

# National Park Authority Board Meeting



## Conservation & Land Use Update

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*Paper for information*

### 1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report provides a summary update on progress towards achieving Conservation and Land Use objectives and recent highlights (and lowlights) since the last report to the Board.

### 2. Highlights

- 2.1. The Peatland Project has now moved on from feasibility to the more exciting stage of implementation. Contractors are poised to start restoration of eroding peat bogs at Scotland's Rural College's Hill & Mountain Research Unit at Kirkton & Auchtertyre and at Luss Estates – just as soon as the late snow has departed. Funding has also been secured to continue this project in 2015/2016.

The NPA's Natural Heritage Grant Scheme funded six significant biodiversity and landscape projects in 2014/2015 and levered in approximately £18,000 (25%) of total project costs from applicants and other partners.

The new access road into the RSPB Loch Lomond Reserve, receiving significant financial support from the NPA, is now under construction and progressing well.

### 3. Lowlights

- 3.1. Sustaining progress on large-scale delivery projects while managing staff changes has required responsibilities and workload to be shared amongst the Conservation & Land Use team, with support from the Community Development team specifically on the Callander Landscape Partnership project. Increasing workload arising from the Peatland Project means that the Land Management Advisers may not achieve their year-end target of seven entirely completed Whole Farm/Estate Plans.

The NPA are involved in two cases of alleged illegal tree felling in the Drymen area.

### 4. National Park Partnership Plan outcome

- 4.1. An internationally-renowned landscape where the natural beauty, ecology and the cultural heritage are positively managed and enhanced for future generations.

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### 5. Corporate Plan outcomes:

- 5.1. Conservation is embedded into everything we do.
- 5.2. The National Park is widely recognised as a leading area in the management and enhancement of its habitats and species.
- 5.3. Maintain high quality landscapes that deliver multiple benefits and an economic return.

### 6. Progress

- 6.1. Peatland Project – This project is currently the main delivery mechanism for Wild Park 2020's Mountain Bogs Wild Challenge, using funding via Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) from the Scottish Government's Green Stimulus Fund to restore peatlands as important habitats and carbon stores.

The tenders for the peatland restoration works at Luss Estates and at Scotland's Rural College's Hill & Mountain Research Unit at Kirkton & Auchtertyre in Strathfillan were awarded to a contractor in January and are due to complete by the end of March 2015. However, weather and consequent ground conditions continue to delay commencement of the work. Funding arrangements with SNH are such that the risks associated with any underspend lies with SNH rather than with the NPA or the land managers.

SNH have also now confirmed funding to continue support of the Peatland Project Officer role within the Park during 2015/2016. This will enable continued landowner engagement on peatland restoration and begin progress towards potential SRDP applications. Funding has also been secured to run a good practice peatland restoration event aimed at land managers, agents and policy-makers.

- 6.2. Callander Landscape Partnership – The NPA's involvement in this project is now being led by the Community Development team with continued support from relevant NPA specialists.

Based on the recommendations of the consultants working on this project, project partners are developing a suite of projects under the five themes of: Landscape Restoration; Uncovering Our Heritage; Access; Interpretation; and Skills, Training & Volunteer Involvement. The consultants will compile the developed projects and combine this with their work on the overarching 'Vision' and 'Need' for a potential Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) application. A first full draft of the HLF Landscape

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Partnership funding bid is anticipated in late March, at which point the Partnership Board will review the strength of the potential application and the suitability of submission in May 2015.

### 6.3. Natural Heritage Grant Scheme – Grants this year have included:

- Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs for the 'Views from the Road' project, the third and final year of Natural Heritage Grant Scheme (NHGS) funding for the removal of scrub from beside the A82 to allow views of Loch Lomond;
- Drumardoch Estate for improvements to the designed landscape along the A84 on the north side of Callander, including replacing avenue and parkland trees and restoring 135 metres of drystone dyke;
- Portnellan Farm for restoring hedgerows and excluding stock from riparian woodland important for biodiversity and the landscape;
- Argyll Fisheries Trust for tree planting and riparian fencing to improve the River Goil as habitat for salmon;
- River Forth Fisheries Trusts for invasive non-native species control in the Forth and Teith catchments;
- Leskine Farm to complete the creation of shallow, muddy 'wader scrapes' in support of the Glen Dochart Waders Project.

All NHGS projects are either completed or are underway and due for completion by end of March. The total projected NHGS expenditure for the year is £52k and has levered in an additional £18,000 (25% of total project costs) from applicants and other partners.

### 6.4. Whole Farm/Estate Plans – Increasing workload arising from the Peatland Project means that the target of seven Whole Farm/Estate Plans completed in this year may not be met: completion will be rolled into next year to ensure that the businesses involved are provided with a satisfactory product. The importance of this work – engaging with land managers in a business context about how they can help deliver Park aims – remains and increases as details of the changes to both Pillar 1 (Basic Support payments) and Pillar 2 (Rural Development payments) of the Common Agricultural Policy are released by Scottish Government.

### 6.5. Deer Management – The management of wild deer has important environmental and economic effects within the Park and wider Scotland. The NPA continue to engage with this subject at both the strategic level, through attendance at the national Deer Management Round Table, and the local level, by participation in Deer Management Group meetings within the Park.

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The NPA's involvement and understanding of wild deer issues brings credibility with land managers, opening up opportunities to discuss related issues such as habitat condition, woodland creation and access management, as well as wider National Park policies and objectives.

- 6.6. Renewable Energy Proposals – Hydro schemes continue to make up a significant proportion of the Conservation & Land Use team's planning casework advice. This includes significant work on discharging conditions to protect species, habitats and landscape for schemes previously approved; for example through approval of detailed construction method statements for the Glen Falloch and Keltie Water schemes.

Despite reductions in the feed-in tariff, new hydro applications continue to be received including the Arrochar & Tarbet Community hydro scheme, a re-application for Ballimore and the Bruach scheme on Forestry Commission Scotland land in the Loch Ard Forest.

- 6.7. A82 Crianlarich Bypass – Construction works at the bypass are largely complete and planting for landscaping is progressing to a good standard. Some points of finishing detail for the West Highland Way and underpass are under discussion between the NPA and the contractors to ensure a good village threshold experience for walkers.
- 6.8. A82 Pulpit Rock – The rock and soil slope cut works have been completed and landscape engineering works are well underway. These will create a good stable surface for re-vegetation of the new slope rising above the realigned road, which will lead to the desired landscape fit for the completed work.
- 6.9. A82 Tarbet to Inverarnan Upgrade – Following a community and stakeholders workshop in November, the NPA have made further representations about the importance of getting the best road design for delivering for visitors and tourism and the consequential economic and conservation benefits within the National Park. Many stakeholders are focused only on the relevance of the road as a transport link to locations further north and west so it is considered essential that the NPA continue to emphasise the relevance to the National Park.

Initial discussions have been held with SEPA about scope for work to improve understanding of the morphological condition of north Loch Lomond to provide a baseline from which to assess options for road design. This will depend on the availability of resources. A key consideration for the NPA is to ensure that morphological impacts on the loch shore from the new road alignment do not

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compromise the ecological status of Loch Lomond under the Water Framework Directive.

- 6.10. Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve – The new access road into the RSPB Loch Lomond Reserve is now under construction and is progressing well. The project has significant financial support from the NPA. Its completion is a vital step in unlocking the true potential of the reserve for education and volunteering activities and will greatly simplify the on-going management of the site into the future.

Recent reports from RSPB confirm that work over the last two years to improve the condition of the main grazing areas of the reserve has achieved a marked reduction in rush infestation, improvements in the botanical diversity of the sward and an increase in numbers of wading birds, especially lapwings, all in line with agreed objectives for the site.

- 6.11. Trees and Woodland – The NPA submitted a report to the Procurator Fiscal regarding a case in October 2014 in Drymen where trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order and within the Conservation Area were felled without NPA consent or a felling licence. The landowner has been called to appear at a pleading diet on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

The NPA is currently dealing with a subsequent similar case also close to Drymen which occurred in February 2015.

Communications will be made through the Community Council and community newsletter in an attempt to prevent further such acts.

- 6.12. Ecosystems Services – Discussions are being held with SEPA and Stirling Council on a proposal to develop an ecosystems services project that would investigate scope for achieving and demonstrating natural flood management on the Duchray Water to help moderate the flooding problems in Aberfoyle.

- 6.13. Flood Risk Management Plans – The public consultation on the proposed short-listed actions to manage flooding went live on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, following an initial advisory stage on the baseline characterisation of flood risk that was launched in December. Several of the short-listed actions are located within the National Park and have potential impacts that need to be examined in more detail before any decisions are made to proceed with them. These include:

- Enhancing storage capabilities of several lochs to help store flood water, including Loch Lomond, Loch Earn and Loch Tay;

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- Looking at natural flood management techniques to retain more water in upland areas and decrease rapid run-off;
- More traditional engineered defences at Aberfoyle; and
- Creation of a canal adjacent to the River Leven, to provide additional conveyance capacity.

6.14. River Basin Management Plans – The NPA have assessed and analysed the water quality data that were released for the Park in December. This has highlighted the main issues affecting the ecological status of the water bodies in the Park in relation to the Water Framework Directive. It allows identification of the main topics and locations where effort will be required in the coming years to work with partners to improve the water environment and meet the objectives of the Directive.

6.15. Wild Park 2020 – Work has commenced on the production of a short video about the five Wild Challenges. This will be completed by the end of March 2015. It will form a key tool in an educational resource pack for promoting WP2020 to John Muir Award candidates, schools and other groups. Work is also in hand with partner organisations to roll forward the Trossachs Water Vole and Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels projects in the Park into 2015/2016.

**Author:** Scott Nisbet, Head of Conservation & Land Use  
Alan Bell, Conservation Manager

**Sponsor:** Scott Nisbet, Head of Conservation & Land Use