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By email to

Simon Franks
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Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park

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6 July 2018

Dear Simon

**LL&TNP Trees and Woodland Strategy
Stakeholder discussion paper June 2018**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion paper for the forthcoming Trees and Woodland Strategy for the National Park.

Mountaineering Scotland is the only recognised representative organisation for hill walkers, climbers, mountaineers and ski-tourers who live in Scotland or who enjoy Scotland's mountains, and acts to represent, support and promote Scottish mountaineering. Mountaineering Scotland also acts on behalf of the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) on matters related to landscape and access in Scotland, and provides training and information to mountain users to promote safety, self-reliance and the enjoyment of our mountain environment.

Our response follows the layout of the proposals in the discussion paper.

Proposal 1:

In order to help deliver the National Park Partnership Plan target, the Trees and Woodland Strategy will identify priority areas for native woodland creation. We have identified areas of high potential by a modelling exercise to explore where woodland creation would benefit woodland connectivity. It is not proposed to detail a split in the National Park Partnership Plan woodland creation target between productive conifer and native woodland.

We think that a split between native woodland and productive conifer is a helpful measure to record. If there is no split between them then it is difficult to assess how any connectivity would be of benefit to wildlife. It would also help address landscape assessments.

Proposal 2:

The Trees and Woodland Strategy will refer to the previously agreed Wild Challenges and promote actions to help deliver the Wild Park outcomes.

We agree that this is a useful proposal to make as continuity is important, building on previous work done.

Proposal 3:

The Trees and Woodland Strategy will identify issues and solutions to improve or enhance woodland management. This could include unsustainable herbivore impacts, invasive species, woodlands with limited species diversity and age structure, and limited woodland management options.

We agree generally with this Proposal, as it is a sensible policy to improve the wildlife value of woodlands. We would expect most effort to be targeted on native woodlands and the connectivity between them. Productive softwoods can have a place in a habitat network, but in this part of Scotland they are different in character to the broadleaf woodland and of much less value to wildlife, unlike further north and east. Adding diversity to recreational paths through productive softwood plantations by varying the species mix would be of benefit to walkers.

Proposal 4:

The Trees and Woodland Strategy will identify where different types of woodland could be located to bring landscape enhancement while not detracting from the special landscape qualities of the National Park. The Strategy will provide a toolkit to assist with woodland landscape assessment and design.

We think this is important for restructuring of productive softwood plantations. We also note that there is what seems to us a conflict with Proposal 1 which proposes not to differentiate between locations for soft- and hardwood creation. Proposal 1 needs the differentiation to be able to work with landscape character and to plan for them accordingly.

Proposal 5:

The Trees and Woodland Strategy will identify areas in the lowlands and strath floors of the National Park where the management of existing tree features such as parkland, boundary trees and groups of trees will be prioritised for management to retain, enhance or expand such features for landscape, biodiversity and economic benefits.

We agree with this proposal for the visual and landscape benefits it should provide.

Access and Recreation:

It is not intended for this strategy to cover access and recreation matters in detail, as these are detailed further in the National Park Outdoor Recreation Plan. However, an assumption is made that all woodland creation and management proposals take into account requirements of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and discussions take place to explore opportunities for delivering recreational priorities in the National Park Partnership Plan.

We note that there is no Proposal associated with this topic and are concerned that recreational access will be overlooked. We do recognise that the intention is to place the detail of access issues in the Outdoor Recreational Plan, but we are of the opinion that this would not be helpful in integrating access into multi-purpose forestry and woodland management. The general strategic principle of maintaining and enhancing recreational access needs to be made explicit as part of this Strategy. If it is not mentioned here it may be easily forgotten about. It is essential that cross-referencing is included in both this strategy and the Outdoor Recreation Plan.

Proposal 6:

The Trees and Woodland Strategy will encourage increased woodland diversity in both species and age structure and will promote biosecurity measures to help deliver resilient woodlands.

We agree with this proposal. Variety of the habitat walked through is a welcome feature of recreational access.

Proposal 7:

The Trees and Woodland Strategy will promote alternative woodland management and integrated land management techniques where appropriate, identify new economic markets and seek solutions to issues preventing harvesting/timber haulage of existing conifer forests.

We agree with this proposal if it leads to a different culture of harvesting and planting in the National Park where the landscape implications of large-scale clear-felling becomes a thing of the past.

Proposal 8:

The Trees and Woodland Strategy should have additional requirements to enhance the delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan through woodland creation and management proposals which are considered alongside the current suite of UKFS requirements. For example, requiring increased minimum proportion of native broadleaves in productive conifer woodland creation to maximize the multiple benefits for the new woodland.

We agree with this proposal and suggest that recreational access be acknowledged as part of the suite of multiple benefits.

Proposal 9:

The Trees and Woodland Strategy will encourage land managers/owners and local communities to identify the best ways to co-ordinate and manage a balanced approach to woodland management and creation. This could, for example, be via the existing Deer Management Groups as a forum to discuss these issues.

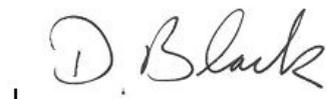
We agree with this proposal to widen the engagement and discussion of woodland management to allow social and environmental benefits to be made more widely available

Proposal 10:

The Trees and Woodland Strategy will encourage engagement between local communities and woodland owners/managers to explore opportunities for greater involvement in the use and management of woods, as well as greater understanding of the opportunities and constraints associated with woodland management and creation. In addition the Strategy should signpost interested communities to relevant information and support should they wish to exercise their powers through the Community Empowerment or Land Reform legislation.

We agree with this proposal for benefits of woodlands to be spread among both local communities and those wishing to enjoy the landscapes of the National Park through recreation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D. Black". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'D' and a stylized 'Black'.

Davie Black
Access & Conservation Officer
Mountaineering Scotland