



Scottish National Parks Strategy Project



SUPPORT FOR FARMING IN NATIONAL PARKS

What are National Parks?

'National Park' is the leading internationally-recognised designation for places of the highest national importance for natural or cultural heritage – including landscape, wildlife, recreation, historic environment and cultural traditions. National Parks are exemplars of rural development which help to create jobs in remote rural areas alongside best-practice custodianship of natural assets. There are over 3,500 National Parks in the world, including for example 29 in Norway and 14 in New Zealand. Some are truly wild places; many, including those in Scotland, are lived-in, working landscapes. Under the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, Scottish National Parks have four statutory aims:

- (a) to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area
- (b) to promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area
- (c) to promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public
- (d) to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities

Scotland has two National Parks: Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, established in 2002, and Cairngorms National Park, established in 2003. National Parks in Scotland are governed by boards made up of directly-elected local people, local councillors and national experts.

National Parks and Farming

The principal purpose of a National Park is to care for the special qualities of an area's landscape – its natural and cultural heritage of places and people. Some of these special qualities result largely from the forces of nature – such as mountains, lochs and coastlines. However, others derive mostly from centuries of work by local people – such as farmland, woodlands, towns and villages. That is why National Park Authorities (NPAs) invariably put great effort into supporting environmentally-sensitive farming practices in their areas. The way this is done varies across the different National Parks, but can include grant schemes, practical support on the ground and arguing at a national level for better rural development programmes.

National Parks in Scotland seek to achieve the fourth aim set out above by providing practical advice, grants and support to local businesses, including farming enterprises, to help them adapt to new markets, add value to local produce and win new customers in ways which also support the objectives of the National Park. Eight examples of these kinds of approach from across Scotland, Wales and England are set out below. This sort of work is of course also done elsewhere, but it is more common in National Parks, as NPAs bring additional resources and a greater focus on the landscapes of the areas for which they are responsible.

Brecon Beacons National Park

In 2017 the Black Mountains Land Use Partnership in the Brecon Beacons National Park was awarded a £1m grant from the Rural Development Programme, funded by the EU and the Welsh Government. The partnership aims to promote continued improvement, restoration and sustainable management of the natural resources of the Black Mountains, an iconic expanse of upland common mostly in the National Park. The Black Mountains is a living and working landscape dependent on the viability of hundreds of private businesses which rely on a sustainable and attractive landscape which delivers multiple economic, environmental and social benefits.

The partnership brings together key local stakeholders, including the Black Mountains Graziers Association, seven private estates, the Brecon Beacons NPA, Natural Resources Wales, Welsh Water and the Young Farmers Club. The Partnership is chaired by National Sheep Association Chief Executive Phil Stocker. By working together, the partners aim to improve the viability and quality of the environmentally sensitive farming practices that contribute to the sustainable management of natural resources across the Black Mountains landscape. These include bracken management, heather regeneration, improvement of grazing land, peatland protection and improvements to livestock access to help with stock management and provide a better visitor experience. Local communities are involved through developing a rural skills programme, engagement with schools and the creation of employment opportunities. Further information at [Black Mountains Land Use Partnership](#).

Broads National Park

The Norfolk and Suffolk Broads is Britain's largest protected wetland and one of Europe's most important wetlands for nature conservation. The landscape of the Broads is a result of centuries of natural processes and interactions between people and their environment and attracts more than seven million visitors every year. The Broads Authority aims to help balance the needs of the environment, local residents, local businesses and visitors.

However, the Broads does not exist in isolation. The Broadland rivers catchment area is more than ten times bigger than the Broads and includes around two thirds of Norfolk and some of North Suffolk. The Broads Authority and Norfolk Rivers Trust co-host the Broadland Catchment Partnership to help co-ordinate joined-up and targeted water and land management. The partnership involves local people, organisations and businesses in developing and carrying out actions; it helps local businesses to make the most of existing funding and seek more innovative sources, and highlights incentives which encourage best practice across all sectors.

For example, the recent three-year Water Sensitive Farming project aimed to benefit both farmers and the environment by improving agricultural soil and water management throughout much of East Anglia. It was funded by private, third sector and EU investment but delivered through local catchment partnerships, with a focus on on-the-ground action and relationship building. It aimed to keep soil, nutrients and water in the fields and away from the surrounding river systems, thereby enhancing both farm productivity and watercourse quality. The project funded Norfolk Rivers Trust to employ farm advisers to work with farmers to improve land use, engaging more than over 1000 farmers in each catchment and installing 15 silt traps.

Exmoor National Park

In 2018 a farmer-led group from Exmoor published ambitious proposals to sustain and enhance Exmoor's farmed landscapes and communities after Brexit. The steering group for this project is chaired by Robin Milton, Chairman of the Exmoor NPA, and

comprises the Exmoor Hill Farming Network, private estates, the Exmoor Society, Natural England and the RSPB.

These proposals resulted from a clear appetite from the Exmoor farming community, encouraged by the UK Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), to influence future policy and investment through developing a locally-designed agri-environment scheme which would provide incentives for the wide range of public benefits provided by farming and other forms of land management. The group are proposing a single locally-delivered scheme which:

- is co-designed and delivered by farmers and land managers
- encourages new thinking, especially from the next generation
- recognises the importance of branding and promotion of goods and services to secure a premium income for their producers
- would be delivered through a team of farm liaison officers

These ideas, particularly the bottom-up approach using the skills of Exmoor farmers to help develop the scheme, have received overwhelming local support. The scheme would only apply within the National Park. Further information at [Exmoor's Ambition](#).

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park

As in all UK National Parks, most of the land in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs is privately owned, ranging from small farms to extensive estates, many of which have been in the same family for generations. The NPA collaborates closely with land managers from these farms and estates to prepare Integrated Land Management Plans. These plans identify and support actions that both generate economic returns for the business itself and help deliver the National Park's wider environmental and social priorities. These plans have for example supported local initiatives in the areas of agriculture, forestry, deer management, renewable energy and peatland management. Two examples of where this approach has been successfully implemented are at [Lochdochart Estate](#) in Strathfillan and [Portnellan Farm](#) on the shores of Loch Lomond.

The NPA also actively seeks to publicise the large numbers of quality food producers, innovative food processors and outlets for local food and drink in the National Park by showcasing several of them on the [Producers in the Park](#) page on its website.

Northumberland National Park

The Northumberland NPA made a concerted effort to ensure that farms in the National Park could benefit from DEFRA's Higher Level Stewardship agri-environment scheme, so it is proud that 100% of the farmed area of the National Park is now in the Environmental Stewardship scheme.

Rural businesses within the National Park receive support from dedicated farming and rural enterprise officers with in-depth knowledge and practical experience of farming, living and working in the rural uplands. They can help farmers with stewardship agreements, grant applications, project development and access to other agencies. This advice and support is only available within the National Park. The National Park is regularly used as a testbed for new ideas, so there are opportunities not available elsewhere to take part in innovative projects such as water quality enhancement, preventing moorland wildfires, reducing track erosion and climate change adaptation.

Equally importantly, the NPA acts as an advocate for farmers and land managers within the National Park, representing them in dealing with organisations such as Natural England and DEFA. This has been important at a time of changes to land management stewardship schemes and to other grant programmes. Local farmer [John Riddle](#) chaired the NPA for many years. Further information at [Looking After the Park – Farming](#).

North York Moors National Park

The traditional farm boundaries of hedges and drystone walls form a big part of the landscape character of the North York Moors and are an important feature of its historic environment. They also provide wildlife habitat and shelter for stock and reduce soil erosion. The North York Moors NPA's Traditional Boundary Scheme therefore provides grants to land managers within the National Park to help towards restoring dry stone walls, coppicing, gapping up or laying existing hedges or planting new ones along field boundaries. Funding from the Scheme is only available within the National Park. Further information at [Traditional Boundary Scheme](#).

Peak District National Park

Farmers and land managers in the Peak District can access a range of services from the National Park Authority's team of Farm Advisers. This team helps farmers and land managers to access national conservation and land management grant schemes by helping them to:

- learn about the grants that are on offer
- apply for and manage funding agreements
- access environmental advice

The NPA Farm Advisers can be contacted at the local Agricultural Business Centre or NPA office, or will visit a farm or place of business by arrangement. They offer advice or longer-term support on topics including:

- restoring traditional drystone walls and hedges
- managing traditional hay meadows and other species-rich grassland
- moorland management
- managing and creating woodland and tree planting
- planning
- cross-compliance
- Nitrate Vulnerable Zones
- pollution control
- energy, water and waste management

The NPA also publishes a range of guidance documents on specific issues such as fencing and walling.

Countryside Stewardship is a national agri-environment scheme in England which provides funding to farmers and land managers to deliver effective environmental management. Its primary objectives are to:

- conserve and restore wildlife habitats
- manage flood risk
- reduce water pollution
- keep the character of the countryside
- preserve features important to the history of the rural landscape
- encourage educational access

The NPA offers help with applications to this Scheme, including higher tier and mid tier payments, capital grants, woodland support and the hedgerows and boundaries grant scheme. The NPA also offers advice on applications for LEADER funding, the Rural Development Programme, the Catchment Sensitive Farming Project and the Peak District Small Woodland Creation Scheme. The NPA also offers its own grant scheme for help with projects that may not be suitable for the main national schemes. Further details on the [Peak District NPA website](#).

South Downs National Park

The landscapes of the South Downs, Britain's newest National Park, are inextricably linked with farming. It is quite different from the older National Parks, as 85% of the National Park is farmed; it is the only lowland mixed farmland National Park in Britain. Centuries of cultivating the landscape have resulted in a tapestry of fields, vineyards, villages, chalk grassland, lowland heath and woodland, all tied together by farming. Anything which has an impact on farming therefore has an impact on the landscapes of the National Park. South Downs farming is very diverse, with a mixture of livestock and arable farming and a mosaic of farm types, including small family-run farms and large farming estates.

The NPA understands that farmers need to run sustainable and economically viable businesses, so anything they are asked to do must fit with their farming business operations. It accepts that the South Downs will continue to change and that farming will continue to develop. NPA Farming Officers help farmers to get the most out of environmental land management schemes, sharing ideas and best practice and working collaboratively across the landscape. The NPA seeks to maximise participation in agri-environment and other similar schemes, which enable farmers to make caring for and managing the environment part of their farm business. The NPA also plays a significant role in helping the public to understand that the South Downs is a farmed landscape which needs to be treated with respect. For example, it has run the *#TaketheLead* campaign for four years to raise awareness of dog attacks on sheep and to encourage more responsible dog ownership; in 2017 the campaign reached more than half a million people. The NPA has supported the production of an innovative [video trail](#) aimed at visitors, which showcases the work of seven farmers in the eastern part of the National Park in caring for landscape and nature.

The NPA has supported the establishment of six independent, farmer-led, farm cluster groups, covering approximately 2/3 of the National Park, which are working to improve and connect habitats on a landscape scale for threatened species, including several farmland birds. The NPA has developed a range of joint training courses to promote the work of the farm clusters and to encourage joint working between them. Every year the NPA holds three farmer breakfasts across the National Park to enable farmers to air their views, challenge the NPA about its work and provide an opportunity for farmers working on their own to talk to each other and share experiences and ideas. The NPA has also endorsed five [Whole Estate Plans](#) which set out clear baseline information on an estate's environmental and social assets and proposed development projects, in order to identify opportunities and to aid decision-making for both the estate and the NPA. Whole Estate Plans aim to identify mutually acceptable and proactive solutions which serve both the wider purposes of the National Park and those of the estate.

Farming in the South Downs is currently going through significant change. The decision to leave the EU will require the UK Government to test new approaches to find out what works, what doesn't and what's practical, giving great potential for the farm cluster groups to test out possible future schemes. NPA Farming Officers are working with farmers across the South Downs to help them to identify new and innovative opportunities during this time of change, and to ensure that their voices and ideas are heard as a new UK farming policy is developed. Early indications are that the new Agriculture Bill will shift emphasis even more towards policies that rewards farmers for sustainable management and the range of public benefits this provides, such as protecting iconic landscapes, creating wildlife habitats, providing clean air and water, reducing flood risk and improving access. This may lead to further opportunities for diversification and development of farm businesses.

Conclusions

1. All NPAs understand that farming is critical to achieving their National Park's objectives, and therefore allocate resources towards employing dedicated and experienced staff to support and advise farmers within the National Park.
2. An increasing emphasis is evident on supporting future farm innovation, diversification and market development, particularly through the forthcoming period of significant change.
3. This approach is particularly prevalent in National Parks with more extensive areas of productive farmland, such as the Peak District and the South Downs.
4. Many of the most successful initiatives are farmer-led, and farmers are frequently represented on NPA Boards.
5. The additional resources which a National Park brings to an area means that higher levels of advice, support and resources tend to be available to farmers within National Parks than to those outwith them.

Further Information

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The Scottish National Parks Strategy Project is a joint project between the Scottish Campaign for National Parks (SCNP) and The Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS).

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