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Wildness is crucial



By Cameron McNeish

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The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoFS) has sent a strong response to the Cairngorms National Park Authority's (CNPA) Draft National Park Plan for 2012-2017.

Confirming its support for the principles under which National Parks in Scotland were established, MCoFS stated that: "It is the wildness of the arctic-alpine zone, and the opportunities for quiet recreation and physical challenge both in those areas, and on lowland crags, that makes the National Park special to mountaineers. The feeling of wildness is central to the special experience that the Park offers."

Responding to a question from CNPA about opportunities and threats that might arise in the years ahead, MCoFS stated that in its view: "There is great urgency to address the threat of a reduced sense of wildness as a result of the visual impact of development. The minimum should be to achieve no loss during 2012-17 as wildness is frequently lost through both incremental and major developments."

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MCoFS "strongly agrees with the need to conserve the special qualities of the Park, welcoming the recognition that wildness is affected both by a view from within the Park outwards, as well as a view of the Park from beyond the boundary and within the Park. We agree that wildness is one of the defining features of the Park, and also that it is the 'glue' for the identity of the Park."

MCoFS feels that there is a particular challenge for the CNPA in: "ensuring the landscape context of the Park does not become a ring of wind farm developments. There is already a significant impact on the special qualities of the Park which are threatened by the numerous developments constructed or planned close to the boundary of the Park. Many are highly visible from core upland areas within the Park, and are having a significant impact on the wild quality. These are primarily wind energy developments, which pose an immediate and growing threat as the cumulative impacts are already evident, and there are more applications in the planning system. This is a challenge that needs to be urgently and consistently addressed by the CNPA, which should exert as much pressure as possible on decisions outside the National Park."

In its response to the draft Plan, MCoFS reiterated its opposition to the proposed 'new town' of An Camas Mòr at Aviemore because the development would: "change the character of the Park and detract from the communities' 'sense of place' in the landscape."

In considering the impact of human activity on the special qualities of the National Park, MCoFS recognised that erosion could be exacerbated both by human activity and also by extreme weather. MCoFS "welcomes the excellent mountain heritage project currently being delivered by the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) to address erosion caused by human activity in the uplands. This threat is likely to have the greatest impact where there is intense human activity on vulnerable thin soils found on the plateau, as is the case around the Cairn Gorm summit and the corrie rims to the west." In this context, MCoFS feels that: "the continuation of the 'closed system' at Cairngorm Mountain is important to manage pressure on the plateau in the vicinity of the easy access afforded by the high altitude car park and funicular."

The MCoFS will continue to work closely with the CNPA to help ensure that this magnificent area is properly managed and conserved for future generations to enjoy.

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