



Conservation Update

Paper for Information

1. Purpose

1.1 This report provides an update on activity carried out by the National Park Authority (NPA) under the theme of 'Conservation'.

2. Consideration

2.1 Projects

2.1.1 Whole-Farm and Whole-Estate Plans – Work is well underway rolling out this project using the most effective approach identified from the initial pilot phase.

One of the businesses having completed a Whole Farm Plan has already submitted planning proposals to establish a new enterprise that will provide an alternative income stream, supporting agricultural returns and the land management that delivers Park aims. This is a great example of where integrated, holistic and proactive business planning facilitated by the NPA can produce multiple benefits. Our new Trees & Woodlands Officer Simon Franks joins the Land Use Team on 5th March and will assist our two Land Management Advisers with progressing this initiative.

We are also currently tendering for specialist advisers on call-off arrangements to provide any additional support required over the next three years.

2.1.2 Natural Heritage Grant Scheme – Projects being funded in 2013/2014 include:

- Forth Invasives Project: supporting the River Forth Fisheries Trust and volunteers to control invasive plant species and American mink (Forth/Teith catchment) – on-going project.
- Designed Landscapes Project: parkland tree planting at Buchanan Castle Designed Landscape (Drymen) – completed.
- Views from the Road: over 1 kilometre of tree and scrub clearance to improve views from the A82 and the West Loch Lomond Cycle-Way (Luss and Inverbeg), in partnership with the Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs – completed.
- Designed Landscapes and Views from the Road projects: boundary wall restoration and parkland fencing at Leny Designed Landscape (Callander).
- Views from the Train: tree and scrub clearance to improve views from the West Highland Line at Glen Falloch Viaduct (Inverarnan), in partnership with the Friends of the West Highland Line.
- Glen Kinglas Tree Planting Project: supporting the Argyll Fisheries Trust and volunteers to plant native trees along the Kinglas Water (Butterbridge) to improve riparian habitat for salmon conservation.
- Arrochar Litter Project: supporting local businesses and volunteers to remove litter from the shore-line of Loch Long (Arrochar).

2.1.3 Peatland Project – The Peatland Project is now into Phase 2, with ground-truthing surveys having been carried out in the East Loch Lomond zone and further ground-truthing surveys planned for the Glen Dochart zone. The ground-truthing aims to

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verify the results of the Phase 1 desktop study and identify areas where peatland restoration work can be carried out practically and for optimum benefits. We are currently recruiting for a two-year Peatland Project Officer post, with employment costs to be funded via SNH, to lead this project into Phase 3 of bidding for the funding for practical peatland restoration works.

- 2.1.4 Callander Landscape Partnership – The Executive has given approval for us to continue our work with the Forward Planning and Communities Teams and the six community-based organisations in Callander to support a potential Landscape Partnership Project that will deliver some of the aims of the Callander Charrette, as reported in the December 2013 Conservation Update paper.

We have formed an internal Project Team and submitted a Project Enquiry Form to the Heritage Lottery Fund which enables a Case Officer to be appointed to provide advice from the outset. An inaugural meeting of the 'Project Partnership Board' representing the various interested parties has been arranged for mid-March 2014. A tender brief has been drafted to commission a consultant to facilitate agreement on priority projects and to draw together a Stage One Application.

2.2 Casework

- 2.2.1 Renewable Energy Proposals – The very significant increase in workload on run-of-river hydro casework, as reported in the December 2013 Conservation Update paper, was dealt with by a huge effort, including temporary increase in working hours, by the NPA Natural Heritage Team specialists supporting the Development Management Team.

Significant volumes of specialist landscape and ecology work has continued since then on hydro scheme casework, comprising a mix of new cases and a growing emphasis on securing satisfactory discharge of planning conditions for approved schemes.

There have also been two new consultations from neighbouring local authorities regarding windfarms: one application and one pre-application. Both raise landscape considerations for the National Park.

- 2.2.2 A82 Pulpit Rock – Discussions have been held with the construction team over an alternative means for completing the works using a reinforced land-based temporary platform for craneage and piling instead of using barges. This solution would avoid the need for a temporary pier at Tarbet.

- 2.2.3 A82 Tarbet to Inverarnan Upgrade – Liaison continues with the project team, including defining the 'Transport Planning Objectives' and other measures by which the success of the new road design will be judged.

- 2.2.4 Other Planning Casework – The Natural Heritage Team has provided specialist support to the Scenic Routes Project installations and Inveruglas and Lubnaig to take account of potential landscape and ecological sensitivities, including the River Teith Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Advice has also been provided regarding bats for building conversion proposals and ecological impacts on loch shores from bank protection and harbour and pontoon proposals.

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2.3 Partnerships

- 2.3.1 RSPB Loch Lomond – The first five year Management Plan for the new RSPB Loch Lomond Reserve, compiled with significant input from NPA staff, has been approved by the Reserve Management Board.

The Plan includes a 'Vision for the site in 25 years', with objectives and detailed five year work programmes focussed on conservation and people engagement.

2.4 Strategy

- 2.4.1 Wild Park 2020 – Following analysis and incorporation of the responses from the public consultation, the final version of Wild Park 2020 (the National Park Biodiversity Action Plan) has now been produced and is brought for Board approval at this March 2014 meeting.

This is the fruition of a long period of intensive work and discussion with partners to drive forward and deliver a very high standard and highly significant project for the NPA, effectively creating the conservation strategy for the National Park for the years ahead.

- 2.4.2 Local Development Plan – Specialist input from the Natural Heritage Team has continued in helping the Forward Planning Team to finalise the Local Development Plan Main Issues Report.

2.5 Policy

- 2.5.1 Ecosystems Approach – We have made progress on assessing our options to deliver National Park Partnership Plan Priority for Action C1: Asset Management - the aim is to develop an approach that takes into account the value of natural resources in all decision-making by public bodies in the National Park.

We have researched 'ecosystem services' and 'natural capital' and how these concepts might usefully be applied by the NPA in day-to-day decision-making. This is a policy area developing rapidly at national level, and our role in its development and/or application requires further consideration by the NPA and our partners - we will present our initial options appraisal to the Executive early next financial year.

- 2.5.2 Flood Risk Management – Work has continued with Local Authorities and SEPA on the development of Flood Risk Management Plans, as part of our new obligations under the Flood Risk Management Act as a designated Responsible Authority. This includes on-going consultation regarding the development of the Plans that will span the Park and ensuring that issues within the Park are given due consideration. It is envisaged that this will lead to the development of Park-specific guidance for developers on how to consider flood risk when proposing developments within the Park.

- 2.5.3 River Basin Management Planning – Work continues with SEPA to identify issues and deliver improvements to the water environment within the Park, through continued involvement in the River Basin Management Planning (RBMP) process.

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This has included organising training for NPA staff on diffuse pollution, attendance at Diffuse Pollution Management Advisory Group and RBMP National Advisory Group meetings, and collating responses to current consultations.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

Author: Scott Nisbet, Head of Conservation & Land Use

Executive Sponsor: Gordon Watson, Director of Operations