

Media Release

For immediate release

Response to deer management proposals in Cairngorms Partnership Plan

Duncan Orr-Ewing, Chair of the LINK Deer Task Force said: "We welcome the CNPA's step in the right direction to promote sustainable deer management in one of Scotland's most outstanding areas for wildlife. This supports the CNPA's statutory objectives, which include the sustainable use of natural resources and the conservation of the natural heritage. Public interest objectives such as restoration of protected areas and expansion of native woodland should be a priority in the Park and sustainable economic activity and community resilience should benefit from this. The LINK Deer Task Force awaits the outcome of the Cabinet Secretary's consideration of SNH's recent Review of Deer Management and we have encouraged the facilitation of a range of measures to improve deer management systems in Scotland, including better use of SNH's existing powers to reduce deer numbers where they are causing damage to the natural heritage".

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Editors' Notes

(1) Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 35 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

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(2) Deer Management proposals attached.



PRIORITY 2

Deer management

Key policies: 1.5, 1.6, 1.7

KEY ISSUES

Deer management is integral to delivering the public interest priorities set out in the Partnership Plan. These include priorities for woodland expansion (both productive and montane woodland), peatland restoration and designated sites as well as employment.

There has been a longstanding policy ambition in the Cairngorms to manage deer at levels that protect and enhance habitats, from the Cairngorms Working Party (1992) through to current National Park policy. Significant progress has been made in many parts of the National Park in both reducing deer impacts and improving management planning and collaboration by Deer Management Groups. While deer densities and management objectives will vary, the continued effort to maintain lower deer numbers and associated impacts is delivering further enhancement on the ground.

Through the period of this Plan we aim to continue the current direction of travel in which deer numbers and consequent impacts are reduced, where deer welfare is improved and sport stalking in a high quality environment continues to make a valuable economic contribution in the National Park. In the longer term this will lead to having fewer, good quality deer in a better quality environment.

Research indicates that reducing red deer numbers and moving towards a more balanced stag to hind ratio can result in a sporting resource of better quality stags with greater carcass weights and better antlers, as well as improved fecundity in hinds and reduced winter mortality. Access to improved grazing and woodland shelter can also improve the carcass weight and welfare of red deer. There are therefore welfare advantages as well as habitat advantages to moving in this direction.

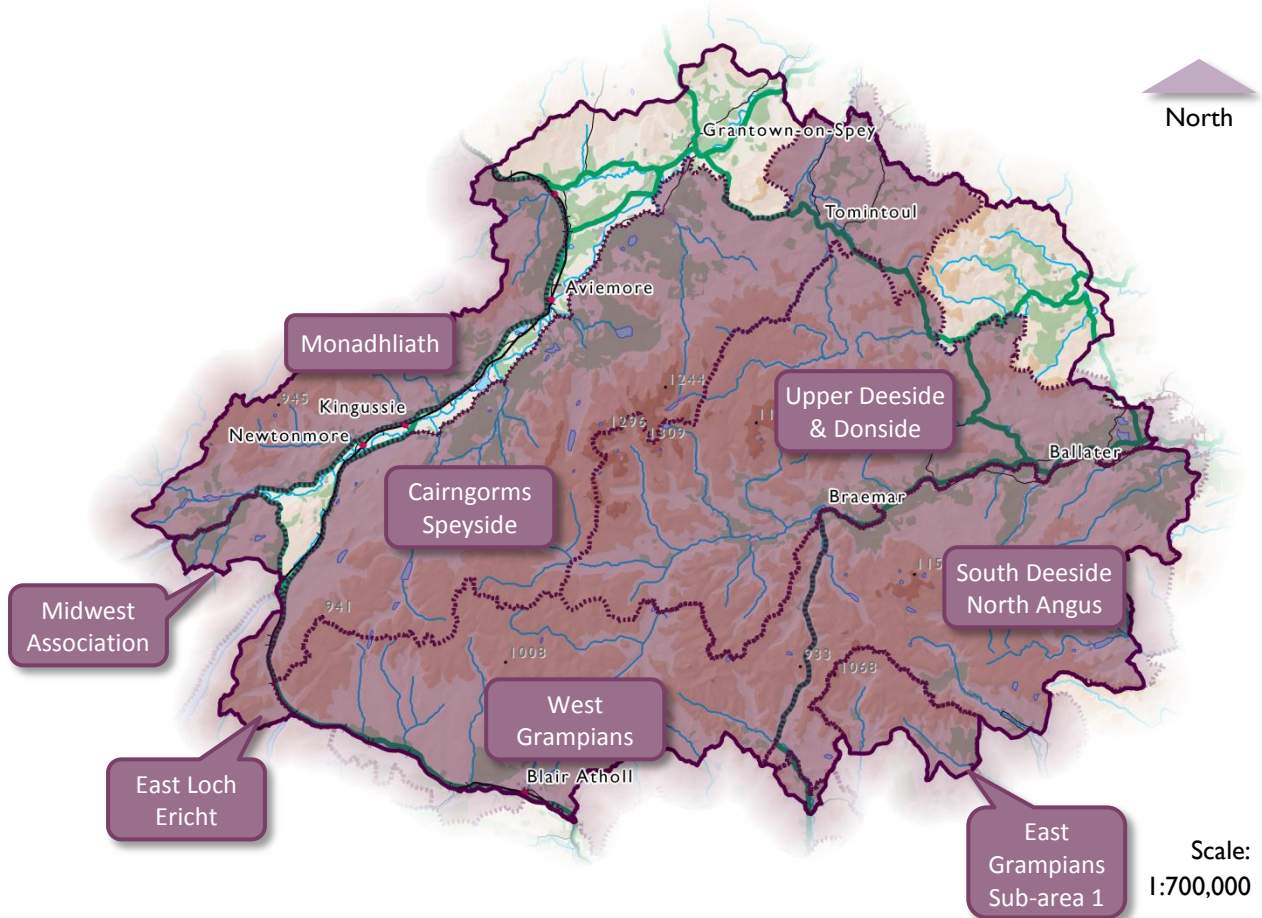
The National Park already includes a number of well recognised examples where reducing the density of deer has resulted in significant woodland regeneration and habitat restoration. In some of these areas deer densities have been recorded as being temporarily well below five per km². Very low densities are required to enable tree seedlings to establish but in time, with increased food availability and shelter, the habitat can again support more deer. In some places short term rotational fencing will help deliver this change.

KEY ISSUES CONTINUED

Deer densities and impacts will vary over time and support should be provided for population modelling and habitat impact assessments at group and landholding scale to target management to local circumstances. Deer impacts also need to be considered alongside impacts of other herbivores, climate and management factors. But the scale and connectivity of habitats and designated sites in the National Park requires a collaborative effort across the whole area to maintain deer numbers at a level which enables delivery of the public interest priorities and reduces marked differences across land management boundaries. Where habitat enhancement is restricted by management objectives which seek to maintain higher red deer densities, significantly above ten per km², our aim is for the density of deer to be reduced.

Increasingly the roe deer population in the National Park also needs more collaborative management, in order to make the most of it as a sporting resource and to manage potential impacts. It is important that populations of all deer species including red, roe, fallow, sika and reindeer continue to be monitored to inform management.

Figure 6: Deer Management Groups covering the Cairngorms National Park



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AGENDA FOR ACTION

We recognise the challenges that continuing the transition to a long-term direction of maintaining lower deer numbers brings for some managers, both in practical implementation and management objectives. During the period of this Plan we will work with land managers and Deer Management Groups to use population modelling, adaptive management and monitoring to demonstrate whether a more balanced ratio of stags to hinds can deliver reduced impacts and welfare benefits while maintaining a sport stalking resource.

Public agencies will support delivery through deer management groups by:

- a) Providing clarity on the public interest priorities and developing spatial mapping approaches to show these;
- b) Supporting the use of population modelling, herbivore impact assessments and habitat monitoring to inform management;
- c) Supporting an adaptive approach by monitoring the habitat, economic and welfare implications of changes in the context of the Deer Code;
- d) Supporting greater co-ordination of roe deer management and associated habitat and economic benefits, and collation of population information on all deer species;
- e) Supporting Deer Management Groups and facilitating communication and joint action across Deer Management Group boundaries where necessary.