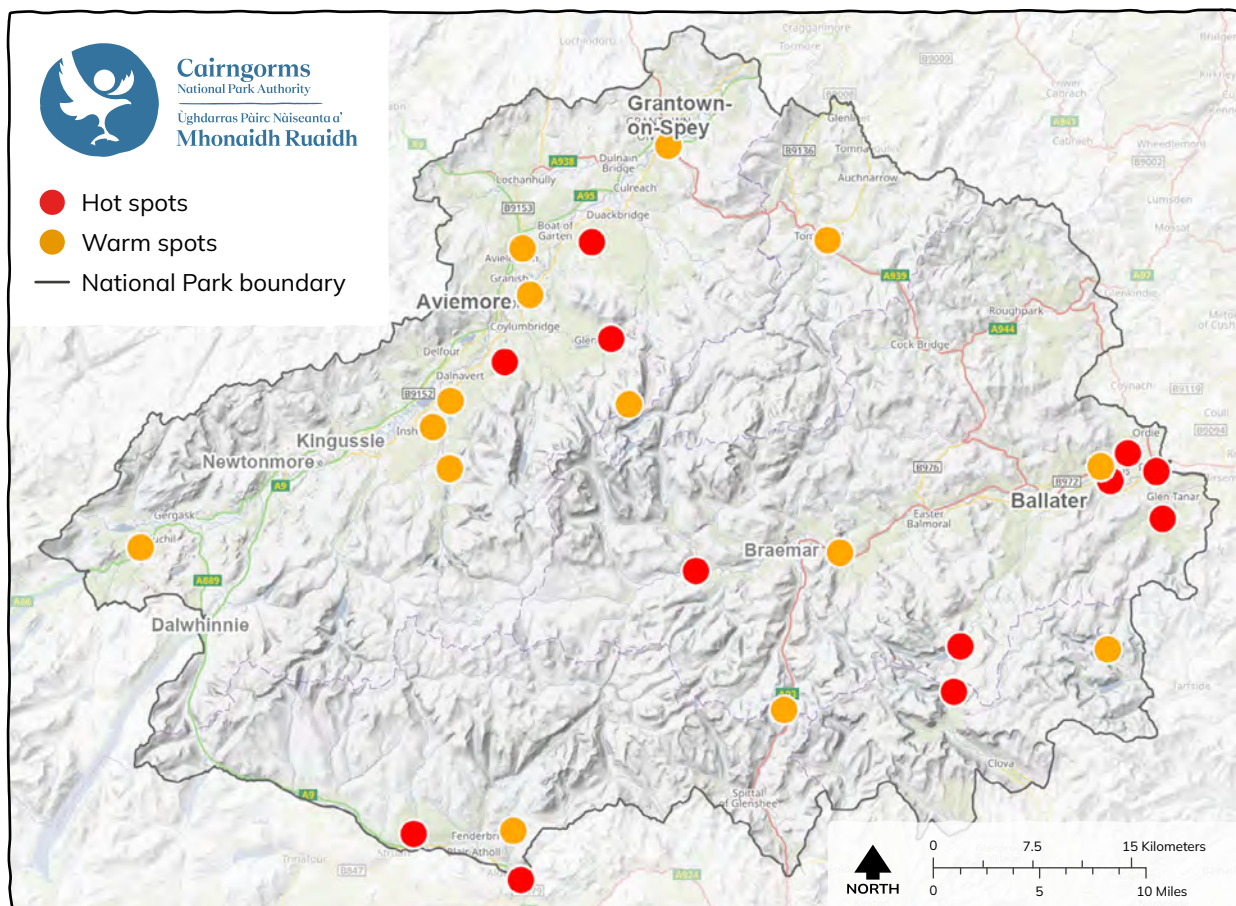
The key actions for each of these priorities are identified on the following pages, all of which will help to deliver the National Park Partnership Plan.

# Managing for visitors

During and after the Covid-19 pandemic we saw significant changes in visitor distribution and behaviour in the National Park, and across Scotland, due to the easing of lockdown policies and the desire of visitors to experience the outdoors and nature. Significant new pressures were put on certain locations in the National Park.

New arrangements for managing these pressures were put in place, at national level and within the National Park, during this time and we developed a level of partnership working that we had never seen before in this field. Areas of the National Park that were popular with visitors and which saw instances of anti-social behaviour were identified (see Map 1 below). Resources were invested to increase the presence of rangers on the ground, including the development of a new Cairngorms National Park Authority Ranger Service. New awareness-raising campaigns were developed to reach new audiences and investment in visitor infrastructure planning was stepped up.

## Map 1 – Visitor management hotspots





Looking ahead we want to continue this exemplary approach to partnership work and the ambitions for this area of work are:

- To work with visitors, communities and businesses to protect the Park and minimise any potential conflicts.
- Promote collaboration across land management and organisational boundaries to ensure a positive visitor experience.

## 1. Managing for Visitors group



### **ACTION**

**Develop the Managing for Visitors group to bring together key public sector partners, land managers and businesses and participate in national arrangements.**



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, VisitScotland

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## 2. Influencing visitor behaviour



### **ACTION**

**Influence visitor behaviour through a series of initiatives that include:**

- Promoting messaging that visitors should ‘tread lightly’ as the main means of promoting the Scottish Outdoor Access Code in the National Park.
- Providing clear guidance on recreational activities such as wild camping and water sports.
- Developing standard signage for key messages that promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and supporting land managers to use signs to help them promote responsible access.
- Ensuring a wide range of audiences are engaged with through the use of different platforms, accessible formats, and different languages.
- Working well with Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to reduce rural crime and ensure appropriate enforcement measures are in place.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, Cairngorms Business Partnership, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Police Scotland, ranger services, land managers

# 3. New audience campaigns



**ACTION**

Develop dedicated campaigns for new audiences in partnership with partners to positively influence specific visitor behaviours such as fires, toileting and roadside or overnight parking.



**PARTNERS**  
(lead first)

Park Authority, Cairngorms Business Partnership, national visitor management groups

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# 4. Fire byelaws



**ACTION**

Consult on options around fire byelaws for the National Park.



**PARTNERS**  
(lead first)

Park Authority

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# 5. Visitor welcome app



**ACTION**

Investigate the viability of a visitor welcome app for the Cairngorms National Park, providing guidance to visitors and giving real-time data on visitor distribution.



**PARTNERS**  
(lead first)

Park Authority



# 6. Data collection and analysis



**ACTION**

Develop our capability to collect and analyse information about visitor distribution and behaviour spatially using digital technology.



**PARTNERS**  
(lead first)

Park Authority

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# 7. Land management best practice



**ACTION**

Deliver a programme to support best practice within the land management sector on safeguarding access rights to reduce access obstructions.



**PARTNERS**  
(lead first)

Park Authority, Scottish Land and Estates



## Case study

Image of full visitor car park at Balmoral Castle  
© Liam Anderstrem / Airbourne Lens

### Managing for Visitors group

Lockdown easing during the Covid pandemic led to unprecedented visitor pressure at key hot spots throughout the Park. This required coordinated action across a number of organisational, estate and geographic boundaries to address visitor pressures and prevent anti-social behaviour. During the Covid pandemic the Park Authority and partners develop the Managing for Visitors Plan. The Managing for Visitors group is the main operational group for the management for visitors within the Cairngorms National Park that oversees the delivery of the actions within the Managing for Visitors Plan. Meeting every fortnight between April and October, it is attended by land managers from the public, private and third sectors, including local authorities, NatureScot and emergency services.

The success of this group is measured by the continuing partnership and collaboration on messaging, ranger deployment and innovative visitor management measures.



# Minimising impacts on sensitive species and habitats

To ensure people and nature thrive together – and to maintain viable populations of sensitive species and safeguard fragile environments – significant planning and careful management activity is required. This area of work will focus on helping the public to engage positively with nature while, at the same time, minimising disturbance from recreation.

Looking ahead, the overarching ambitions for this area of work are:

- Reduce recreational disturbance and impacts on sensitive species and habitats
- Gather information to inform future management measures

## 8. Measuring the impact of disturbance



### **ACTION**

Develop and utilise methods for measuring the impact of disturbance on sensitive habitats and species – to be used to build a strong evidence base to help inform future management measures.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, NatureScot

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## 9. Spatial plan



### **ACTION**

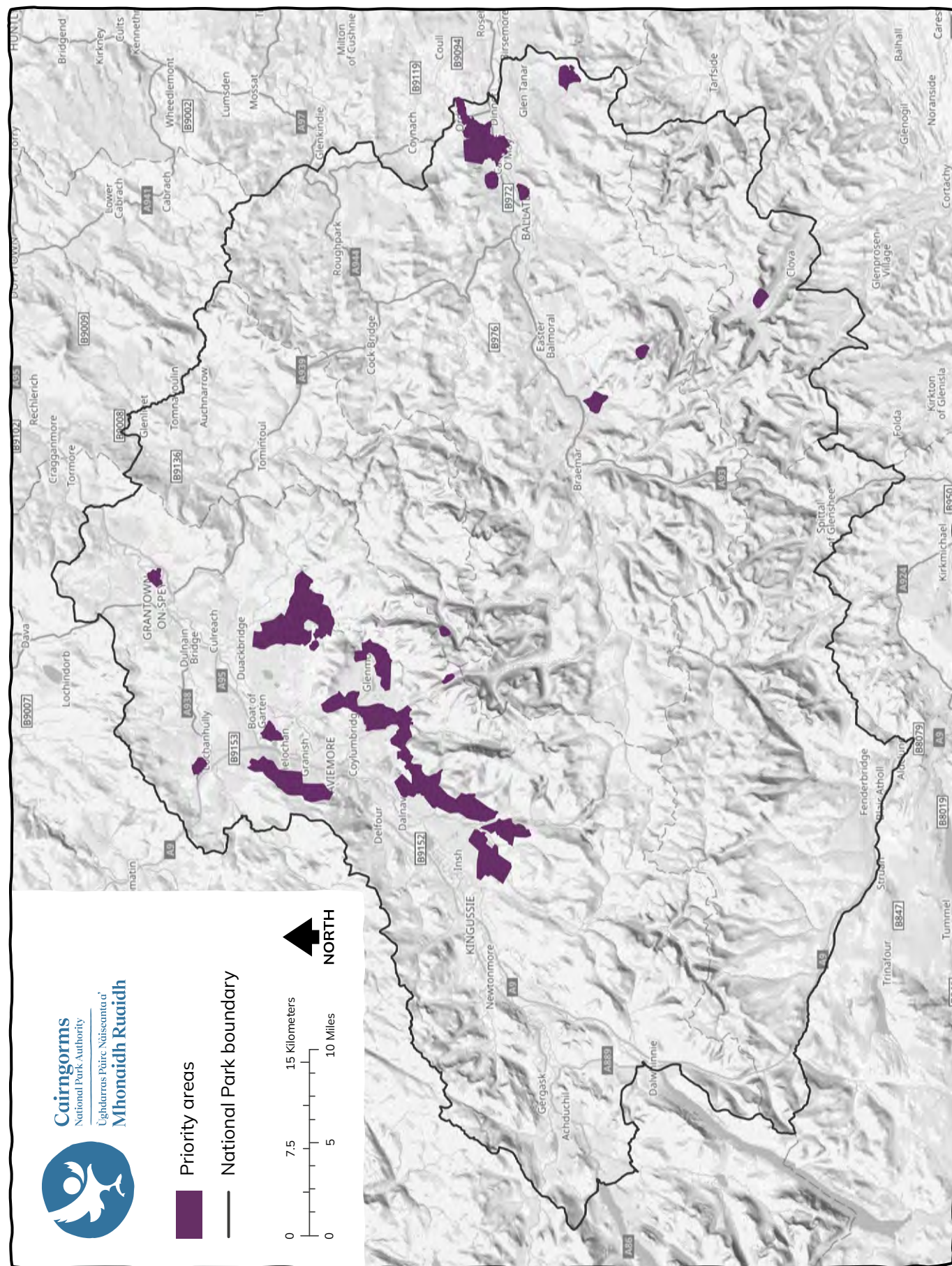
Utilise a spatial plan to prioritise the management of reductions in recreational disturbance to species and habitats (see Map 2 opposite).



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, NatureScot

# Map 2 – Priority areas for the management of recreational disturbance to species and habitats





## 10. Ground-nesting bird impacts



### **ACTION**

Reduce the impact of recreation on ground-nesting birds by implementing site-specific actions and initiatives with land managers.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland, Cairngorms Business Partnership, land managers

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## 11. Dog-friendly Cairngorms



### **ACTION**

Develop and deliver 'Dog-friendly Cairngorms' package for the National Park including:

- Supporting communities to create and develop dog walking spaces to meet the needs of dogs and reduce pressure on sensitive areas for wildlife.
- Build knowledge and support by developing an active community of dog owners with information and understanding.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority

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## 12. Best practice for bikes



### **ACTION**

Develop further with users best practice for bikes including supporting the delivery of the Mountain Biking Recreation Management Plan for Badenoch and Strathspey.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, NatureScot, land managers

## 13. Outdoor event guidance



### **ACTION**

Update guidance on outdoor events to promote best practice.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, Cairngorms Business Partnership

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## 14. Wildlife and activity guide training



### **ACTION**

Work with wildlife and activity guides to develop specific local training and codes of conduct for sensitive sites and species eg, twinflower, beavers, raptors and lek sites.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, Cairngorms Business Partnership, wildlife and activity guides





Image of a mountain biker © Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland

## Case study

### Mountain biking: the Trail Feathers project

In 2020, the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project conducted a survey with 388 mountain bikers within the Cairngorms National Park. The survey found that almost all felt responsible for the environment they ride in and were willing to change behaviours to help protect it.

In response to these findings, a group of over 20 riders from the Badenoch and Strathspey area came together to help turn this consensus into action and create a plan to help the mountain biking community enhance and protect the environment it utilises. The group of riders, who represent a range of riding abilities and interests and include bike shop owners, mountain bike guides and members of the Badenoch and Strathspey Trail Association, took part in a series of action planning workshops in early 2021.

Through this process the group have become more informed about capercaillie, have been able to identify potential solutions, and have agreed a goal and set of actions to help deliver wins for capercaillie and the mountain biking community. Their goal is to unlock at least 100 hectares of capercaillie habitat with no net loss of trails.

This goal and the actions to achieve it are known as the Trail Feathers project. The project has been funded and facilitated through the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project and Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland, with support from the Badenoch and Strathspey Trail Association.



# Ranger services

**Rangers working in the National Park play a crucial role in helping people to understand, engage with and safeguard the natural and cultural environment that people come to enjoy.**

We have a unique approach to the deployment of rangers within the National Park with 14 different employers in the family of ranger services, all coordinated by Cairngorms National Park Authority using a mix of directly employed staff and rangers supported through grant-aid. These include site-based ranger services, employed directly by landowners to deliver services on their property, complemented by the Cairngorms National Park Authority Ranger Service which works dynamically and flexibly, delivering services across a wider area. Cairngorms National Park Authority coordinates the family of ranger services and all rangers wear National Park branded clothing and collaborate to a very high degree, with coordinated training and operational management procedures. Ranger services are supplemented in the busy summer period with additional seasonal staff and all rangers work closely with local communities, land managers, disadvantaged groups and young people, helping to look after nature and the cultural heritage.

**Looking ahead, the overarching ambitions for this area of work are:**

- Maintaining a strong and high-profile network of rangers in the Cairngorms where the number of rangers employed within the Park is stable or increasing.
- Ensuring ranger services are connecting people with an outstanding National Park and working collaboratively to provide an innovative, inspirational and professional service.
- Promoting skills and providing a career pathway into ranger services for people from a wide range of different backgrounds.



Image of a Cairngorms National Park Authority ranger talking to a family © Ed Smith



## 15. Family of ranger services



### **ACTION**

Coordinate and develop the family of ranger services to ensure coverage and deployment across the whole National Park and alignment with national arrangements.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, ranger services, NatureScot

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## 16. Ranger Managers' group



### **ACTION**

Develop the Ranger Managers' group that brings together public sector and site-specific ranger services to ensure a coordinated approach and to feed into the national arrangements for rangers.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, ranger services

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## 17. Ranger training and development



### **ACTION**

Develop the programme of training to develop best practice and a committed and skilled workforce.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, ranger services, Scottish Countryside Rangers Association

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## 18. New career pathways and skills



### **ACTION**

Develop skills and new career pathways to help people into employment with ranger services.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, ranger services, Scottish Countryside Rangers Association



Image of trainee rangers © Pete Short

## Case study

### Trainee rangers

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has run a Trainee Ranger Programme for two years to promote opportunities in a career as a ranger. Working alongside our partner ranger services, trainees have opportunities to build a range of practical skills, learn about the varied role of rangers across Scotland, and to understand career pathways, expectations and skill requirement for future career aspirations. Nine people have completed the scheme to date, including four rangers who were supported by the kickstart scheme in 2021. Two of the kickstart rangers became seasonal rangers in the team after 2021 and one further trainee ranger became a seasonal ranger from 2022; others have progressed in directly related work outside the National Park. Feedback about the experience has been extremely positive.



# Public health and the outdoors

The natural environment of the National Park is a valuable resource when it comes to tackling some of our most pressing health issues.

With an ageing population, more people with multiple health conditions, chronic illness and long-term mental health issues for those living in the National Park, developing green health opportunities can help us respond to these pressures. The Active Cairngorms Action Plan demonstrates how nature-based solutions can make a meaningful and lasting difference to people's health and wellbeing. This work is a key strand of the Cairngorms 2030 programme.

Looking ahead, the overarching ambitions for this area of work are:

- Meeting the target in the National Park Partnership Plan to have green health referral programmes in place in all GP practices in the National Park.
- Improving access to health-enhancing opportunities in nature.
- Reducing inequalities through additional support for disadvantaged and under-represented groups.

## 19. Pathways to green health



### ACTION

Embed pathways to green health and nature within GP Practices, social care and education.



**PARTNERS**  
(lead first)

NHS, Park Authority, local authorities

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## 20. Green health promotion



### ACTION

Make green health opportunities more visible:

- Maintain up-to-date information for green health opportunities and promote widely within communities.
- Develop green health information on the Park Authority website.
- Promote Green Health Week.



**PARTNERS**  
(lead first)

Park Authority, community green health networks

## 21. Community networks



### **ACTION**

**Nurture strong community networks that will provide, and support access to, recreational opportunities for wellbeing:**

- Further develop green health opportunities with key players.
- Work with ranger services to integrate green health into the wider learning and engagement work (eg school visits, Junior Rangers etc).



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, community green health networks

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## 22. Targeted community support



### **ACTION**

**Liaise with specific community support organisations to support particular groups, eg, carers and young carers, ethnic minorities, seasonal workers, etc.**



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, community networks

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## 23. Dementia-friendly walks



### **ACTION**

**Develop dementia-friendly walks in each community within the National Park.**



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, Paths for All



## 24. Health walks programme



### ACTION

Develop and promote a health walks programme in each community of the Park.



### PARTNERS (lead first)

Park Authority, NHS, Paths for All

## 25. Sedentary lifestyle support



### ACTION

Develop targeted promotion activities for those living sedentary lifestyles (for example, Green Health Week, World Mental Health Day, Cairngorms Nature Festival etc), to deliver and promote green health opportunities.



### PARTNERS (lead first)

Park Authority, NHS







## Case study

Image of Alzheimer Scotland's Outdoor Dementia Centre at Badaguish Outdoor Centre © Will Hall

# Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre

Alzheimer Scotland's Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre is based at Badaguish Outdoor Centre and enables people with dementia, their families, and carers to experience the mental and physical benefits of spending time outdoors. Since the official opening in April 2023, hundreds of participants have taken part in nature-based activities there.

The project is part of the Cairngorms National Park Authority's Cairngorms 2030 programme and is supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.





# Volunteer Cairngorms

**Environmental volunteering delivers tangible benefits to the management of the National Park, as well as to the physical and mental wellbeing of those participating in volunteering.**

It also provides excellent training opportunities and develops experiences that can lead to future employment. We want to see an expansion of the opportunities available for volunteering in the National Park, ensuring they are open to people from all backgrounds. Active management is required to ensure volunteers are adding value and not replacing or competing with employment opportunities.

**Looking ahead, the overarching ambitions for this area of work are:**

- Meet the targets in the National Park Partnership Plan to have at least 200 volunteer rangers by 2030 and increase the number of volunteer days every year.
- Develop a world-class network of Cairngorms National Park Volunteer Rangers, taking an inclusive approach to volunteering recruitment.
- Raise awareness of existing environmental volunteering opportunities across the Cairngorms National Park amongst a wide range of people.

## 26. Volunteer rangers



### **ACTION**

**Increase the number of volunteer rangers to meet the needs of partners and the Cairngorms National Park Authority:**

- Deliver recruitment programmes.
- Monitor and evaluate the demand and need of partners who provide opportunities for volunteer rangers.
- Maintain high quality volunteer management and the Volunteer Cairngorms portal.
- Maintain and deliver high quality Volunteer Ranger Programme and monitor capacity of the Park Authority to deliver it.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority

## 27. Volunteer Experience Programme



### **ACTION**

Develop and manage the Volunteer Experience Programme to specifically encourage new and under-represented groups into volunteering (eg carers and young carers, ethnic minority communities, LGBTQ+ people, disabled people, seasonal workers, etc).



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority

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## 28. Green health opportunities



### **ACTION**

Increase volunteering opportunities linked to green health activities, and support a vibrant community of volunteer Health Walk Leaders across the Park to deliver a Health Walks Programme with a health walk in every community.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, Paths for All

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## 29. Environmental volunteering



### **ACTION**

**Promote awareness of environmental volunteering:**

- Advertising opportunities through the Volunteer Cairngorms portal
- Developing / supporting a series of awareness / recruitment events
- Promoting value of environmental volunteering through media outlets.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority

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## 30. Cairngorms Litter Network



### ACTION

Create a Cairngorms Litter Network to coordinate and encourage community-based litter picking and support relevant littering awareness campaigns.



### PARTNERS (lead first)

Park Authority, Keep Scotland Beautiful, community groups







## Case study

# Volunteer Experience Programme

This specific initiative has been developed to promote an inclusive approach to volunteering, providing support to groups and individuals who would not normally become involved. One such group is from the charity Home-Start East Highland, including mostly single mothers and children who come out to participate in environmental volunteering. The group spent time in the wildlife garden learning how to pond dip, build bug hotels and get to know the animals in the Highland Wildlife Park. Home-Start work closely with families that have been referred through social work and are based in regions all over Scotland.

The Volunteer Experience Programme also works with asylum and refugee groups and a sexual abuse charity, providing safe spaces for these groups to volunteer in nature. Tasks include upland path maintenance, tree planting, capercaillie habitat creation and ring barking. In 2024, 169 participants places were filled by these groups who otherwise would be unable to experience volunteering in the National Park. Feedback is very positive, with charity partners reporting improved sleep and mood in participants after the events.

There are plans to extend the programme with charities working with socially disadvantaged people from within and around the Park.



# Young people and outdoor learning

Young people are the future of the Cairngorms and will have to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to meet the demands and challenges of an increasingly uncertain future.

The outdoor learning and youth action work of the Park Authority is focussed on engaging and empowering young people through a range of programmes so they feel equipped, informed and motivated for the future.

Looking ahead, the overarching ambitions for this area of work are:

- Provide opportunities for inspiration, learning and understanding outdoors through engaging with people.
- Promote opportunities for young people to develop their skills and confidence and have their voices heard on the future management of the National Park.

## 31. Nature-based award schemes



### **ACTION**

Promote and manage the use of nature-based award schemes in the National Park to promote and inspire young people.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority

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## 32. Junior ranger programme



### **ACTION**

Deliver junior ranger programmes to six local secondary schools with monthly junior ranger activities in Badenoch and Strathspey and on Deeside.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, local authorities, ranger services

# 33. Scottish Outdoor Access Code in schools



**ACTION**

Deliver education sessions for all schools in the National Park to promote Scottish Outdoor Access Code and outdoor learning.



**PARTNERS**  
(lead first)

Park Authority, ranger services

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# 34. Skills development programmes



**ACTION**

Collaborate with other public sector partners to deliver and develop national education and skills-development programmes.



**PARTNERS**  
(lead first)

Park Authority, Forestry and Land Scotland, NatureScot, Countryside Learning Scotland

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# 35. Education travel grant



**ACTION**

Promote and manage the Cairngorms National Park education travel grant which supports schools and other education groups to access the Park.



**PARTNERS**  
(lead first)

Park Authority



# 36. Cairngorms Youth Action Team



**ACTION**

Develop and facilitate the Cairngorms Youth Action Team events programme.



**PARTNERS**  
(lead first)

Park Authority

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# 37. Youth collaboration initiatives



**ACTION**

Support continuing youth collaboration with other national parks, youth initiatives and events to share and celebrate best practice, eg through EUROPARC or Youth Parliament events.



**PARTNERS**  
(lead first)

Park Authority



Image of Cairngorms Youth Climate Camp participants © Alaska Stikova





## Case study

### Junior Ranger project

Delivered by ranger services and other key partners, the Cairngorms Junior Ranger programme has developed opportunities for 11–18 year-olds to take part in fun, practical outdoor activities to equip them with new skills, confidence and opportunities to act as ambassadors for the National Park. There is no charge for young people taking part in the programme. Six high schools participate in annual 5-day Junior Ranger Discovery Weeks, with up to 15 junior rangers per school per week. Monthly sessions are offered to a growing community of around one hundred regularly attending junior rangers living in or close to the National Park, open to any young person with an interest in the outdoors.

Since 2021 the project has engaged with over 250 junior rangers and now has a partnership of over 40 motivated organisations, helping to deliver meaningful sessions with the collective goal of enhancing nature connection of young people growing up in our communities and skilling up the next generation of rural workers. The project won the national award in the Education Category in 2023 from the Scottish Land and Estates “Helping it Happen Awards”.

# Paths, trails and outdoor access

**The extensive network of paths and long-distance routes are fundamental to people's enjoyment of our National Park and they help to underpin our reputation as a high-quality sustainable tourism destination.**

Since the National Park's designation in 2003, we have built our outdoor access network in partnership with land managers and community groups who maintain and develop the paths network. Our unique approach helps ensure that the paths help to tackle health inequalities, support active lifestyles, active travel and to connect people with nature. The Park Authority has duties as an access authority to uphold access rights, develop a core paths plan; and NatureScot has duties to keep the Scottish Outdoor Access Code under review and to promote understanding of the Code. The right of access is based on people exercising their rights responsibly, as set out in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and the vast majority of visitors and land managers take these responsibilities very seriously. Work to improve the facilities associated with the paths network is set out within the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan.

**Looking ahead, the overarching ambitions for this area of work are:**

- Meet the target in the Partnership Plan to increase the number of kilometres of safe and inclusive off-road, or segregated on-road, routes between communities by 2030.
- Ensure all Core Paths and the community paths networks are in good condition, well-promoted and accessible to the widest possible range of users.
- Ensure that the Scottish Outdoor Access Code is well-promoted and well-understood.

## 38. Core Paths Plan



### **ACTION**

**Review and publish an updated Core Paths Plan by end of 2026.**



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority



## 39. Local Outdoor Access Forum



### **ACTION**

Refresh the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum to ensure it plays an active role in advising on all aspects of the Active Cairngorms Action Plan.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority

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## 40. Data-gathering tools



### **ACTION**

Develop more robust range of data-gathering tools as a basis for supporting visitor management and path investment priorities including:

- A strategic review of monitoring at indicator sites (lowland paths, upland paths, trail-heads, Core Paths and Long Distances Routes).
- Use of people counters and other data-gathering technologies to measure usage on key paths and car parks.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority

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## 41. Path network promotion



### **ACTION**

Promote path networks across the Park by:

- Maintaining a suite of community path leaflets in paper and accessible digital formats.
- Supporting partners to deliver appropriate publications (eg Hill Tracks leaflet).



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, Cairngorms Business Partnership, community groups, Scotways

## 42. Signposts and waymarking



### **ACTION**

Ensure paths around communities are well-signposted and waymarked with community map boards in every community across the National Park.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Park Authority, community groups

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## 43. Community path groups



### **ACTION**

Support and expand the number of community path groups to deliver path projects through funding, training and sharing best practice.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Paths For All, Park Authority

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## 44. Upland path network



### **ACTION**

Review the Upland Path Audit to identify investment priorities for the upland path network and develop innovative techniques to reduce upland path erosion.



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland, Park Authority, Upland Path Advisory Group

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## 45. Adopt a Path scheme



### **ACTION**

Expand the existing 'Adopt a Path' scheme to promote volunteer-led approach to cover all upland paths in the Park



### **PARTNERS** (lead first)

Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland, Park Authority



Image of volunteers working to restore upland paths on Beinn a' Ghlo © Will Hall

## Case study

### Path Network Assessment

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has developed a programme to map paths and infrastructure, with the goal of producing an assessment framework for all paths within the core path network. The methodology has been developed to map the assets that are in and around lowland community core paths, creating a baseline in digital form for use with GIS. This has included training of rangers to conduct community core paths surveys.

Going forwards, this work will help plan and manage projects including the replacement of directional path signage and removal or replacement of barriers such as narrow gates or stiles. Volunteers will also be encouraged to become involved, notably through the Adopt a Path scheme, managed by the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland and targeted at upland paths. The data will be combined with other digital data sets to improve our collective ability to plan and manage the paths resource in the Park.



# Monitoring and review

**A comprehensive programme of work is being set out to monitor delivery of the actions set out in the National Park Partnership Plan.**

The monitoring and review of this Action Plan will be closely tied to this work and led by Park Authority officers, with contributions from all relevant stakeholders. The Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum will advise on delivery of the Action Plan and the Managing for Visitors group will discuss aspects of operational delivery. A formal report will be taken, at least annually, to the Cairngorms National Park Authority Board.







Image of health walk participants in Grantown-on-Spey © Will Hall





**Cairngorms**  
National Park

Pàirc Nàiseanta a'  
**Mhonaidh Ruaidh**

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