



Scottish Council for National Parks

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Shauna Marsh,
Administrator,
Facilities Development,
sportscotland,
Caledonia House,
South Gyle,
Edinburgh EH12 9DQ.

22 August 2005

Dear Ms Marsh

sportscotland policy statement "Out There".
Response from the Scottish Council for National Parks
August 2005

We apologise for our late response to the consultation, but hope it may still be taken into consideration.

The Scottish Council for National Parks welcomes the sportscotland draft policy statement on countryside sports, "Out There" and has considerable sympathy for many of the views expressed. We would however comment as follows:

Exercising access rights, Para 3.3.1

With regard to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, you state correctly that you are exercising access rights responsibly if you:

- ***do not interfere unreasonably with the rights of other people;*** and
- ***act lawfully and reasonably and take proper account of the interests of others and of the features of the land.***

We have italicized in these statements important aspects of responsible access which are often jeopardised at present in our two existing Scottish national parks, by sports which are inevitably noisy, particularly on water, and by sports which involve damage to the surface of the land, whether by motorised vehicles, mountain bikes or large numbers of walkers walking repeatedly over fragile terrain. We feel that insufficient consideration is given in this paper to the need to train practitioners of sports in consideration for the enjoyment of others, and, where necessary, in self-denying ordinances where their enjoyment threatens that of others.

National parks Para 4.1

With regard to national parks, you state that the third aim of national parks in Scotland is "of most relevance to countryside sports". While this may be true, it is necessary to take this aim in its context, and the arguments in the rest of Section 4 appear to proceed as if the balance to be achieved with the other 3 aims in accordance with the legislation as currently framed may be set aside or reinterpreted in favour of sports development.

National Parks Para 4.2

With reference to the statement that "sportscotland considers that the promotion of enjoyment in Scotland's national parks should be about its proactive and positive management, provision, facilitation and development", and while agreeing that "promotion of enjoyment is about more than just the management or containment of recreation", we would



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observe that for many, active management of for example “the wilderness experience” would be precisely the opposite of what practitioners require, while on the other hand active management is required to ensure an equal balance of interests between those who enjoy the countryside for its peace and tranquillity, and those for whom intrusive movement and accompanying noise is intrinsic to their sport.

National Parks Para 4.3: Designation of the area as a national park

Arguments in favour of the need for National Park status for the two presently designated Scottish National Parks centred on the fact that the high quality of the scenery had generated tourism and recreation pressures which urgently required management to avoid damaging the resource. We favour the development of a set of criteria by which areas can be evaluated for possible Park designation. This has been made more complex by the Scottish Executive’s recent announcement of an intention to set up a new coastal or marine park. Comments in the sportscotland paper therefore which attempt to define narrowly what type of area might be designated may well be premature.

National Parks Para 4.4: Conservation in national parks

The paper shows no recognition that the UK government is constrained by various European directives which point to the need for conservation in certain directions. These do not on the whole allow for a “pick and mix” attitude to conservation, particularly in areas carrying international designations.

National Parks 4.5.2: Restriction of recreation

While supporting the statement that “ sportscotland considers it important that a fair and balanced approach is taking to promoting recreation in national parks” and that “there are significant opportunities to enjoy qualities such as tranquillity, naturalness and a slow pace of life throughout Scotland’s countryside”, it should be noted that these do not exist over wide areas of the western Central Belt, and we are unhappy at the implication that non-watersport enthusiasts can be readily accommodated elsewhere.

Countryside Sports Management 5.3.4: Wild Land

We agree with much of your comments about wild land. Much of it will fall within areas which we would hope to see designated as future national parks, in the hope that, by careful forward planning, many of the problems currently affecting the two existing Scottish national parks can be foreseen and either avoided, or appropriate policies and structures put in place to prevent degradation of the special qualities of the area. These would certainly include the “precautionary principle” you recognise at 5.3.2.

Countryside Sports Management: 5.4: Noise

While noting the paper’s recognition that noise is an inevitable by-product of certain types of countryside sports, and that steps can be taken to reduce these (a stated intention to publicise these amongst sports practitioners would be welcome), it should also be recognized that noise in the open countryside can be a source of considerable mental stress to those who go into the countryside to obtain relief from the noise with which they are surrounded in towns, and cannot be so lightly dismissed as a factor.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Maund