

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 6



## 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, if any) since the last report to the Board.

### 2. Highlights

- 2.1 The successful public launch of Wild Park 2020, the “Grow Your Potential” event for rural businesses and the shortlisting of the Glen Dochart Waders Project for the Nature Of Scotland Award.

### 3. Lowlights

- 3.1 Continuing high workload pressures from advising on natural heritage aspects of renewables developments.

### 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.

### 5. Corporate Plan outcomes:

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

### 6. Progress

- 6.1 Landscape Strategy – Initial work towards producing a landscape strategy has commenced. There are a number of NPA projects currently underway that deliver landscape outputs (eg scenic routes, threshold signage and tunnel of trees). The first step will be to produce an internal landscape programme to embrace these projects and to ensure that the landscape contribution of these projects is fully recognised and optimised.
- 6.2 Whole-Farm and Whole-Estate Plans – As a way of promoting this project and engaging with the land-based sector on business terms, a successful ‘Grow Your Potential’ event was held at Carrochan on 10<sup>th</sup> June. Over 70 attendees heard talks from: Scottish Government on Common Agricultural Policy reform and the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2014-2020; Quality Meat Scotland on the importance of planning for business sustainability; Portnellan Farm on their experience of whole farm planning and how it has encouraged them to diversify and plan for the future; and, on their individual

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areas of expertise, the external consultants that the NPA have on call-off arrangements contributing to whole farm/estate plans. Feedback was very positive and a number of farms and estates have asked the NPA for follow-up advice.

- 6.3 Peatland Project – Contractors have been appointed to take this project to the implementation phase. This is fully funded by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). They will be working with land managers across the Park to develop peatland restoration and wider moorland management plans, including applications for funding to SNH and potentially to SRDP 2014-2020.
- 6.4 Callander Landscape Partnership – Consultants have been appointed to undertake the feasibility study and will be contacting all potential stakeholders to gather all project ideas and define the scope for any potential HLF funding bid. This will in form a decision on whether to proceed with an agreed set of projects as part of a comprehensive funding application.
- 6.5 Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels – A new project, the NPA assisted Scottish Wildlife Trust officer Paul McDonald took up post in August. NPA officers responded to SNH's consultation on a revision to the Scottish Squirrel Strategy. Our response highlighted the need to review the southern frontier of grey squirrel control to take account of recent successes in altering the distribution of red and grey squirrels in parts of the National Park, in line with the aspirations in Wild Park 2020.
- 6.6 Tay Invasive Non-Native Species Project – The spraying season is now at a close and over 50 sites where non-native plants are present in the catchment have been chemically treated or pulled this year. Those sites which have been treated on one or more previous occasions are showing significant improvement, though suppressed re-growth is persistent demonstrating the commitment required to eradicate these species. Some new sites have been identified this year and treated for the first time.
- 6.7 Renewable Energy Proposals – Discharging conditions from hydro schemes previously consented and processing current applications continues to require significant conservation input on landscape and ecology aspects. Most recently, an application submitted to Argyll & Bute Council for a windfarm above Helensburgh near the Park boundary has required significant landscape advice from NPA specialists to assess the implications for the special qualities of the National Park, in addition to work on numerous hydro scheme cases.
- 6.8 A82 Crianlarich Bypass – The earthworks and foundations for the bypass have been substantially completed and the new underpass for the West Highland Way (WHW) spur is in place. This allowed NPA staff to revisit the site and discuss scope for fine-tuning

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the proposed alignment of the footpath as it descends to the underpass. Final details should be confirmed imminently by the project managers and work to complete the realignment of the WHW commenced in the next few weeks. The final road-works cannot commence on site until the WHW has been re-routed off the bypass into the underpass.

- 6.9 A82 Pulpit Rock – Work on the road improvement is progressing well. The piers and piling for the viaduct and installation of the main support girder has all been completed. Construction of the viaduct decking and the earthworks for the soil slope above the new road alignment are well underway. The rock cut to smooth out the corner on the headland will be the next major stage.
- 6.10 A82 Tarbet to Inverarnan Upgrade – Following the announcement in May of the preferred route option for an upgrade based on the existing road corridor, the design consultants have held further meetings with the NPA on landscape and water environment matters. Initial drawings for road layout options are hoped to emerge from the process during September. As anticipated, a number of challenging sections of road will need to be dealt with.
- 6.11 RSPB Loch Lomond – Site visits have been undertaken by the NPA landscape adviser to start planning a landscape appraisal of the reserve. Once complete, the appraisal study will become a tool to ensure that management activities on the reserve take account of its very high landscape quality alongside its nature conservation and visitor engagement objectives.
- 6.12 Forestry – Discussions have been held with FCS on how the NPA as a statutory consultee on Forest Design Plans (for the National Forest Estate) and Long-Term Forest Plans (for private land) can add value to and influence forest design within the Park.
- 6.13 Flood Risk Management – Arrangements have been confirmed with Stirling Council for the NPA's formal role in the partnership that is producing the Forth Flood Risk Management Plan (FRMP). Further discussions have been held with SEPA and the consultants producing the FRMP for the Clyde and Loch Lomond. The Draft Flood Risk Management Plans are on track for going out to public consultation before the end of 2014. NPA input continues to be focussed on three elements:
- Ensuring that we properly understand the process.
  - Ensuring that our participation in it is proportionate and recognised by other flood risk authorities.
  - Ensuring that the National Park and its sensitivities are properly recognised and taken into account in the process.

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- 6.14 Wild Fisheries Review – NPA officers responded to the Wild Fisheries Review currently being undertaken on behalf of the Scottish Government. The NPA response highlighted the opportunities for the new arrangements to take account of the interface between fisheries management and the conservation management of native non-quarry fish species as well as recreation management round loch shores.
- 6.15 Wild Park 2020 – Wild Park 2020, the new biodiversity action plan for the National Park, was publicly launched with great success on 11<sup>th</sup> August in Queen Street Station, Glasgow by Paul Wheelhouse MSP, Minister for Environment & Climate Change, with a reception in the adjacent Millennium Hotel. An engaging new publication “Tales From Our Wild Park” and new website content were produced to accompany the main on-line Wild Park 2020 strategy document. Excellent coverage of the launch was achieved in both conventional and social media.
- 6.16 Nature of Scotland Award – The Glen Dochart Waders Project, a partnership between four farm businesses in Glen Dochart supported by the NPA, has been short-listed in the RSPB Species Champion category of the prestigious Nature of Scotland Award. Positive conservation management has almost doubled the number of breeding wading birds (curlew, lapwing, oystercatcher, redshank and snipe) in the project area within the first three years. Short-listing for this high-profile national award is great recognition of the work of the farmers and the NPA staff involved, and provides an opportunity to raise the profile of successful conservation in the National Park.

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