

05 May 2025

## Muirburn Code – Consultation

Dear NatureScot

Ensuring that best practice is adhered to when undertaking muirburn is very important for the Cairngorms National Park Authority. There have been numerous examples over March and April 2025 where muirburn has been carried out in contravention of the current code within the National Park. The Park Authority recognises that muirburn when done well can have positive benefits especially around fuel load but can also be used to reduce diversity of habitats and stop appropriate succession.

The Park Authority would like the following points taken into consideration in the Muirburn Code:

- 1) There is nothing in the draft Code about undertaking muirburn during periods of high fire risk. This seems like a major issue to exclude especially with climate change models showing the risk of wildfire increasing. The Park Authority would strongly recommend no burning during periods of high fire risk. It is our understanding that the current fire risk warning system is not necessarily appropriate for muirburn management and so the Park Authority think this is an area for further investment to get a system fit for purpose.
- 2) The draft Code currently advises that practitioners leave a protective buffer of at least 10m around native woodland trees and shrubs. This should be mandatory not optional.
- 3) The draft Code at present only suggests a 2m buffer around water courses. The Park Authority would like to see this extended to be consistent with SEPA guidelines. The buffer width for the Muirburn code should be set in line with SEPA's "Recommended Riparian Corridor" as found on the Scottish Governments Environment hub. *The Riparian Corridor GIS layer is a buffer zone that extends from the banks of all natural watercourses in Scotland. The Riparian Corridor buffer has 3 size categories: 10m,*



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15m, and 30m. The size of buffer is determined by the width of each watercourse; channels less than 2m wide having a corridor of 10m, 2m to 15m wide, 15m and greater than 15m wide, 30m applied to each bank. In total, the riparian corridor buffer zone adds 20m, 30m or 60m to the width of each river channel. If we are going to see greater shade and diversity of habitats along our watercourses then this is a crucial change to the draft Code.

- 4) There is no upper limit to burn size in the draft Code. Large burns reduce diversity of habitats as stated in the draft code - 'Large fires are less likely to create the mosaic of habitats and vegetation ages that provide forage through the year and increase the biodiversity value.' The Park Authority would recommend an upper limit of any individual burn size is needed and consideration should also be given to cumulative impact of multiple smaller burns within an area.
- 5) The draft Code needs to be clear around the definitions within the Code e.g. what is included on a no burn list, what species are protected e.g. aquatic species and what the sanctions are for estates and individuals who break the finalised Code.

The Park Authority does a great deal of work with estates across the National Park including on river restoration, peatland restoration, woodland expansion, moorland management etc. It would be beneficial for NatureScot to consult the Park Authority on muirburn licence applications in the National Park to make sure that NatureScot benefit from this local knowledge.

The management of muirburn is a key issue for the Cairngorms National Park and the team here is happy to discuss any of the points made above.

Yours sincerely



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