

# 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 NPA won a commendation for our Supplementary Planning Guidance on Renewables at the Scottish Planning Awards ceremony. This guidance contained significant contributions from the Conservation & Land Use Team.

### 3. Lowlights

3.1. Continuing high workload pressures from advising on natural heritage aspects, especially landscape considerations, of renewables developments continue to impact on other delivery work.

### 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:

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 from the Scottish Government's Green Stimulus Fund to restore peatlands as important habitats and carbon stores. In September, two further Green Stimulus Fund bids, each for £60k, were made for practical peatland restoration at Luss Estates and at SRUC Kirkton in Strathfillan. The

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NPA are currently preparing tenders for the works which need to be complete by March 2015 and will see hags (ie eroded peat banks) re-graded, eroded gullies blocked and areas of bare peat re-seeded. While works are in progress, we will organise site visits for staff and other land managers in the Park to demonstrate the broad benefits of peatland management.

- 6.2. Callander Landscape Partnership – Consultants have taken a feasibility study to the Partnership Board, Chaired by Neil Cameron (landowner) with Vice-Chair Paul Prescott (Callander Countryside) and including other community, landowner and partner representatives. The Partnership Board agreed to continue to develop the suite of projects towards a Stage 1 Heritage Lottery Fund application in May 2015. During November, we have been feeding back to community groups which projects have been selected and why.
- 6.3. Natural Heritage Grant Scheme – Offers are currently being made and this year will include grants for: ‘Views from the Road’, the on-going removal of scrub from beside the A82 to allow views of Loch Lomond; Forth and Argyll fisheries trusts for invasive non-native species control, tree planting and other riparian improvement projects; and Portnellan Farm for restoring hedgerows important for biodiversity and the landscape.
- 6.4. Forth Invasive Non-Native Species project – This project, led by the River Forth Fisheries Trust (RFFT), is a key part of delivering Wild Park 2020’s Invasive Non-Native Species Wild Challenge and has been supported by the NPA for the last three years. RFFT have purchased control equipment (sprayers and stem injectors) and trained teams of volunteers who have been working from the headwaters of the Forth within the National Park downstream to North Berwick to control species like Japanese knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and giant hogweed. The Forth-wide funding package has come to an end so the NPA are working with RFFT and other fisheries trusts in the Park to look at longer term opportunities for partnership working and funding in order to continue and expand this programme.
- 6.5. Renewable Energy Proposals – Landscape advice has been central to the NPA’s decision to object to the Helensburgh Windfarm. Responses have also been made to scoping consultations for other windfarms more distant from the Park. The commencement of construction work at hydro schemes such as Burn of Mar has entailed specialist advice to support the discharging pre-commencement conditions. Landscape and ecological advice has been required for a number of other current hydro scheme proposals.
- 6.6. A82 Crianlarich Bypass – Construction of the West Highland Way realignment has been largely completed, as has much of the landscaping of the bypass earthworks and

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associated deposition areas for excess peat and peaty soil. A further site visit is planned in December to inspect the near-final works.

- 6.7. A82 Pulpit Rock – The decking and parapet for the new viaduct have been substantially progressed. The landscape fit of the viaduct can now be clearly seen and is considered to be very satisfactory. The slope exposed by the soil and rock cut work has proven to need fewer rock bolts than was anticipated. This is a valuable landscape gain as it means a marked reduction in the number of rock bolt-heads and plates that need to be left permanently exposed to allow for engineering inspections.
- 6.8. A82 Tarbet to Inverarnan Upgrade – Discussions with the road design team have focussed on management of flood risk along the road and options for managing the impacts on the loch shore, otter habitat, ancient woodland and the hillside landscape. The design team are developing four detailed options, one of which will be selected for taking forward into the EIA process. A key consideration for the NPA will be to ensure that morphological impacts on the loch shore from the new road alignment do not compromise the ecological status of Loch Lomond under the Water Framework Directive. A further public meeting for the community and other stakeholders was attended by NPA staff in November.
- 6.9. Loch Lomond NNR – The brief for the landscape appraisal for RSPB Loch Lomond has been progressed and the new access road onto the reserve has been granted planning consent. The arrangements between SNH and the NPA for the on-going management of Inchcailloch have been progressed through the finalisation of a lease. The current Management Plan for the island expires in 2015 and work on reviewing it has begun. The production of a report on the current plan as well as the next five year management plan will commence in 2015 for completion and agreement with SNH by the 2015 year-end. Maintenance works on the island toilets and composting system are scheduled for the winter period.
- 6.10. Trees and Woodland – We are dealing with a case in Drymen where trees protected by a TPO and within the Conservation Area have been felled without NPA consent or a felling licence.
- 6.11. Flood Risk Management and River Basin Management Planning – Public consultations are due to commence in December on the draft flood risk management plans. This has required input from the NPA in finalising the various supporting reports. It now seems likely that actions in these plans will include taking forward more detailed studies of potential flood management solutions to fully understand their effectiveness and potential impacts. One option of particular interest is to examine the detailed operation of the Leven Barrage to see if it can be managed differently to reduce flood risks

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downstream in Dumbarton without causing unacceptable impacts upstream in the National Park.

6.12. The second round of River Basin Management Plans for Scotland is also progressing towards public consultation. The draft plans are due out for consultation from November 2014 to March 2015, to allow the final plans to be published by December 2015. The consultation will focus on the delivery options, which look at different paces of delivering improvements in five key areas of focus:

- Diffuse Pollution
- Levels and Flows
- Toxic Substances/Urban Diffuse Pollution
- Physical Condition and Fish Barriers
- Invasive Non-Native Species

Options for delivery at a slower pace may not meet the Water Framework Directive Objectives by the target date of 2027 and may not help to meet the NPPP target for making an improvement to the ecological status of water bodies in the National Park by 2017. Other approaches such as Ecosystems Services pilot projects are being discussed with SEPA to see if progress in the National Park can be made by other means.

6.13. Wild Park 2020 – The profile of Wild Park 2020 was raised amongst other UK National Parks at the National Park Ecologists' conference that was hosted here in September. Internal staff sessions have been held to contribute towards the embedding of conservation into all aspects of the NPA's work. Copies of the "Tales from Our Wild Park" book have been distributed to all NPA staff, key delivery partners, community groups, schools, John Muir Award groups, tourism businesses and media contacts. Plans have been developed for integrating Wild Park themes into John Muir Award work in the Park. Detailed project delivery discussions have been held with partners for projects to improve the coordination of mink control and a 'camera trap' survey for any potential wildcats in the National Park. Habitat Impact monitoring has been undertaken for woodland in the Callander black grouse project area. Discussions have been held with CNPA's "Cairngorms Nature" team to ensure that the combined National Parks contribution to the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy remains coordinated in both delivery and presentation.

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