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Farming Benefits of National Parks



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Photo: Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park

Introduction

Scotland's National Parks are working landscapes, where Scotland's natural beauty and cultural richness has resulted from land-use that has changed over time, as well as from natural processes. For a sustainable future, an approach to land management is required that is able to support thriving and profitable businesses and that can also deliver for nature and climate. Land managers within National Parks have access to funding support and advice that can help them accelerate the change towards net zero and being nature positive. They therefore can have leading roles in demonstrating and delivering farming for the future that is more nature-friendly, climate resilient and diversified.

Land management in National Parks produces food and timber, protects and restores nature, rebuilds rural infrastructures and communities and invests in thriving landscapes. A National Park location not only provides additional support and advice, it can provide additional opportunities for businesses to diversify beyond production and gain benefits of location specific marketing.

This report shows how in the nature and culture rich landscape of a National Park, land managers not only deliver multiple benefits for individual businesses and for the local community, but also for Scotland as a whole.

Deborah Long, Chief Officer, LINK

National Parks

- 1 'National Park' is the leading designation recognised across the world for places of the highest national importance for natural or cultural heritage – including landscape, wildlife, recreation, historic environment and cultural traditions. There are over 3,500 National Parks in the world including 15 in the UK, of which two are in Scotland:

Cairngorms National Park

Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park

- 2 National Parks in Scotland have four aims **by law**:
 - a) to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area
 - b) to promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area
 - c) to promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public
 - d) to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities
- 3 Some National Parks are truly wild places; many, including those in Scotland, are **predominantly working landscapes**. National Park Authorities (NPAs) own very little land, so achieving the National Park aims depends mainly on the management of land in private ownership or in the ownership of other public bodies. This report sets out the wide range of ways in which farmers, crofters and other land managers can benefit from being within a National Park.

Farming in National Parks

- 4 The principal purpose of a National Park is to care for the special qualities of an area's landscape – its natural and cultural heritage of places and people. Some of these special

qualities derive from the way in which the land has been worked for many generations by farmers, crofters and other land managers. This means that farming plays a key part in achieving the statutory aims set out above. That is why in all National Parks great efforts are put into supporting environmentally-sensitive farming practices in their areas, including through grant schemes, practical advice and support on the ground and arguing at a national level for better rural development programmes.

- 5 The aim is to reconcile farming objectives with other local and national interests, so that the special qualities of the National Park are safeguarded and enhanced for future generations. Support is provided to land managers to produce high-quality food from successful farm businesses, whilst also addressing climate change and protecting and restoring nature across a wider area. National Parks do not seek to prevent land use change, but rather to manage and guide it in ways which support National Park aims.

Funding

- 6 The Scottish Government's rural payments system and land management regime are the same inside National Parks as they are outwith them. This includes the **Agri-Environment Climate Scheme**, the principal way in which the Scottish Government and NatureScot fund land management practices which protect and enhance the natural heritage, improve water quality, manage flood risk and mitigate and adapt to climate change. However, some additional funding is available within National Parks for land managers to carry out work which supports the aims of the National Park.



Photo: John Mayhew

- 7 For example, the **Cairngorms 2030** programme is a partnership of over 70 organisations brought together by the National Park Authority (NPA) to deliver 20 long-term projects across the National Park, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. This demonstrates the convening ability of the NPA to pull all relevant public agencies and other organisations together to work jointly for the overall benefit of the National Park.
- 8 One of these projects, **Cairngorms 2030 Future Farming**, is working with six trial farms from across the National Park to identify ways to reduce carbon emissions and biodiversity loss and to enhance habitats whilst maintaining profitable and resilient farming businesses. The six farms are implementing a variety of farming practices to reduce their carbon footprint and increase the biodiversity on their holdings. The project will also run a programme of sharing good practice, communications and knowledge exchange to widen the benefits of the project to other farms. Each of the six trial farms has been allocated £50,000 for training, advice and specific, agreed low-carbon and high-nature measures. A further £117,000 will provide the wider programme of events open to all farmers about low-carbon high-nature farming and support other farms to try similar practices.
- 9 In 2024 the Cairngorms NPA also awarded £370,000 through its **Climate Adaptation Fund** to support projects such as wildfire management, flood prevention, rain-water catchment initiatives and nature-friendly farming. The fund was open to businesses, land managers, farmers, community bodies and charities and was several times over-subscribed.



Photo: Rhindhu Farm, near Tomintoul, Cairngorms National Park
by Alaska Stikova, Cairngorms National Park Authority

Case Study Rhindhu Farm

Rhindhu, Glenlivet, is one of the six trial farms taking part in the Cairngorms 2030 Future Farming initiative. Farmer David Toovey has noticed adverse changes over the years around the farm in terms of wildlife and habitats. He wanted to get involved in the project to help wildlife and their habitats while keeping the farm viable. Rhindhu has been part of national environmental farming schemes since the 1990s, but these schemes weren't always relevant to farming in the Cairngorms, whereas this project is specific to the Cairngorms.

The project has identified many small actions to reduce carbon emissions and improve habitats, including:

- installing bat and barn owl boxes in buildings
- introducing strips of pollen and nectar mixes and wild bird cover
- managing scrub and existing woodlands, restructuring conifer plantations and creating pond habitats for invertebrates, wetland plants and amphibians

David feels that implementing these changes will be straightforward and that none will negatively impact his farming business.

10 The Loch Lomond and The Trossachs NPA provides funding through the **Nature Restoration Fund** to support projects that restore wildlife and habitats and address biodiversity loss and climate change. Farmers and other land managers have already secured support from this fund for projects including:

- habitat and species restoration
- freshwater restoration
- control of invasive non-native species

11 Similar funding schemes are available for National Parks elsewhere in the UK. For example the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme funds projects by land managers in England's National Parks and other protected landscapes to support nature recovery, mitigate the impacts of climate change, improve the quality and character of the landscape and provide opportunities for people to enjoy it.

Advice and support

12 Additional advice and support are available to land managers within all National Parks, with the help provided tailored to the specific circumstances of the National Park and the types of land management involved. For example, land managers within the Cairngorms National Park receive support through access to funding, skills, collaboration and project delivery, in order to enhance nature, tackle climate change and produce high-quality food. **The Farm Conservation Advisor**, funded and employed by the NPA, helps farmers and crofters with:

- advice on access to the **Agri-Environment Climate Scheme**
- farm and croft biodiversity planning
- carbon auditing
- establishing small woodlands and hedging on farms and crofts
- agricultural support and advice
- diversification
- funding for nature friendly farming and climate resilience

13 The Land Use Team in Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park responds to requests from land managers across the National Park to advise on and support projects which support National Park aims as well as thriving farm businesses. They help land managers to apply for agri-environment and nature restoration funding, including by funding background consultants' reports where necessary. The **Future Nature** partnership strategy works with all types of land managers within the National Park, including charities, private businesses, community trusts and public agencies. The type of projects supported through this initiative include peatland restoration, control of invasive non-native species, wetland conservation and opportunities for local communities to benefit from appropriate facilities for visitors.



Photo: Kat Jones

Case Study Glen Finglas Estate

Glen Finglas is a 5,000 hectare estate in The Trossachs which comprises a range of habitats including native woodland, moorland, peatland and wetlands. Since 1996 it has been owned by the Woodland Trust, which has established 1,800 hectares of new woodland whilst retaining a commercially viable farm business, demonstrating how farming and conservation can work together. The farm's cattle help to maintain the characteristic wood pasture on the estate, and reduce fire risk by controlling *Molinia* moor grass. The estate's farm manager is one of several land managers featured in this **video** about the Future Nature project.

14 This kind of advice and support is also provided in all National Parks across England and Wales tailored to each area's unique character. For example, in the UK's most recently created National Park, the **South Downs National Park**, farming comprises more than 75% of the landscape with a mosaic of farm types including small family run farms and large farming estates. In the **Northumberland National Park** there is a five-strong team of Farming and Rural Enterprise advisers. They work closely with land managers to ensure high coverage of agri-environment schemes; in 2020 98% of the farmed land in the National Park was under some form of stewardship scheme. The team have in-depth knowledge and practical experience of farming, living and working in the rural uplands. They support farmers with stewardship agreements, grant applications, project development and access to other agencies. This level of advice and support is only available within the National Park. The NPA also acts as an advocate for farmers and land managers, representing them in dealing with national government and agencies. This is particularly important given the significant changes currently being experienced by the farming industry as we transition from the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to a new agricultural support system.

Marketing

15 National Park status brings international-level recognition of the quality of the area, generating promotional benefits in terms of marketing and branding of local produce such as beef, lamb or venison, to secure a premium income for their producers. National Parks support collaboration through advisory groups, business networks, forums and partnerships and publicise new opportunities for producers in their areas.

16 More than 200 businesses in the Cairngorms use special National Park branding materials, and the NPA supports the **Cairngorms Farmers Market** and the **Creative Cairngorms** artists' and craft workers' association. Loch Lomond and The Trossachs NPA actively promotes several local producers on the **Producers in the Park** page of its website.



Diversification

17 The scale of the visitor economy in National Parks brings opportunities for local communities and businesses, including for farming businesses that wish to diversify and benefit from the visitor economy. This includes, for example, providing self-catering or bed and breakfast accommodation, bike hire or selling farm produce directly to visitors through farm shops and cafés. **Scottish Agritourism** works to support this kind of farm diversification in the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park, and the destination management organisation **Love Loch Lomond** includes farming businesses amongst its members.

Case Study Portnellan Farm

Portnellan is a family farm on the south shore of Loch Lomond which produces organic beef. Over the past decade the farm has diversified extensively into self-catering accommodation, boat mooring rental and outdoor activities, including boat tours, farm tours, kayak hire and paddleboard hire. The farm has developed an Integrated Land Management Plan with Loch Lomond and The Trossachs NPA to support its diversification initiatives whilst maintaining its core farming business.

Visitor management

18 National Park staff play an active role in ensuring that recreation undertaken by visitors is achieved in ways that are compatible with land management interests. They invest in physical facilities such as paths, bike routes, car parks and signage. Most importantly they employ countryside rangers and co-ordinate the work of other ranger services in their areas. Countryside rangers engage directly with visitors to encourage responsible behaviour, so are the key means to minimise any tension between visitors and land managers. Many other areas of Scotland experience visitor management pressures such as irresponsible camping, fires, litter or parking, but have fewer resources to address these issues than are available in National Parks.

19 Loch Lomond and The Trossachs NPA has employed a team of approximately 30 countryside rangers throughout its existence. Cairngorms NPA initially focussed on co-ordinating and supporting the **thirteen existing ranger services** within the National Park, including those run by private estates, non-governmental organisations, local authorities and government agencies. Since the Covid pandemic, it has also directly employed its own team of seasonal rangers to complement the work of existing ranger services, so that there are now nearly 50 full-time equivalent rangers working across the National Park.



Photo: Anagach Woods, Grantown, Cairngorms National Park, APRS

Planning

20 NPAs aspire to ensure high-quality location and design of development, including farm buildings. They seek to achieve this both by issuing general guidance and by working closely with anyone planning a development. Scottish NPAs are no more restrictive than other planning authorities. For example, in 2019–23 the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs NPA approved an average of 94.3% of planning applications and the Cairngorms NPA 94.7%, against a Scottish average of 94.1%.¹

21 Planning rules for agricultural development are identical within and outwith National Parks, with one minor exception. Since National Parks were first established in Scotland there have been Permitted Development Rights (PDRs) for agricultural buildings with a ground area of up to 465m². However in 2021 the Scottish Government increased this threshold to 1,000m² outwith National Parks, National Scenic Areas and some other designated areas. In other words PDRs remain as they always have been in National Parks, but have been partly relaxed elsewhere. The full detailed wording of the current guidance is in the Scottish Government’s **Consolidated Circular on Non-Domestic Permitted Development Rights 2021** (Annex E, page 7).

Accountability

22 Schedule 1 of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 specifies that at least 20% of the members of a NPA must be local residents directly elected by the local community, 40% local Councillors appointed by the local authorities any part of whose area is within the National Park, and 40% national experts appointed by Scottish Ministers for their relevant knowledge or experience.

This arrangement delivers local democratic accountability for the management of a nationally important area, with an in-built majority for local residents regarding decisions made by the NPA. Local residents can stand for direct election to the NPA, and can vote both in these elections and in local elections for Councillors who may be appointed to the NPA.

23 Local people are therefore always in a majority on the Board. Alongside all other local residents, farmers and other land managers can vote in elections for local Councillors and for directly elected NPA Board members, and can stand for election for these posts and thereby seek to influence the policies and approach which apply to the National Park. This has regularly happened across National Parks in Scotland, Wales and England; farmers and other land managers are regularly represented on NPA Boards and also on land use partnerships established within National Parks. For example Northumberland NPA was chaired by farmer John Riddle from 2001–2015, followed immediately by another farmer Glen Sanderson from 2015–2020.

Communication

24 In 2024 the Cairngorms NPA established the Cairngorms Agricultural Advisory Group, whose members represent the farming and crofting community across the Cairngorms National Park along with agencies and organisations involved in agriculture. This includes the Scottish Crofters Federation, NFU Scotland, NatureScot and the Cairngorms Crofting and Farming Community. The group’s focus is on facilitating engagement and information flow, providing advice and guidance on NPA plans and policies, and collaborating on delivery of National Park Partnership Plan objectives.

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/planning-applications-statistics-2022-23-annual-quarterly-october-2022-march-2023/documents/>

Conclusions

This report presents evidence to show that it is widely understood that farming and sustainable land use is critical to achieving the aims of National Parks. NPAs therefore employ dedicated and experienced staff to support and advise farmers and land managers within National Parks, and allocate additional funding to support projects which both contribute to National Park aims and support viable farm businesses. Much of this advice, support and funding is only available to farmers within National Parks. Scottish National Parks are democratically accountable, with farmers and land managers regularly represented on their governance structures.



Photo: Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park



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