

Still ‘Unfinished Business’ Five Years On

“*More National Parks would benefit the entire country.*”

The Herald editorial, December 2015.

Five years ago, in April 2013, SCNP and APRS launched our landmark report ‘Unfinished Business’. This called on the Scottish Government to prepare a strategy for designating more National Parks in Scotland, and proposed seven areas worthy of this accolade. Copies of ‘Unfinished Business’ are available on request, or it can be read on our website. Since then we have campaigned vigorously for more National Parks, and community and political support has grown substantially, but five years on Scotland still has only two National Parks, so this is Still ‘Unfinished Business’.



Sir Alex Fergusson, President – Scottish Campaign for National Parks speaking at SCNP Scottish Parliament Reception, January 2017.
© Scots Magazine

Why Should Scotland Have More National Parks?

Scotland’s landscapes rank amongst the best in the world in their richness, quality and diversity. We have wild mountains, pristine rivers and lochs, ancient forests and stunning coastline and islands, all rich in wildlife and history and internationally renowned for their beauty. Our landscapes enhance our quality of life, well-being and physical and mental health. They give us inspiration, refreshment and enjoyment. They provide great opportunities for outdoor recreation, including walking, cycling, canoeing and mountaineering. They are one of the main reasons why people visit Scotland, so they support important economic benefits through tourism, our largest industry.

“*Scotland has some of the most stunning scenery in the world, so it is only right that we should protect, promote and enhance our natural assets as much as possible. The call to create up to seven more National Parks in Scotland is one we should all get behind.*”

Press and Journal editorial, April 2013.

With landscapes of such quality you might expect Scotland to have several National Parks – the principal mechanism used across the world to safeguard and manage fine landscapes according to international best practice. However, although the world has over 3,500 National Parks (including for example 60 in Canada, 29 in Norway and 14 in New Zealand), Scotland has only two, both quite recent. Scots-born John Muir is regarded worldwide as the “Father of National Parks”, which is why we presented our case at a fringe meeting at the Perth conference marking the centenary of his death in 2014.

Parliamentary Petition

In 2015 we submitted a formal Petition to the Scottish Parliament calling for more National Parks. We were invited to present oral evidence to the Public Petitions Committee at Holyrood, where MSPs gave us a positive reception and asked several relevant questions. Our Petition received over 1,100 signatures and was supported by the John Muir Trust, Mountaineering Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Ramblers Scotland, the Scottish Wild Land Group, the Scottish Wildlife Trust and Woodland Trust Scotland. However, after debate the Committee closed our Petition without further action, possibly because the 2016 election campaign was fast approaching.

Topic Reports

During 2015–2016 we researched and published four detailed reports on the topics covered in 'Unfinished Business' which had raised the most interest:

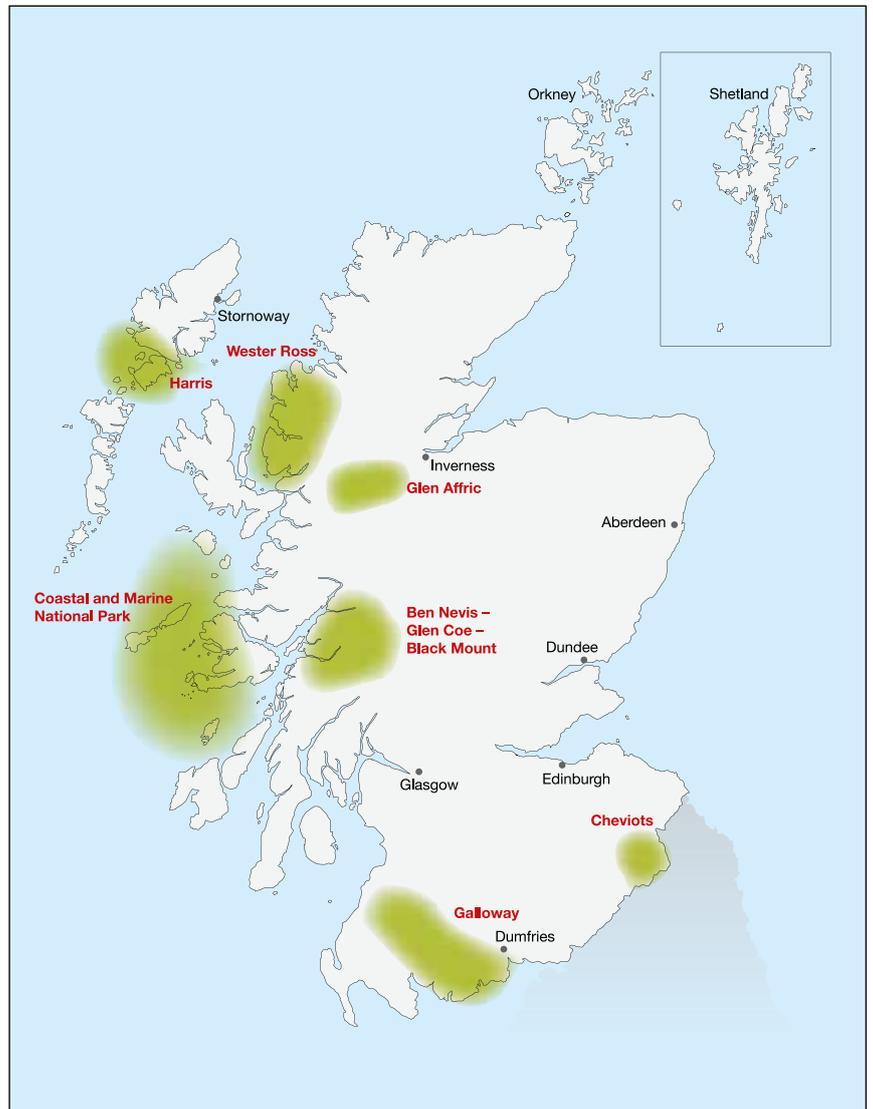
- Socio-Economic Benefits
- Possible Governance Models
- Tourism benefits
- Volunteering opportunities.

The Socio-Economic and Tourism reports describe the wide range of benefits which National Parks bring to the areas they cover. The Governance report sets out why creating more National Parks need not be unduly complicated or expensive, as National Parks in remote less populated areas of Scotland such as Glen Affric in the Highlands or the northern Cheviots in the Borders would have smaller budgets, staffing and governance structures than our two relatively large and complex existing National Parks. Copies of all the topic reports are available on request or can be read on our website.

We are continuing to develop our thinking on a wide range of issues related to the management of National Parks, including:

- Extending the positive influence of National Park Authorities beyond proposals which require planning permission to other forms of land management including forestry and agriculture
- Potential for affordable housing provision; relative effect of National Park designation and other factors upon the rural housing market
- Benefits provided by Friends of National Parks organisations
- Governance, finance, budgets and funding.

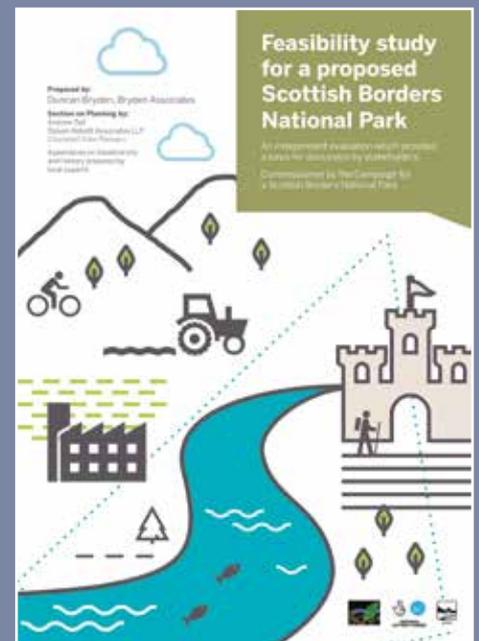
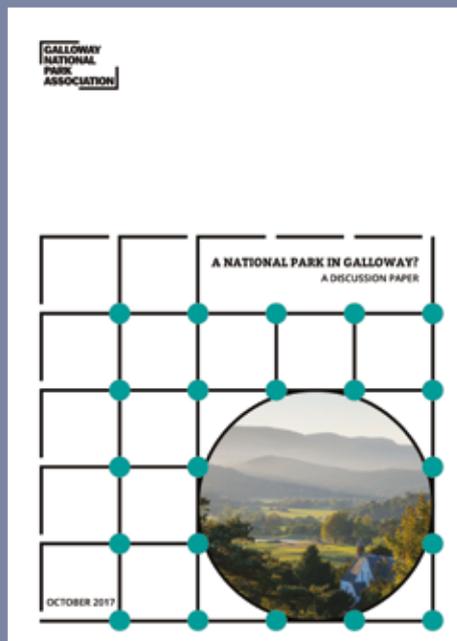
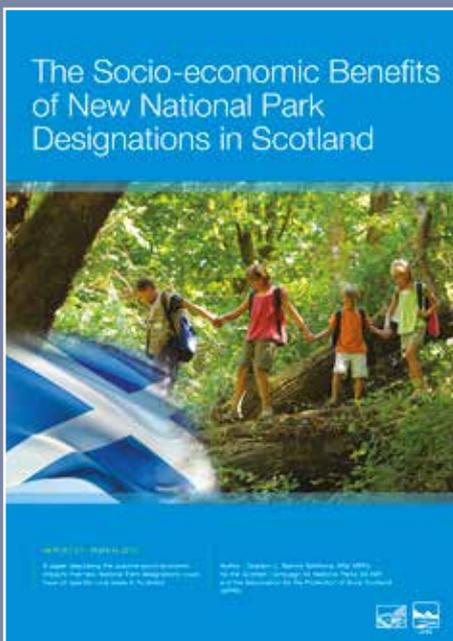
We may publish further reports on some of these subjects in the future.



National Parks recommended by SCNP and APRS 2013

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* For layout purposes the Shetland Islands are not shown in the correct geographical position.



Political Support

During the run-up to the Scottish Parliament elections in May 2016 we put our case to all the political parties. The successful result was that the Conservative, Green, Labour and Liberal Democrat manifestos for those elections all supported more National Parks, meaning that a majority of MSPs (65 out of 128) now represent parties which support our case.

“Given that Scotland, with all its scenic beauty and wide open wilderness, has only two of the UK’s 15 National Parks, an addition to that number is surely appropriate.”

Scotland on Sunday editorial, November 2016.

In 2017 we once more took our case directly to the Scottish Parliament, with a three-day exhibition in the hall through which MSPs pass to reach the debating chamber, and an evening Reception attended by over 100 people including about a dozen MSPs, addressed by the Director of Europarc, the European network of protected areas. A supportive Parliamentary Motion led to a Members’ Debate in the main chamber at Holyrood, where Conservative, Green and Labour MSPs all spoke passionately in favour of more National Parks. We have held cordial meetings with every one of the Environment Ministers appointed by the Scottish Government in the last five years, seeking to persuade them of the benefits which designating more National Parks would bring to Scotland.

Local Campaigns

The most significant development in the last five years has been the emergence of lively local campaigns for National Parks in both the Borders and Galloway, with enthusiastic policy, technical and financial support from SCNP and APRS. The Campaign for a Scottish Borders National Park published a major independent ‘Feasibility study for a proposed Scottish Borders National Park’ in September 2017 and is currently discussing this with all relevant stakeholders, particularly Scottish Borders Council. The study was funded by the Big Lottery Fund through its Investing In Ideas programme.

The Galloway National Park Association (GNPA) was formed in 2016 and has secured the support of Dumfries and Galloway Council (DGC) and of the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Partnership Board. In 2016 DGC commissioned the report ‘A Galloway National Park...?’ from the Southern Uplands Partnership, and in 2017 GNPA published its own discussion paper ‘A National Park in Galloway?’, which it is now discussing with all relevant stakeholders.

“If Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and the Cairngorms are the mother and father of our National Parks, as I like to think of them, then I would suggest that it’s high time they started to have a family.”

Sir Alex Fergusson, SCNP President, January 2017.

Then in 2017, much to our surprise and delight, Argyll and Bute Council announced that it was exploring the potential to create a coastal/marine Argyll and Islands National Park through the ‘Main Issues Report’ for its new Local Development Plan. This initiative effectively revived the proposals for Scotland’s first Coastal and Marine National Park developed by the Scottish Executive in 2006-2007. SCNP and APRS made submissions in support of this proposal, as did several other national organisations and local members.

We have also kept in touch with local people and organisations interested in the potential of National Parks in the other four areas identified in ‘Unfinished Business’: Ben Nevis/Glen Coe/Black Mount; Glen Affric; Harris; and Wester Ross. We are currently planning the most effective ways in which we can step up our activities in these areas.

image 01: Scottish Borders © Frank Wielbo

image 02: Galloway © John Thomson

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Communications

We have benefited greatly from the enthusiastic support of the Scots Magazine, which has printed articles about our campaign almost every month since 2016.

Our campaign has featured extensively in the Scottish media, including on BBC Scotland's Landward TV programme and BBC Radio Scotland, as well as features and editorials in The Herald, The Scotsman, The Courier and the Press and Journal. We have given many presentations across Scotland, including to the Royal Scottish Geographical Society and to the annual conference of Wild Scotland, the network for outdoors and adventure tourism operators.

“National Parks are an investment, bringing significant environmental, social and economic benefits to the areas they serve.”

Scots Magazine editorial, March 2017.

We have contributed articles to the membership magazines of several Scottish organisations, including 'Reforestation Scotland' and 'The Geographer'. We have kept the SCNP website and APRS website up to date with campaign news throughout and have maintained a lively flow of information on Facebook and Twitter.

National Parks Across the World

Governments across the world have continued to press ahead with designating more National Parks over the last five years. For example, Chile has recently created five new National Parks, covering more than 10 million acres. If a developing nation such as Chile can designate more National Parks, surely so can Scotland.

“This is not just an unprecedented act of preservation; it is an invitation to imagine other forms to use our land. To use natural resources in a way that does not destroy them. To have sustainable development – the only profitable economic development in the long term.”

Michelle Bachelet, President of Chile, January 2018.

Acknowledgements

SCNP and APRS are very grateful to an anonymous Edinburgh-based charitable trust and the Susan H Guy's Charitable Trust for funding our Scottish National Parks Strategy Project, to the Big Lottery Fund for funding the Scottish Borders National Park feasibility study, and to SCNP and APRS members and business supporters.

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SCNP promotes the protection, enhancement and enjoyment of National Parks, potential National Parks and other nationally outstanding areas worthy of special protection.
SCNP is a registered Scottish charity, No SC031008.
www.scnp.org.uk

APRS promotes the care of all of Scotland's rural landscapes.
APRS is a registered Scottish charity, No SC016139.
www.aprs.scot

April 2018



Call to Action

We are convinced that designating a fine landscape as a National Park is the best way to:

- generate a high profile
- support its active management as well as its protection
- encourage integrated planning and management by all public bodies, and
- invest additional national resources in helping residents and visitors both to enjoy the landscape and conserve it for future generations.

Scotland's first two National Parks have achieved a great deal in their first 15 years and represent remarkable value for money. They inspire pride and passion amongst local people and visitors and provide many benefits to local residents, visitors and Scotland.

SCNP and APRS therefore continue to call upon the Scottish Government to show leadership on this issue and support the efforts of local campaigners by delivering a national strategy for future National Parks in Scotland, including Coastal and Marine National Parks. This would bring additional resources and significant social and economic benefits to places which richly deserve them, strengthen Scotland's international standing for environmental protection and support our crucial tourism industry. We will carry on campaigning tirelessly for this to come about.



image 03: Mull © Scottish Natural Heritage