



# THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF SCOTLAND

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Dear Sir

## **Beinn Eighe NNR Management Proposals Response 2009- 2015**

### **Mountaineering Council of Scotland Response**

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoFS) is recognised by the Scottish Government as the representative body for hill walkers, climbers and ski-tourers. We have over 10,000 members, and represent the interests of all 400,000 mountaineers. Beinn Eighe is a popular mountain as a Munro, and a magnificent mountain in its own right. Access is enjoyed for both walking and climbing throughout the year.

#### **1. Our Vision for Beinn Eighe NNR**

It would be useful for us, and presumably yourselves, to be clear what objective mountain path repair would fall under. Care needs to be taken to make it clear there is a distinction between providing access facilities such as building interpretation trails at low altitudes on the reserve and repairing erosion that is not to facilitate access but for natural heritage reasons.

#### **2. Natural Heritage Management**

##### **Objective 1 - Woodland**

The MCoFS supports the objective of realising a natural mosaic of connected woodland and open ground. We strongly believe that fences have a detrimental impact on access and landscape, hence we consider that their use should be avoided unless absolutely necessary. For this reason we welcome this vision stated on p10 and commitment to remove redundant fences, "no new fencing will be erected on the reserve." Due to our stance on fences in general, we welcome the commitment to review the need for the fences near the end of the Plan and would encourage removal where this would not compromise the natural heritage objectives. Additionally, we note the longer term plan not to undertake major fence repairs, however it is unclear how this will be used for deer management. This needs to be explained. It would also be of great value to explain this to visitors, who may interpret unrepaired fences as neglect.

Regarding the position of fences in the present and future, Map A does not say if enclosure 9 is still fenced. This needs to be clarified as this is not indicated on the legend.

#### **Deer**

The MCofS welcomes the statement of commitment to manage deer not just in the emerging woodland areas, but also on open ground where over-grazing can threaten shrub and ground layer vegetation which has high importance alongside the woodland aspect of the NNR. However, it needs to be clarified why there is reference to “shooting of stags” as the management tool, but no reference to a hind cull. Considering the debates around effectiveness of deer control by shooting hind versus stag, it is necessary to explain why, if that is the intended meaning that deer control will be through stag shooting alone. Should this not be the intended meaning then the balance of hind versus stag culling should be expanded upon. The MCofS welcomes the use of habitat assessment for monitoring rather than relying on deer number estimates, as essentially it is the impact on the habitats and species that matters; its quantity as well as pattern of impact.

### **Objective 3 – Open Ground Upland Habitats**

The term “conservation gain” needs explained with reference to balancing woodland expansion and resultant dry / wet heath contraction as it is unclear what the decision making process is and how conclusions of priority are to be drawn. A component of this is our support for efforts to bring the dry heath into favourable condition, but would be reassured by further explanation of the decision process, but we appreciate the aim of carefully balancing priority habitats.

### **Objective 5 – Geology**

The MCofS particularly supports the use of local material for path maintenance to minimise the landscape impact.

### **Objective 6 – Research and Demonstration**

The MCofS would be keen to promote awareness of the work at Beinn Eighe NNR through the website, magazine, volunteer opportunities or events, if deemed useful. It may be appropriate to combine this with promotion of other upland NNR to a coherent project.

## **3. Management for People**

The MCofS supports the NNRs engagement with all potential visitors, but in particular we would emphasise the need to work with the largest group of access users – hillwalkers. These users are marginalised due to not being a geographical community, but have a major stake in Beinn Eighe.

### **Objective 7 – Visitor Facilities and Access**

The stated plans, alongside preparation of a Visitor Management Plan, are welcomed. We would however question how much use would be made of a link between Coulin access routes and Kinlochewe, and suggest this should be specifically surveyed for. The MCofS believes that the resources may be better used in higher priority projects such as high altitude erosion control. We are keen to work with the NNR in promoting responsible access to minimise the need for this, but as promotion of the site is part of the plans, this dealing with the resultant impacts needs to be a high priority. With respect to “upgrading” sections of the mountain access routes, we would welcome such an investment but would encourage consideration of an altitudinal limit to whether access is facilitated rather than the impact of access is managed; freedom of access across the reserve being available to responsible access irrespective of whether on path or off.

### **Objective 8 – Interpretation and Promotion**

The MCofS supports interpretation as awareness raising and as an education tool about responsible access. For hill walkers this can be a valuable way to emphasise the importance of responsibility

towards impacts they may be having, and behaviours they can undertake to minimise their potential impact. One aspect to interpretation is also ensuring it adds, rather than detracts from the experience. An important element of this is provision of interpretation and not introducing it into areas where wildness character is encroached upon.

### **Objective 9 – Involving Local People & volunteers**

In addition to the local community, the mountaineering community has a very important stake in Beinn Eighe through the numbers visiting the NNR. As previously mentioned, there is a tendency to under-estimate the importance of engaging with non-geographical communities. As the recognised representative body of hill walkers in Scotland, the MCofS would be keen to assist in their closer involvement in the management of the NNR. One suggestion would be to develop closer links with clubs with local huts, or a joint project to promote awareness of NNR status, its meaning and the value of the sites to hill walkers and climbers.

Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely

Hebe Carus  
Access & Conservation Officer