



THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF SCOTLAND

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Dear Sir/Madam

Invereshie & Inshriach NNR Management Proposals Response 2010- 2016

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 10,500 members, and represent the interests of all 400,000 mountaineers. The area within the NNR is a popular upland area for hill waking and ski touring, hence is enjoyed for mountaineering throughout the year.

1 Our Vision for Invereshie & Inshriach NNR

The MCofS would like to commend the NNR management for achieving excellent early results for natural regeneration without the need for fencing, while working with neighbouring landowners with different objectives. The recognition of the importance of the wild land quality is also greatly welcomed as despite it not being a qualifying feature for any designation, the recent CNP survey showed how important it is to residents and visitors alike. It can easily get lost among all the statutory requirements for management.

The last paragraph of the boxed section rightly refers to the importance of the local community, but although no user profile survey is referred to, it can probably be assumed that a large proportion of visitors to the NNR are not "local." Many are likely to be part of the non-geographical mountaineering "community." Their stake in this NNR should not be downgraded due to their locality; it is after all a National NR, rather than a Local NR, and visitors contribute to the local economy through their visits.

2 Management of the Natural Heritage

Objective 1

The MCofS supports the proposal for management trials in the Allt Ruadh area. This may be a good topic for interpretation for visitors to understand that the area is actively managed. This fact is not evident unless visitors know what they are looking at.

Objective 2

The felling of the last remaining block of lodgepole pine is welcomed. Felling, until natural regeneration takes effect, can have significant negative, though temporary effects, on the landscape. An explanation of this management would be an opportunity for interpretation.

Objective 3

The MCoFS shares the concern regarding the “path creep.” Any attempts to attract more visitors will of course have the potential to increase this issue. The main options being to attempt to more widely distribute the visitors, which may have implications e.g. for ground nesting bird disturbance, or encourage access use concentration. The latter could increase the impact within confined areas which could be more easily to manage. It is likely that either way, the popularity of the Munros and natural routes between them and directly up them from car parks will continue. Funds need to be available to deal with this issue. Maybe this could be available through the COAT upland paths project?

The MCoFS recognises the delicate balance between native woodland expansion and valuable open ground habitats. This is another topic that may interest visitors as interpretation.

On the matter of ground nesting birds, decisions should be carefully made on scientific evidence rather than fears of the impact of disturbance. In particular evidence for the impact on Capercaillie has been asserted, but there are mixed expert opinions on the matter due to the confounding factor of huge drops in numbers primarily associated with climate change, not disturbance. Before any restrictions on access are considered, there needs to be a clear assessment of the significance of the impact on productivity of disturbance. It must be shown that access restrictions will actually have a beneficial effect against the background of the huge reduction in the population fairly unanimously attributed to climate change. All experts, rather than pressure groups, should be listened to. This is a very delicate matter and access users must be confident that their access is being disrupted for a good reason, and that there is a direct benefit.

Objective 5

The MCoFS is always keen to directly, and through encouraging involvement and awareness, to be involved in any projects, and this includes monitoring. We will do anything we can to assist.

3 Management for People

It is worth being explicit when promoting the wild land experience that part of that is being in a challenging environment and self-sufficient. Visitors that feel their wild land experience is being “managed” may also feel their experience is diminished. Any management in the wilder areas of the NNR must therefore be very subtly designed.

Objective 6

Comments on Objective 3 equally apply to this objective.

Drake’s Bothy could be (maybe it is already) used as a site for interpretation and therefore awareness raising regarding the effects of the local damage. In the visitor survey it may be advantageous to survey use of the bothy as well to ascertain whether the damage is likely to be through ignorance or lack of caring. These two origins of the damage would have different optimal management approaches.

The routes used by hill walkers are greatly influenced by those suggested in guidebooks and websites etc. The usual routes are well established. Any encouragement to use other routes, if that is what is concluded is needed, would be more effective if guidebook authors / publishers could be encouraged to include relevant information. Local accommodation would also be a way to reach

visitors, targeting relevant types of accommodation depending upon which audience is the required focus.

With respect to ground nesting birds, it is important that factors influencing productivity are separated out, and this would serve to indicate if there is a need for specific measures to manage people for the birds benefit. The comments under objective 3 are relevant to this objective also. It needs to be recognised if increasing numbers would risk compromising existing access that the current number of visitors enjoy, and whether quality or quantity of visitor experience is paramount. It may of course not be an either / or situation, but with the current statements in the proposal document it is not evident that this potential situation is explicitly accepted.

Objective 8

It is likely that a high proportion (majority) of visitors are not local. Involving the local community is vital, but also a balance needs reached to reflect the cross-section of visitors, and non-geographical communities such as that of mountaineers should be fully included. In particular there are 2 club huts within a few miles of the NNR. Engagement with the mountaineering community would be welcomed through the medium of MCofS. We would also be happy to approach the clubs with adjacent huts to gauge interest in closer ties. The MCofS would like to be involved with any project affecting visitors and the upland areas of the NNR.

A short circular walk may involve a wider range of visitors with the NNR, but as stated earlier, the topography and plantation forestry in the vicinity of the road may be a challenge to achieving this. The MCofS would support such provision as long as there was no impact on the wild land character of the majority of the NNR.

Throughout this response to the proposals, topics have been suggested for interpretation. Those offered in the proposals are also supported, the key being to show why the visitor should be interested.

Without knowing the current level of car park use compared to capacity and likely demand if they, or new ones, were promoted, it is difficult to make comment on this aspect. Certainly when I was ski touring over this past winter the Allt Ruadh car park was overflowing, even when the road was nearly inaccessible for many cars due to the road conditions. Promotion beyond capacity would not be beneficial.

4 Property Management

Objective 9

It must be accepted by visitors that the NNR has inherent risks which it is neither practicable, nor desirable, to remove. Risks are an integral part of much of the NNR having wild land characteristics. The wilder areas should not be made any “safer” as this would impact on the wild experience many visitors come to the NNR to enjoy.

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

Yours sincerely

Hebe Carus
Access & Conservation Officer