

SCOTTISH COUNCIL
FOR NATIONAL PARKS
IUCN
NEWSLETTER
SUMMER 2004

A Good AGM 7 May 2004

The AGM held in the Baptists chapel, Stirling was a successful occasion. The turnout was modest but at least this year we were quorate and contributions from the floor were positive, supportive and useful. We still need three additional Executive members but we are very pleased that Kate Walsham has agreed to take on the role of Hon. Secretary and been confirmed in the job by the members and that Duncan Campbell has agreed to take on the job of Vice-Chairman. Similarly, John Rodger, co-opted last year has been voted on by the membership and has already made his presence felt by working on draft responses to a number of government consultation documents.

We had two excellent presentations, one from Bill Dalrymple, Chief Executive of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park and the other from Bill Wright from the Cairngorms Campaign who gave views from the inside and the outside respectively on progress on the two Parks. The presentations were very well received and were followed by a constructive question and answer session.

We are considering having next year's AGM on a Saturday in the hope of enabling more people who currently work, to attend. Please respond to our questionnaire enclosed with the newsletter .

Facelift.

We have decided that the time has come to give SCNP a facelift. Our note paper, newsletters, leaflets etc., done over the years are all beginning to look a bit tired and we have asked a firm of graphic designers to work with us to bring things up to date. We have no wish to join the 'all presentation and no content brigade' but we do wish to produce material where the content and message is aided by high quality design and is therefore more memorable.

Yours

Robert Maund - Chairman

A Strategy for Future National Parks.

Our efforts to persuade, influential bodies of the need for a strategy for future National Parks in Scotland, continues. The June issue of Holyrood Magazine which goes to all MSPs and Scottish MPs as well as civil servants and other parties concerned with politics in Scotland, had a leading article written by Sam Galbraith calling for more National Parks. We had a strap line (technical term used by those in the publishing industry) on the same page and a full page briefing on page 8 arguing the case for a strategy. This has already caused one MSP supportive of National Parks to write to us seeking further information.

Meeting the Minister.

On 10 August, we are meeting the Minister, Mr Allan Wilson and we have asked to discuss four matters:

- 1. The need for a strategy for future National Parks in Scotland;*
- 2. The future of National Scenic Areas in relation to a NP Strategy;*
- 3. Ministers approach to marine/coastal National Parks;*
and last but not least,
- 4. The possibility of some core funding for SCNP as happens with CNP south of the border.*

We'll keep you posted on how we get on - don't expect miracles but it is a start.

Cairngorms National Park.

As you know, we wish to establish regular meetings with the Cairngorms National Park Authority in the same way that we enjoy with LL and T NPA. Again progress is being made and Andrew Thin, Chairman of the NPA is to meet with us in the near future to discuss issues of common interest. We are hopeful that with the Chief Executive, Jane Hope now in post, this will lead to a constructive dialogue where we can be of assistance in sustaining the high ideals on which all National Parks are founded.

One of the testing issues which is likely to come before the NPA in the not too distant future concerns the conditions imposed on the management of visitors using the funicular railway. The financial position has suffered because of lack of snow etc., and the operating company are now thinking of ways of generating more income. These seem likely to

include pressure to ease or drop the conditions restricting visitors from accessing the plateau with its fragile ecosystems. This potential clash between economic forces and the conservation needs of the area could be the first real test of whether the Sandford principle which gives priority to conservation when there are irreconcilable conflicts, is going to be applied in National Parks in Scotland.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NP.

The big issue which has been exercising everyone's minds of late has been the introduction of a commercial float plane service on Loch Lomond which started on 18 May this year. In our view this is not compatible with the National Park.

There seem to be two issues to be resolved, namely, whether planning permission is required and secondly, what should be the policy context for considering such proposals.

We fully understand the difficulties for the NPA created by the approach adopted by the CAA and the lack of clarity over whether planning permission is required. Common sense, however, would suggest that planning permission is required and as the service has now commenced, it seems imperative to establish the position by testing it through the normal procedure of requesting a planning application and responding by taking enforcement action if no application is forthcoming. In this way, the situation will be brought to a head and the matter resolved through the planning legislation and the courts.

As far as the policy context is concerned, the Council sees no inhibition to the NPA considering the issue of float plane services on the loch and deliberating on whether they are compatible with the aims of the National Park and the conservation of one of Scotland's most important environmental resources. We can think of no National Park anywhere in the world where such a proposal would be deemed acceptable unless float planes were the only reasonable means of access for local people and businesses. Strategic planning has traditionally been the vehicle for establishing the policy framework against which sometimes unexpected schemes are judged. It cannot in our view be criticised on the grounds that it is pre-empting a decision on a possible future planning application.

The danger in the present situation is that if the NPA does not address the problem positively and waits until it can secure new bye-laws, there is a grave risk that the service will become firmly established and will be difficult to get rid of. The adoption of new bye-laws will not of themselves control the situation unless they prevent the running of commercial float plane services from the loch. To create such a bye-law would clearly require the policy to have been addressed. If any bye-law merely gave the NPA the power to regulate commercial float plane services, it would presume that there are circumstances on Loch Lomond where it could be acceptable. That is a position we could not support. We have asked the NPA to address this important issue as a matter of urgency so that the pass is not sold. To date they have resolved to make a new bye law to regulate the activity but this is unlikely to become active until some time next year.

We are not aware of any precedent for a proposal to operate a commercial float plane service in a British National Park. This case is likely to be given national publicity and we consider that it is very important for the first Scottish National Park Authority to be seen to be decisive in its commitment to the conservation ethic.

SCNP Executive

Since the Spring 2004 Newsletter, the Executive has met on two occasions, 12 May, 16 June and a further meeting is scheduled for 21 July.

We have sent formal responses to three more consultations, all of which will be available on our web site as follows:

Strategic Framework for Scotland's Marine Environment;
CAP Reform: cross compliance;
Review of Non-native Species Policy

Members and Friends.

Please try to give some thought to whether you have friends and neighbours who might be interested in joining SCNP. The future of Scotland's wild places is so important that the question is not what you get out of the organisation by joining, but what you can put into it.

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