

Cairngorms National Park Authority and Scottish Environment LINK workshop: 20 April.

Agenda and background paper.

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|---------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| 10:00 – 10:10 | Welcome & introductions Agenda for the day | |
| 10:10 – 10:45 | Overview of NPPP Discussion on policy context | |
| 10:45 – 11:30 | Workshop | |
| | Room 1: landscape scale restoration | Room 2: species conservation |
| 11:30 – 11:45 | BREAK | |
| 11:45 – 12:30 | Workshop | |
| | Room 1: species conservation | Room 2: landscape scale restoration |
| 12:30 – 13:00 | BREAK | |
| 13:00 – 14:00 | Plenary feedback and discussion | |

National Park Partnership Plan 2027 – 2032

Intro

The National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) is the long-term plan for the Park. It provides the strategic context and the key actions that drives the work of the Park Authority and partner organisations.

Actions, objectives and targets in the Plan directly lead to the Park Authority’s corporate and operational plans. Through close strategic and policy alignment, it informs the activities of a wide range of partners in the Cairngorms.

Timetable

Engagement timetable



National policy context

The Park Plan is a place-based approach for delivering a range of national public policies and plans, in partnership with organisations, government agencies, the private and third sectors, in a way that is appropriate and tailored to the Cairngorms.

An innovative and practical approach in the National Park positions it as a place to trial solutions to some of the most pressing national issues, deliver national strategies and priorities within a regional context, provide transparent reporting and accountability, and work closely with Scottish Government on monitoring outcomes.

The Natural Environment (Scotland) Act requires Scottish Government to set legally binding nature restoration targets for habitats, species and ecosystem functionality. The National Park is home to 25% of the UK’s rare and threatened species, including many cold adapted and montane, and also to the UK’s best opportunities for landscape scale restoration of functioning ecosystems.

The Act strengthens the duty that public bodies must “...have regard to...” the National Park Partnership Plan to “...facilitate the implementation of...”, placing more weight on the NPPP as the framework for public sector alignment and focus. Also, as the statutory plan for the Park, the NPPP becomes the grounds for intervention under section 6ZB, making the deer policies in the NPPP key in setting the incentive and regulatory agenda in the Park.

The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) sets a high-level goal to halt biodiversity loss and be Nature Positive by 2030 and to have restored and regenerated biodiversity by 2045. A priority action in the Delivery Plan 2024-2030 is to strengthen the role of National Parks and ensure they act as exemplars of biodiversity protection and recovery whilst continuing to support local communities.

Other priority actions include expanding and enhancing Nature Networks and ecological connectivity, with the possibility for new NNRs as key building blocks. And ensuring that at least 30% of land and sea is protected and effectively managed to support nature in good health by 2030 (30 by 30). National Parks do not automatically count towards the 30% in their entirety. Areas within them do, either in the form of a 'protected area' (SSSI, Natura sites and NNRs) or a 'Nature30' site.

NPPP 2022 – 2027

The current NPPP contains ambitious targets for woodland, peatland and deer densities stretching to 2045, which are unlikely to substantially change. There may be some modification to actions over the next 5 years, but the long-term commitment and goal will remain.

The Park Plan contains a target for at least 50% of the National Park to be managed principally for ecosystem restoration by 2045. Actions to progress towards this target are supporting existing partnerships in their demonstration and leadership roles, and developing a broader suite of examples and monitoring framework.

The NPPP uses progression along the species recovery curve to set targets and monitor progress in terms of species conservation, primarily through work programmes described in the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan. Capercaillie, beaver and raptors are highlighted.

Cairngorms Nature Action Plan (CNAP)

The CNAP is an iteration of how the overarching objectives in the NPPP will be delivered. It describes the partnerships and projects, and provides the framework for collaboration and oversight through the Cairngorms Nature Steering Group. There has been a gap between the end of the last CNAP and the launch of the next, in order to ensure complete read-across from the NPPP to the CNAP. The two documents are being developed in tandem, with discussion and consultation on the NPPP shaping the structure, objectives and targets in the CNAP.

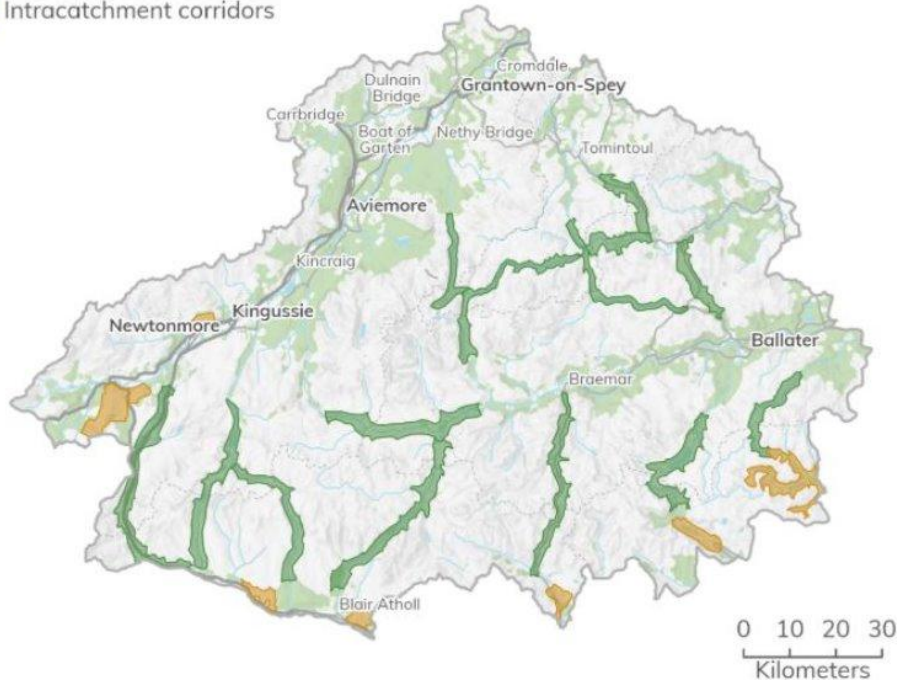
Priorities for the NPPP

A spatial approach to change at speed and scale

To achieve landscape scale restoration and climate change adaptation and mitigation at speed and scale, we need transformational change in the places where it will have the most impact. Identifying the places, how best to use existing mechanisms and identifying any new approaches needed will be central to the next NPPP.

Nature Networks map out the major habitat types at the landscape scale, visually highlighting core areas, corridors, mosaics and gaps. They will be used to identify and direct resource and funding into areas of strategic priority, supporting land-use decision making to maximise the delivery of NPPP and public policy outcomes.

- Intercatchment corridors
- Intracatchment corridors



Almost 50% of the National Park is designated. The management prescriptions for some designated sites are protecting a current state, not delivering for future ecological needs. Native woodland expansion in parts of the Cairngorms has proved challenging because of a perceived conflict with designated open habitats. Whilst the open habitats may be considered nationally and internationally rare, locally they are typically widespread, in good condition and are well connected – unlike woodland. A more mobile, adaptive framework for designated areas would unlock much potential for restoration and climate adaptation in the Park, retaining a commitment to protection whilst allowing for temporal and spatial flexibility as part of natural processes in the landscape.

Nature30 status recognises land that delivers positive, sustained and long-term outcomes for biodiversity. Along with protected areas, Nature30 sites will make up Scotland’s commitment to 30 x 30. There must be a long-term commitment, through legal or similarly well-defined means, and effective monitoring in place. Nature30 is entirely voluntary, a recognition not a regulation. It does not oblige management requirements for landowners.

The NPPP target for 50% of the National Park managed principally for nature restoration by 2045 (50 x 45) was set in 2022. Since that time, almost all of the increase has come from land sale. If we are to reach this ambitious target then we cannot rely solely on land acquisition. There is an appetite

amongst land managers with similar restoration objectives to build a narrative around 50 x 45. This needs to be meaningful and have a value for the landowner, in order to act as a catalyst and inspiration for change.

Species conservation within overall ecological outcomes.

The National Park is home to 25% of the UK's rare and threatened species and also, arguably, to the UK's best opportunities for landscape scale restoration of functioning ecosystems. Allowing natural processes to dominate will result in a change to the composition of habitats and species assemblages. We should be prepared to take some difficult decisions about populations in habitats created and maintained by human activity, where we are advocating change.

Ecosystem restoration is the long-term, sustainable solution, but at the same time there will be specific, targeted action needed get species back on a sustainable footing. Single species interventions will need to be rationalised and justified. The capercaillie emergency plan focusses public funding and effort on expanding and improving Caledonian forest. Fresh water pearl mussel recovery focusses on restoring rivers to more natural states. Both of these outcomes deliver multiple benefits.

Moving at speed and scale, altering habitat states, will require taking risks. In the context of the climate and biodiversity crises we may not have all the evidence to be able to accurately predict outcomes. We may need to adopt a different risk appetite and assess risk in terms of what is likely to happen if we don't do anything.

Many of the Cairngorms rarest and most vulnerable species are montane, cold adapted and/or susceptible to the kind of stochastic interventions which are predicted to increase. Careful consideration will need to be given to the resources applied to species conservation in terms of how much can be done to mitigate and prepare for the impacts of climate change.

For discussion

Do the following themes represent the right areas of focus?

- *Spatially targeting landscape scale ecosystem restoration in Nature Networks and Nature30 or '50 x 45' areas*
- *Directing species conservation where it is underpinned by delivery of future resilience and multiple benefit*

Key questions:

- *How can we use the Nature30, Nature Networks, NNRs and '50 x 45' areas to drive landscape scale change in difficult to reach areas?*
- *Are designations, definitions, incentives and regulations sufficient and efficient bring about and maintain long term restoration?*

- *How is 'healthy biodiversity' quantified and prioritised? Which species do we focus on and why?*
- *How can we demonstrate the multiple benefits conservation delivers for people and nature?*