

**SCOTTISH COUNCIL FOR  
NATIONAL PARKS  
IUCN  
NEWSLETTER  
WINTER 2004-2005**

**A Happy New Year to all our readers!**

The date announced in our last Newsletter for the AGM is now confirmed. Please make a note in your diaries - it will be on us in no time!

**AGM: Saturday 16 April 2005.  
10.30am at  
Stirling Baptist Church**

The leaflet we produced to encourage more Members and Friends to join us is bringing in a trickle of new or returning people including an MSP, Robin Harper. Robin has been a strong supporter of National Parks in Scotland and was active in the stages when the Designation Order for the Cairngorms with all its flaws, was going through the Parliamentary process. He didn't win the argument of course, but at least he stood up for the rational case rather than the political fix on the boundary and planning powers issues.

We sent the leaflet with a covering letter to every MSP (129 of them) and as of mid January, we have had a small number of responses with one, Robin Harper, joining us. Now the festive season is over, let us hope that more will respond.

As you will probably be aware, arising from a reshuffle, we have a new Minister responsible for National Parks, namely Lewis Macdonald. We have made contact and he has kindly agreed to maintain the commitment of his predecessor Allan Wilson, to meet us on an annual basis. A provisional date has been set in August. We also invited Mr Macdonald to address our AGM but he declined, again maintaining the approach of his predecessor! There does seem to be reluctance to come out into the open and explain clearly what the Executive's approach to future National Parks is going to be. Can't think why. Perhaps they don't know!

Yours

**Robert Maund - Chairman**

**The Need for a Strategy - more joined up thinking.**

There have been a number of occurrences in recent months which illustrate the need for a more integrated approach to environmental matters if we are to have a sustainable future. Different departments of government both here in Scotland and in Westminster, are doing things geared towards a sustainable future. The danger is that because they seem to be working in isolation from their colleagues in other departments, the good done by one is cancelled out by the harm done by another.

Take renewable energy and wind energy in particular. The Scottish Executive has very actively promoted the generation of renewable energy from wind farms and has set up the arrangements for consideration of applications such that only the more minor applications are dealt with through the normal planning procedures whereas all the larger applications are submitted to the Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department (ETLLD). This is presumably because they don't trust local planning authorities to handle something as important as a big windfarm! The LPA is reduced to the status of a consultee.

However, because there is no meaningful locational strategy for wind farms, it is left very much to the market to decide where windfarm applications will be pursued. This often results in applications, the locations of which are decided more on the basis of land ownership than environmental and landscape considerations. Similarly, the department handling the applications (ETLLD) is not well versed in Planning or consultation procedures and there are examples where consultations have gone to the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland whose raison d'être is design, even though consent had already been granted!

We are now faced with an application on the isle of Lewis for 234 wind turbines on an important wildlife site which is also a blanket bog subject to a whole host of environmental designations with the express purpose of protecting the area from damaging development. There isn't room here to list all the impacts that development on this scale will have on blanket peat bog let alone the visual impact, but it will be necessary to bring in heavy construction equipment to build deep foundations and erect the turbines, each turbine will require road access for construction and maintenance etc.,etc.

These proposals are justified by developers on the grounds of sustainability, benefit to the economy, jobs and so on. No one seems to be measuring the impact on wildlife, eco systems, green tourism (which creates real sustainable jobs locally) and examining whether we could achieve just as much, if not more, renewable energy if we had a proper locational strategy and examined other forms of renewable energy with the same vigour that the wind turbine people are doing. With a proper strategy, you wouldn't be put in the position of choosing between often exaggerated benefits to the local economy and the destruction of irreplaceable environmental assets. If you ask the wrong question, you usually get a misleading answer.

It is not just government and local government departments that need to think holistically. Take the BBC. The BBC has an enviable track record of producing wonderful nature programmes and has done a great deal to educate us all in the importance of wildlife and biodiversity to the future of the planet, ourselves included.

But then, a programme producer and presenter have the bright idea of testing whether Jeremy Clarkson can drive an all terrain vehicle up a Scottish mountain where there are no tracks. The damage he did to virgin land will, according to the President of the Scottish Mountaineering Council, take hundreds of years to regenerate.

A BBC spokeswoman is quoted in the Guardian as saying, "We took proper precautions, it was filmed under a controlled environment and permission was sought....it is no way telling people to go off and tear up the countryside". What meaningless nonsense is this? Already we have motor bikers exercising 'rights' to tear up countryside and there is every reason to fear that some irresponsible owners of 4x4 vehicles, will take Jeremy Clarkson's example to heart.

Some years ago, a hotel chain with a major outlet in the Lake District National Park, left a marketing questionnaire in each bedroom. It sought to find out what additional activities visitors would like to participate in. Suggestions included war games, powered hang-gliding, - you can imagine the rest. How about racing 4x4 vehicles up virgin mountains? - now there's a bright idea! It

would bring jobs, benefit the economy.....

So where's the BBC in all this? Surely as a responsible body, it should have a corporate policy that guides its various channels, producers, directors and presenters so that they do not take part in destructive antics of this kind and curbs those of its employees who haven't yet grown up.

Where did this all occur? Not in a National Park certainly - but apparently in a National Scenic Area (NSA) whose future is inextricably linked with future National Parks. Time the Scottish Executive got its thinking cap on and decided on a Strategy for Future National Parks in Scotland and how we are to handle NSAs in the future.

### **SCNP Executive**

Since our last Newsletter the Executive has met on 28 October, 24 November and 12 January and further meetings are set for 16 February and 16 March.

At our February meeting, we are to be joined by Drennan Watson, the newly appointed Director of the Cairngorms Campaign. We look forward to hearing his views on the future of the Campaign and exploring how we can work together to the benefit of the National Park. We are also looking forward to welcoming Bill Wright, the former Director of the Cairngorms Campaign who has taken on the role of Director of Rural Scotland (formerly APRS).

Responses have been sent to consultation documents namely:

*Draft Scottish Planning Policy on Opencast Coal SPP 16; and  
CNPA: Interim Planning Policy 4: Mineral Workings.*

Both documents were in our view sound with much to commend and we responded accordingly. The responses will appear on our web site shortly.

**Please sign up your friends as members - we do need more of you.**

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