



Policy Statement

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PARKS

Policy Statement No 02/04

Scotland's National Parks are being established to protect and enhance some of the very best of our nation's natural and cultural heritage. They are special places, cherished by many people for their natural beauty and amenity; the outstanding opportunities they provide for open-air recreation; and the wider contribution they make to the national identity of Scotland.

Developed to meet Scottish needs, our National Parks will also play an important role in sustaining local communities and championing the sustainable development of these areas. To deliver both social and economic objectives alongside the proper protection of their outstanding natural and cultural heritage, National Parks will need strong and effective leadership, the energy, skills and resources of a range of both private and public organisations and the development of trust between national and local interests.

After a long debate about how best to care for these special places, the decision by the Scottish Parliament to establish National Parks is a strong commitment to putting the relationship between the people of Scotland and its outstanding natural heritage at the heart of national life. We therefore enthusiastically welcome the establishment of National Parks in Loch Lomond & the Trossachs and the Cairngorms and stand ready to support the work of the new National Park Authorities in taking forward this challenging agenda.

Introduction

1. Scotland's first National Park will be established in Loch Lomond & the Trossachs in July 2002. The second, in the Cairngorms, is expected to follow in 2003. This policy statement sets out SNH's approach to Scottish National Parks and outlines the work we propose to undertake in order to support the establishment and effective operation of Scotland's first National Parks.

Background

2. SNH has had a close involvement in the preparation of the proposals for National Parks in Scotland. In 1999 we developed the advice which led to the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. In 2001, we were asked to act as the statutory reporter to Scottish Ministers on the National Park proposals for Loch Lomond & the Trossachs and for the Cairngorms. SNH also has wider role in respect of National Parks based on its statutory responsibilities under the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Act 1991. These include specific functions for the notification and management of international and national designations, and the promotion of measures to implement the new legislation on access. We also have a general

advisory function to Scottish Ministers, local authorities and other bodies including the National Park Authorities.

3. Unlike other countries, Scotland's National Parks encompass a wide set of aims, including sustainable social and economic development of the areas' communities. However, National Parks are recognised here and throughout the world as a designation which helps to protect some of a nation's finest natural and cultural heritage. They are also seen as exemplars of management and in the provision of opportunities for people to experience and learn more about the special value of these areas. As such, Scotland's National Parks will be a key means of securing the nation's ambitions for protecting and enhancing in the long-term the natural and cultural heritage of some our most special places, and also for promoting their enjoyment and understanding by the public. SNH therefore has an important part to play in supporting the work of Scotland's National Park Authorities.
4. **This statement sets out SNH's current policy on National Parks. It also outlines a number of actions we propose to undertake to support this policy. These proposed actions are not set in stone, but will be developed further in discussion with the new National Park Authorities and others with an interest in the establishment and effective operation of Scotland's National Parks.**

SNH's Approach to National Parks

It is hard to put your finger on what makes Scotland special. But we are all aware of it and aware of the responsibilities it brings. There is little virgin wilderness out there, in the sense that what is wild is wild because we choose to keep it that way. The land is what we live on, what we live with, something to enjoy and we should sustain and protect it'

Donald Dewar, Secretary of State for Scotland, announcing legislative proposals for National Parks, Balmaha, February 1999

5. The Scottish legislation specifies that National Parks are designated in areas of outstanding national importance for their natural heritage, or for the combination of their natural and cultural heritage. From SNH's perspective, the designation signals a strong national commitment to protecting and enhancing the special qualities of the area as a whole. This will require an approach to National Parks that:
 - sets aspirational targets for the care and enhancement of the natural heritage, which recognise national and local goals and also the linkages between the natural and cultural heritage of the area;
 - promotes a range of outstanding opportunities for people of all backgrounds to experience, enjoy and understand the special qualities of the area;
 - promotes high quality in every aspect of the planning and management of the area;
 - seeks development and the use of land and water resources that is in sympathy with maintaining and enhancing the natural heritage, both now and in the longer term; and that
 - pursues changes in present working practices, to secure effective partnership working with communities and within and between the public and private sector.

Championing Sustainable Development

6. The modern approach to conservation recognises the importance of achieving social and economic development alongside the proper protection of the natural and cultural heritage. In addition to their conservation and enjoyment functions, the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 requires National Parks to seek the sustainable use of its natural resources and also to secure the social and economic well-being of its communities. Delivering each of these aims in ways which are fully compatible with the protection of the outstanding natural and cultural heritage of the area will require an enhanced level of planning and management. The extra resources and more integrated approach of the National Park Authority will be critical to achieving this. It should also provide the opportunity to test new approaches to achieving sustainable development, many of which should be applicable elsewhere in Scotland.

Sustaining Local Communities

7. In developing its work, the Park Authority will need to give special attention to approaches that sustain the local communities in and around the Park area. This implies that development options should be particularly geared to those which can provide sustainable benefits to local people, rather than to meet wider economic aspirations. It also suggests the need for new forms of governance by the Park Authority which actively provide opportunities for local people and other key stakeholders to be involved in the decision making about the future management of the area. The early work undertaken by SNH, the Interim Committee for Loch Lomond & the Trossachs and the Cairngorms Partnership in involving local communities in the development of the proposals for the first two National Parks has already laid the foundations for involving people. But more can still be done to engage local people in the planning and management of their areas.

Partnership Working

8. Many challenges lie ahead for the National Park Authorities. Because of the model of National Parks that we have developed in Scotland to suit our particular circumstances, much will depend on the commitment, skills and resources of others. Public organisations which own and manage land in the Park area or which provide the framework for social and economic development or environmental protection have a particularly important role to play in the collective achievement of Park aims, even if the focus of their remit is on one specific aspect of them. To achieve this joined-up approach in practice, Scottish Ministers will need to prepare clear guidance on partnership working within the Park and on the preparation and implementation of the Park Plan. Government departments and agencies operating within and adjacent to Park areas may also need to look at opportunities for new ways of working within and around Park areas which actively support the new Park Authority.

Local Delivery of National Objectives

9. The new Park Authorities will have a range of powers which will allow them to undertake a number of general activities, some of which are currently undertaken by other government bodies. The Act also allows each Park Authority to perform a range of operations on behalf of others. For SNH, the most important areas of

potential overlap with the Park Authority are likely to be survey and research, grant, casework and reserve management, and we will need to discuss carefully with each Park Authority the arrangements for future working on these issues. It is SNH's view that we should be looking to the establishment of National Parks as an important opportunity to help to deliver national programmes for the natural heritage through local structures. We will therefore take a positive approach to the delegation of these activities, the secondment of staff and the development of more co-ordinated working arrangements with each Park Authority, and we will encourage other Government agencies to do likewise.

Priorities for SNH Work on National Parks

10. Our corporate strategy for the next ten years identifies the establishment and effective operation of Scotland's National Parks as a priority for SNH. It also signals our support for *the establishment of National Parks in those areas of the greatest overall natural quality, and those which draw a consistently high level of attention,....to deliver integration of social and economic development with the proper protection of the natural heritage, both on land and sea*. To help deliver this in practice, SNH will work with the National Park Authorities, Scottish Executive and others to:

- support the successful establishment and operation of National Parks;
- promote the care, enjoyment, understanding and sustainable use of the natural heritage within National Parks; and
- champion the concept of National Parks as part of the family of designations which help to conserve and enhance the Scotland's natural heritage and its enjoyment by the public.

Aim 1: Supporting the successful establishment and operation of National Parks

11. There is much work to be done to ensure the successful establishment and operation of Scotland first National Parks. Expectations are high and quite reasonably so. The new National Park Authorities will need to deliver tangible benefits on the ground quickly. SNH can facilitate this by working with SE to ensure that the interim arrangements lead to a smooth transition to National Park status. We can also help to identify and provide expertise and other resources for taking forward a number of projects and initiatives in conjunction with the new Park Authorities. SNH – like other Government agencies operating in these areas – will also need to develop good working relationships with the Park Authorities. In dialogue with them, we will also actively look at the options for delegating functions to them such as management of national nature reserves, for developing more co-ordinated ways of working with them, and for secondment opportunities.

Actions

- supporting the work of the Scottish Executive, the new Park Authority in Loch Lomond & the Trossachs and the interim arrangements for the Cairngorms to facilitate the transition to National Park status;
- developing effective agreements and partnership arrangements with the new Park Authorities to clarify shared priorities, and the respective roles and responsibilities of each organisation;

- considering the options for delegating SNH functions to Park Authorities, for the secondment of staff, and for developing more co-ordinated ways of working with them;
- seeking the highest standards for the management of sites in Parks which are owned and managed by SNH;
- working with the Park Authorities and others in developing better understanding of and practical approaches to integrating the management of natural and cultural heritage interests;
- contributing to research, pilot and demonstration projects which further conservation, enjoyment, understanding, and sustainable use of the natural heritage within the National Parks; and
- contributing to the development of a range of baseline measures for assessing the achievement of Park aims

Aim 2: Promoting the care, enjoyment, understanding and sustainable use of natural heritage interests of National Parks

12. Scotland's first two National Parks contain some of the country's most outstanding natural heritage, as signalled by the number of national and international designations they contain. Both are also important national resources for open-air recreation. SNH therefore has a keen interest in the care, enjoyment, understanding and sustainable use of the natural heritage of the Park areas and will actively work in partnership with the Park Authority to promote these issues in the preparation and implementation of the Park Plan. We will also contribute to the guidance produced by the Scottish Executive on aspects of Park management and deliver our national responsibilities in relation to Natura 2000 sites, National Nature Reserves, SSSIs and National Scenic Areas.

Actions

- advising on the development of Scottish Executive approach to National Parks, including guidance produced on the Park Plan and other aspects of Park management;
- developing the aims and objectives identified for the care, enjoyment, understanding and sustainable use of the natural heritage as part of the *Natural Heritage Futures* project as a basis for our advice on the development and implementation of the National Park Plan;
- maintaining oversight and support for Natura 2000, and other international and national designations;
- undertaking targeted research and monitoring of natural heritage and recreational interests to inform Park planning and management;
- contributing to the development of policies, technical advice and incentive schemes that promote the highest standards in the quality of development and the management of land and water resources;
- contributing to the development of a sustainable approach to recreation, visitor management and tourism; and
- supporting the development of complementary approaches to the planning and management of areas adjacent to National Parks.

Aim 3: Championing the concept of National Parks as part of the family of designations which help to conserve and enhance Scotland's natural heritage

13. Scotland's National Parks will become a special part of the Scotland's existing system of protected areas, for which SNH has an overall advisory function. They will also join a much larger family of protected areas both in the UK and internationally. SNH has an important role to play in developing better understanding of this national system, and also in making sure that Scotland's National Parks are seen as exemplars of best practice in global terms. This requires us to act generally to provide support for and oversight of the operation of Scotland's National Parks, as well as to contribute to the wider debate about National Parks in Scotland.
14. For the moment, our priority and focus is on the establishment and operation of Scotland's first two National Parks. Experience gained from this will provide important lessons if proposals for other areas come forward in future. SNH's strong view is that such proposals should emerge from a broad consensus involving local community stakeholders as well as from national interests about the management needs of an area and its outstanding natural heritage. SNH has no current plans to initiate such discussions but will continue to foster local debates where National Park status has been raised by others. SNH recognises that the evolution of other Parks may involve different models to those employed in Loch Lomond & the Trossachs or the Cairngorms, for example embracing sea as well as land, or resting in a single local authority area.

Actions:

- promoting National Parks as a special part of Scotland's family of protected areas;
- providing information and advice on National Parks to the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Executive and other relevant interests in Scotland, the UK and internationally;
- encouraging links between National Parks and other Government agencies to take forward common research, training and policy development tasks;
- fostering links between National Parks and other international and national designations in Scotland;
- examining how the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 could be applied to other areas of Scotland, including marine areas; and
- developing and promoting the role of other national designations and/or special initiatives in managing those special natural heritage areas for which National Park status is not appropriate.

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