



Scottish National Parks Strategy Project



New National Parks for Scotland – Next Steps

Summary

We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to designate more National Parks. Community groups in Galloway and the Scottish Borders have already demonstrated clear local community demand for National Parks in those areas. Proposals for new National Parks should be set in the context of national strategy, informed by historical background and expert advice. We are ready and willing to support this process in any way we can.

Introduction

1. APRS and SCNP warmly welcomed the commitment in the August 2021 Scottish Government (SG)/Scottish Green Party Shared Policy Programme to "... designate at least one new National Park by the end of this session", ie by 2026. This will support the SG's priorities to tackle the climate emergency and nature crisis, promote green recovery and improve public health. We particularly welcome the words "at least", indicating that the SG may designate several new National Parks. We jointly led the campaign for more National Parks, supported by 10 other national organisations¹.

National Strategy

2. Any Proposals, Reports or Designation Orders to be prepared under the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 should be set firmly in the context of an overall national strategy for Scotland's National Parks, given that 'National Park' is Scotland's premier national landscape designation. This should include consideration of whether an overall National Parks Service should be established, as a central source of advice and expertise for all Scotland's National Parks and other protected landscapes. The Act enables considerable flexibility regarding National Park Authority functions and powers, including planning.

History

3. All work on Scotland's next National Parks should be informed by full understanding of the lengthy and detailed development of National Parks policy in Scotland and the rest of Europe. This is summarised in our report [Unfinished Business](#) (2013), in which we also proposed seven potential areas for designation (see map); other areas may now also be considered suitable. All relevant reports are on the [APRS website](#). We draw attention in particular to SNH's [Advice to Government](#) (1999) and to the Scottish Executive's [Scotland's First Coastal and Marine National Park](#) (2006).

Expert Advice

4. The SG should seek advice from NGOs and public bodies with relevant expertise related to the National Park Aims set out in the 2000 Act: heritage conservation; sustainable resource use; understanding and enjoyment; and sustainable development. Substantial relevant expertise exists within the NGO sector, including for example at The National Trust for Scotland, Ramblers Scotland and the Blue Marine Foundation as well as APRS

¹ Blue Marine Foundation; John Muir Trust; Marine Conservation Society; Mountaineering Scotland; The National Trust for Scotland; Ramblers Scotland; RSPB Scotland; Scottish Wild Land Group; Scottish Wildlife Trust; Woodland Trust Scotland

and SCNP. Public bodies which should be involved include NatureScot, Historic Environment Scotland, SEPA, the enterprise agencies and local Councils.

National Planning Framework 4

5. We have already proposed that Scotland's new National Parks should be a National Development in the forthcoming NPF4; this is now an essential delivery milestone.

Visitor Management funding

6. We also welcome the increased funding "to improve visitor facilities, safety measures and access opportunities, including in existing Regional Parks". A strategic approach is also needed here, to reverse years of under-investment and to build on successful projects recently enabled by the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. Visitor management issues are experienced in many parts of rural Scotland, although National and Regional Parks have built up substantial levels of relevant expertise. More countryside rangers are needed in many popular rural visitor destinations, along with improved public transport, parking, camping, toilet and recycling facilities.

Rationale

7. The core commitment to designate more National Parks includes a brief summary of the reasoning behind it. We offer the following comments on the four elements of this:
 - a. "provided relevant legal conditions can be met" – we assume this refers to the statutory processes set out in the 2000 Act, but would welcome clarification.
 - b. "support progressive development" – this phrase is unfamiliar; we prefer the internationally-recognised concept of "[sustainable development](#)".
 - c. "address the climate emergency" – we agree, and National Parks also address the equally important and closely-linked nature crisis.
 - d. "improve public and community wellbeing" – we agree; it is important to note that National Parks support the wellbeing of visitors as well as of local residents.
8. The introductory wording also contains statements on which we offer comments:
 - a. "local community demand" – this is crucial, and two areas have already clearly demonstrated it: the [Scottish Borders](#) and [Galloway](#).
 - b. "progressive land use" – another unfamiliar phrase; we prefer "sustainable land use" as set out in the [Land Use Strategy](#).
 - c. "smaller in scale" – National Parks should be as large as is necessary to meet the Aims in Section 1 and the conditions in Section 2(2) of the 2000 Act.
 - d. "good value for money" – National Parks regularly lever in significant external funding and deliver strong returns on investment to local communities.

National Scenic Areas and Regional Parks

9. National Parks constitute the top tier of Scotland's suite of protected landscapes. However, much work is also required on [National Scenic Areas](#) and [Regional Parks](#) if they too are to fully address the climate emergency and nature crisis. Please see SNH's [Advice to Government](#) (1999) and our 2018 [Review of Regional Parks](#).

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Further Information

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[APRS](#) promotes the care of **all** of Scotland's rural landscapes. APRS is a registered Scottish charity, No SC016139. [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.

