



**Scottish
Wildlife
Trust**

Consultation response to National Parks Commission

The Future of National Parks in Scotland

Scottish Wildlife Trust

30 November 2022

National Parks must be exemplar in improving biodiversity and reaching net-zero through a just transition. National Parks should demonstrate best practice and innovation that will have a positive outcome not only for communities in the parks, but the whole of Scotland and beyond.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust welcomes this opportunity to respond to the National Park Commission's consultation on the future for National Parks in Scotland.

Our Response

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (the Trust) strongly agrees that National Parks need a new overarching purpose "to lead nature recovery and a just transition to net zero". The Trust welcomes the proposed focus on nature recovery, not only conservation and enhancement, combined with a focus on a just transition to net-zero carbon emissions. We would strongly suggest strengthening and improving the purpose by stating "a just transition to net zero and nature positive". There is massive transition required to move towards nature positive and this will have impacts on ways of life and cultural capital.

The existing National Parks were created over 20 years ago, when there was limited understanding and awareness on the nature and climate emergencies. There is now clear evidence of the crises we are facing and understanding of how to halt, mitigate and adapt to the changes through the ways we use and manage the land and sea. As such it is urgent that goals of National Parks are updated amended to be coherent with the Government's stated aims on nature and climate.

Future and existing National Parks must demonstrate best practice when it comes to meeting net-zero carbon emissions and protecting and restoring biodiversity. They must be at the forefront of efforts to achieve the objectives of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, Environment Strategy, Nature Network and 30x30 commitments and be pivotal in delivering on legally binding targets from the forthcoming Natural Environment Bill.

National Parks need to adopt the Ecosystems-Approachⁱ to land management "*a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way*". They should be exemplars of best practice and used to encourage those outwith the National Park to follow suit. Lessons learned from the both the Land Use Strategy and Regional Land Use Partnership pilots should be considered as well as learning from landscape scale people and ecosystem restoration projects such as Coigach & Assynt Living Landscapeⁱⁱ.

National Parks must play a key role in implementing nature networks across Scotland, acting as nodes for the wider restoration and protection of nature across Scotland. They must be seen as taking the lead to improve national connectivity of the natural environment and connection of people to nature. This must be done in a way that is place-based and community led, providing sustainable, nature-based economic opportunities and climate adaptation that improve community resilience.

National Parks should be areas where innovative ideas can be tested that will benefit the natural environment, climate and the local economy. Nature-based solutions should be identified and used wherever possible in National Parks to increase climate mitigation and resilience, and biodiversity in tandem. Large-scale, well-planned nature restoration should be a key focus of National Parks, for example through the Riverwoods initiative to create a network of riparian woodland and healthy river systems.ⁱⁱⁱ Species reintroductions should also be led and demonstrated in National Parks.

National Parks can provide means for innovation and opportunities for nature-based investments with Park Authorities working with communities and Nature Scot to ensure positive impacts on nature and climate without greenwashing. They should fully embody and apply the Scottish Governments Principles for Responsible Investment.^{iv}

Contribution to protection and restoration of the natural environment should be a main criterion for selection of new National Parks. They need to be areas where nature restoration and protection will be most effective due to existing or future conditions, with effective guidance and sufficient support and input from local communities.

The Trust do not believe this should limit the Scottish Government to selecting a rural, low populated area for a new National Park.

ⁱ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/applying-ecosystems-approach-land-use-information-note/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.coigach-assynt.org/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.riverwoods.org.uk/about/>

^{iv} <https://www.gov.scot/news/promoting-responsible-investment-in-scotlands-natural-assets/>