

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11



## Conservation and Land Use Update

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### *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 and Land Use'.

#### 2. Consideration

##### 2.1 Projects

- 2.1.1 Whole-Farm and Whole-Estate Plans – Work is underway on 3 Whole Farm/Estate Plans. New call-off contracts have been set up with consultants to provide specialist advice on agri-environment, forestry, and farm business diversification opportunities. A business planning and diversification day aimed at farms and estates is to be held on June 10 with speakers from Scottish Government, private estates and farming and forestry sectors.
- 2.1.2 Natural Heritage Grant Scheme – Projects in discussion for funding in 2014/2015 include:
- Tunnel of trees –A82 and West Highland Line
  - Hedges at Portnellan
  - Riparian improvements for Salmon on the Goil
  - Invasives on the Forth and Endrick
- 2.1.3 Peatland Project – Phase 2 of ground-truthing the Phase 1 desk-study results was completed and meetings held with landowners to identify suitable locations for practical restoration works. Efforts were not successful in recruiting a Peatland Project Officer post so instead a brief has been produced to tender for an external consultant to deliver Phase 3 of the project which will be to bid for the funding for practical peatland restoration works.
- 2.1.4 Callander Landscape Partnership – A project team for the Heritage Lottery Fund bid has been established with partners and the first meetings held. The project is intended to deliver some of the aims of the Callander Charrette, as reported in the December 2013 Conservation Update paper.
- 2.1.5 Trossachs Water Vole Project – Proposals have been discussed with FCS, the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, SNH and the River Forth Fisheries Trust about the recruitment of a replacement Water Vole Project Officer and further co-ordination of mink trapping to benefit water voles moving outside the reintroduction area.
- 2.1.6 Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels – NPA funding support for the Scottish Wildlife Trust's Red Squirrel Project Officer has been arranged for 2014/2015 and discussions held about taking forward the Red Squirrel Wild Challenge under Wild

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11

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---

Park 2020. A response has been submitted to an SNH consultation with stakeholders about a review of the Scottish Squirrel Strategy.

2.1.7 Visitor Management Projects – landscape and ecological support has been provided to several NPA initiatives including the appraisal of options for further improvements to countryside sites, the Scenic Routes Project and the Drumkinnon Bay pontoon.

2.1.8 Tay Invasive Non-Native Species Project – Surveys of treated sites and preparations for the 2014 season of herbicide treatment are underway.

### 2.2 Casework

2.2.1 Renewable Energy Proposals – Wind-farm proposals have been discussed including further wind-farm possibilities on the Kilpatricks and near Strachur. Several new hydro-scheme proposals are being looked at in addition to a significant volume of work on discharging conditions from schemes previously consented. Achieving satisfactory outcomes for the development of new or expanded hill tracks to facilitate these continues to be a challenging area.

2.2.2 A82 Crianlarich Bypass – Discussions have been held on site on the detailed design for the West Highland Way spur as it approaches the bypass. A path of suitable quality should be achievable and sub-contractors with hill path skills have been engaged.

2.2.3 A82 Pulpit Rock – The contractors have devised an approach to construction that avoids the use of barges on the loch. Piling works and the piers are almost complete and the first girders for the viaduct are due on site shortly.

2.2.4 A82 Tarbet to Inverarnan Upgrade – A series of meetings has been held with the road design contractor's team on water management, landscape, recreation and tourism and the interaction of the road with Tarbet village. The preferred route option for an upgrade based on the existing road corridor was announced at a stakeholder meeting in Arrochar on 29 May.

2.2.5 Other Planning Casework – Advice has been provided on a range of casework including housing sites, chalet and holiday lodge development, bats in buildings and an application for a new 'glamping' site arising from the NPA Whole Farm Plan Project.

2.2.6 Casework Systems – Work is underway on improvements to internal procedures and systems for processing conservation input to casework including Tree Protection Orders and planning applications.

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11

## Conservation and Land Use Update

---

### 2.3 Partnerships

- 2.3.1 RSPB Loch Lomond – NPA funding support has been arranged for the RSPB Community Engagement Officer for 2014/2015. Temporary office accommodation has been installed next to West Wards farm house and detailed discussions are underway about a new access road into the site. Lapwings are nesting on Ring Point and other locations following swiping of rushes over the winter and increased levels of grazing by cattle to improve the structure of the sward.

### 2.4 Policy and Strategy

- 2.4.1 Wild Park 2020 – Following Board approval in March 2014, arrangements for the public launch are progressing. The launch will be held on 15<sup>th</sup> July in Queen Street Station, Glasgow with a reception in the adjacent Millennium Hotel. Communications and campaign work is underway for this event. The first draft has been produced of an engaging summary publication in a magazine format, useful promotional images have been gathered and new website content is being developed.

Elizabeth Clements has joined the team on a short-term contract as Biodiversity Officer (backfilling for Linda Winskill who is on internal secondment). Her immediate priority is to work with the Communications team on the launch.

- 2.4.2 Local Development Plan – Detailed landscape advice has been provided on housing site options.
- 2.4.3 Forestry – Discussions have been held with FCS on the Cowal & Trossachs Forest District Strategic Plan.
- 2.4.4 Ecosystems Approach – Discussions have been held between the Conservation and Rural Development & Planning teams and initial ideas presented to the Executive of how best to begin to develop an approach that takes into account the value of natural resources in all decision-making by public bodies in the National Park (National Park Partnership Plan Priority for Action C1). In the current year we aim to explore with partners the scope for developing a project for delivering natural flood risk management that demonstrates benefits for natural capital and an ecosystems services approach. Participation in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy's Natural Capital Group and at the SRUC/SEPA conference on 'Delivering Multiple Benefits from Our Land: Sustainable Development in Practice' has helped to keep the NPA abreast of the developing thinking in this rapidly growing area of policy and research.
- 2.4.5 Flood Risk Management – Further NPA input has been made to flood risk management plans and discussions with Stirling Council over flood management options for Callander and Aberfoyle, including participation in a Callander Community discussion meeting.

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 11

## Conservation and Land Use Update

---

2.4.6 Scotland Rural Development Programme 2014 – Ongoing liaison with Scottish Government and agency partners has been undertaken to keep the NPA abreast of emerging information about the next SRDP. The objective is to benefit businesses in the Park and delivery of Park priorities through participation in Scottish Government Working Groups on 'Targeting the SRDP' and on 'Partnership Working to Deliver SRDP Priorities'.

### 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