

National Parks in Scotland

After many years of debate, National Parks are to be introduced in Scotland. National Parks are being established at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and the Cairngorms. This case study examines the history of National Parks and reviews current developments in Scotland.

Introduction

In England and Wales, National Parks have played an important role in the post-war land use planning framework. The designated Parks provide an integrated approach to environmental protection in defined areas of high environmental quality. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 set out the original arrangements for the designation and management of National Parks in England and Wales. The position in Scotland has been very different, however, as no corresponding arrangements were put into place. Today, that is changing as the Scottish Parliament is seeking to introduce National Parks to address the social, economic and environmental issues in these special areas.

The historical context

Since 1949, the dream of introducing National Parks in Scotland has never been far away. Indeed there have been three attempts to establish National Parks in Scotland. None of these succeeded although there have been important spin-offs in terms of broader rural and conservation measures. The first attempt to address the national park issue in Scotland was associated with the deliberations of the Normand and Ramsay Committees in the 1940s. These Committees examined the range of prevailing rural issues in Scotland at that time. In particular, the recommendations of the Ramsay Committee represent the Scottish parallel of the policy developments then taking place in England and Wales. It recommended the establishment of five National Parks:



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- Loch Lomond and the Trossachs;
- Cairngorms;
- Ben Nevis - Glen Coe -Black Mount;
- Glen Affric - Glen Cannaiach - Strath Farrar; and,
- Wester Ross.

In addition, three Reserve Areas were suggested for Moidart – Morar – Knoydart; Ben Lawers - Glen Lyon – Schiehallion; and, for St Mary's Loch. None of these were accepted, since the political commitment to creating Scottish National Parks had faltered and effectively disappeared.

The second attempt took place in the 1970s. It is associated with the (then) Countryside Commission for Scotland which proposed a new park system, including a provision for Special Parks which were intended to satisfy low intensity national recreational demands. The parks were to be located in relatively remote and sparsely populated locations of national and international landscape value. Significantly, the proposal included the establishment of Special Park Authorities with local and national appointees to reflect the balance of interests in park management. The Special Park Authorities would have been granted normal local authority planning and countryside functions for the designated areas. Attention was drawn to a number of possible areas but no formal

recommendations were made. These areas included Loch Lomond and the Trossachs; Glen Coe - Ben Nevis; and, the Cairngorms. Again, this proposal was not successful.

Finally, in the 1990s, as an outcome of increasing development pressures associated with the expansion of forestry and skiing activities, attention turned again to issues of landscape conservation. The Countryside Commission for Scotland was directed to study management arrangements for popular mountain areas such as the Cairngorms. The study made a strong case made for the designation of National Parks in the Cairngorms; Loch Lomond and the Trossachs; Ben Nevis - Glen Coe - Black Mount; and in Wester Ross. It was suggested that these areas would have independent planning boards, comprising local and national members.



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These specific proposals also failed to materialise. However, Partnerships for the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond were put into place. This idea has been very influential in both areas and has provided a valuable learning experience in terms of rural resource management in such sensitive landscapes. They could be seen as the springboard for the recent move to designate National Parks in these specific areas.

The present position

The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 currently provides the legislative framework for national park designations in Scotland. The case for moving to National Parks is based on a number of challenges which have emerged in these vulnerable environments. These include the changes taking place in agriculture, forestry and tourism; the increase in recreational and associated development pressures; the need to enhance the natural heritage under EU Directives; and the pressing demands of community development. The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 sets out the four aims of the Scottish designations as:



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- To conserve and enhance the national and cultural heritage of the area;
- To promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area;
- To promote understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public; and,
- To promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities.

The legislation provides for the establishment of a National Park Authority in each park to ensure that these aims are addressed in ways that protect the long-term natural and cultural heritage of the area. The Authority will prepare a National Plan to manage the area and will have powers to ensure that it is implemented effectively. The Plans will provide the principal framework for achieving the specific aims of the designated areas. The documents will involve a process of involvement of local and national interests and articulate the agenda for action by the Park Authority and its key partners. Flexibility is stressed in order to allow for the different conditions throughout the designated areas. The Park Plans will also provide a mechanism for integrating the National Park with adjacent areas. The National Parks will be core funded directly by the Scottish Executive, and governed by a Board that will comprise at least 20% directly elected

representatives. The remainder will comprise nominated individuals from local authorities in the National Park area and appointments by Ministers.

Consultation Papers were published to draw attention to the issues associated with this move. There are three principal issues in both areas. The first issue is the proposed area of the Park. In general terms, the purpose of the consultation paper is to confirm that the designated area is suitable for designation. In the context of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, the Consultation Paper sets out an initial proposed map of the Park setting out the area and boundaries. The intention is to include a geographical area that can fulfil the aims of the park.

The second issue concerns the powers of the National Park Authorities with respect to conservation and recreation management. In the context of planning responsibilities in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, the Consultation Paper advocates considerable flexibility in approach. It notes that Scottish Ministers have indicated that the National Park Authority should become the planning authority. It should assume responsibility for preparing the local plan for Park and for making development control decisions based on it. The local authorities would retain responsibility for the strategic framework of structure plans and be statutory consultees on local plan and development control matters. The Consultation Paper suggests that this “would provide for an integrated and more focussed approach to the planning issues in the area, but would not separate the strategic planning of the area from its wider hinterland”. In contrast, the Consultation Paper for the Cairngorms suggests that development planning and development control powers remain with the appropriate local planning authorities. The Park Authority would then be a statutory consultee in the preparation of the relevant structure and local plans and on development control matters. The Authority will still be responsible for the preparation of the Park Plan (Scottish Natural Heritage, 2000b).



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The third issue addressed in the Consultation Papers is the proposed representation on the Board of the National Park Authority. The paper sets out a detailed prescriptive catalogue of different interests to be included in the governance arrangements for the National Park. It suggests that there be 25 members on the Board. Of these 5 would be directly elected, 10 would be nominated by the appropriate local authorities and 10 nominated by Ministers in the Scottish Parliament.

Points for discussion

Why do you think that National Parks were not introduced to Scotland in 1949?

Should National Parks be concerned with only the protection of the environment?

What should happen to the people who live and/or work in defined national park areas?

Should we charge people to visit or holiday in National Parks?

Do you consider that National Parks are effective ways to plan for sensitive rural areas?



Laggan, Cairngorm

Further information:

Countryside Commission for Scotland (1974) *A Park System for Scotland*, Battleby, CCS.

Countryside Commission for Scotland (1990) *The Mountain Areas of Scotland: Conservation and Management*, Perth, CCS.

Moir J (1997) The designation of valued landscapes in Scotland, in Macdonald R and Thomas H (eds) *Nationality and Planning in Scotland and Wales*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 203-242.

Rice D (1998) National Parks for Scotland – a major step forward? *Town and Country Planning*, May, 157 – 161.

Scottish Natural Heritage (2000a) *A Proposal for a Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park*. Battleby, SNH.

Scottish Natural Heritage (2000b) *A Proposal for a Cairngorm National Park*. Aberdeen, SNH.