

## **Co-constructing the research agenda on accessible rural woodland expansion**

### **RESAS 1.4.3c D1: Report on stakeholder engagement to help co-construct the research agenda in the Cairngorms based case study on accessible rural woodland expansion**

Authors: Katrina Brown\*, Justin Irvine, Anke Fischer, Antonia Eastwood & Scott Herrett

\*Corresponding Author: [Katrina.Brown@hutton.ac.uk](mailto:Katrina.Brown@hutton.ac.uk)

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## **Purpose and status of this document**

This is a working document that summarises the current state of knowledge co-production (September 2016) resulting from stakeholder engagement. It is not designed for wide public distribution but as a baseline to help guide the research. The intended audience are the stakeholders engaged to date and the researchers, but it may be of interest to wider stakeholders and academics with an interest in woodland expansion.

## **Stakeholder engagement meetings**

Fundamental to co-constructing the research agenda is engagement with the relevant stakeholders. Researchers have attended (and in some cases organised) several stakeholder meetings in the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) case study area (see Appendix I) related to the issue of managing woodlands for multiple benefits. Stakeholder engagement has taken place through a range of media including workshops, site visits, face-to-face meetings, telephone conversations and email exchange. From this series of exchanges we have identified areas where research can help inform and support sustainable decision making for natural resource management in the CNP. Key to this are effective ways in which we can create a shared knowledge base and build knowledge capital (most notably bringing together ecological and socio-cultural knowledge), and use participatory techniques to capture knowledge held by stakeholders that is currently not easy to access. This report is a summary of areas for research to support, as emerging from these events.

## **Summary**

The CNPA area provides a case study spanning three scales where we can look at the adaptive governance and management processes involved in an intervention such as woodland expansion. At the Park scale we can map current and potential woodland expansion options in the light of different drivers and policy levers. Then there is an opportunity to engage with groups of estates across the Park to explore how different issues that woodland expansion raises can be addressed by investigating the governance arrangements as well as the evidence base. Finally, at a community level we can bring together biophysical modelling of land use configuration with stakeholder knowledge and understanding of cultural ecosystem services and benefits as part of initiatives around native woodland expansion. The main outcome required is a system that provides practical, on-the-ground guidance on where trees can go that takes into account the multiple benefits and objectives relating to land use.

## **Aim of the stakeholder engagement**

The aim of the stakeholder engagement is to co-construct research so that it is relevant to the issues stakeholders are faced with over the management of the multiple benefits the woodland environment provides in the CNP. From a research perspective we are focussing on the relevance and applicability of Adaptive Management (AM) principles to the woodland issues facing relevant actors in these areas.

## **Emerging issues**

Woodland expansion is primarily driven by interest in developing more and improved habitat and its connectivity for biodiversity in response to drivers of change such as climate and land use; especially capercaillie as a flagship/umbrella species. However, understanding how woodland configuration also influences objectives relating to flood resilience, shading

for river water temperature, waders (and moorland fringe birds), peatland functioning and grouse moor viability is also of interest in terms of achieving multiple benefits as well as understanding the risks from invasive non-native species (INNS) and disease.

Stakeholders identified three critical woodland-related conflicts (not mutually exclusive) relevant to this RD:

1. Woodland expansion versus land use for open hill sporting use (deer/grouse): how to move to a less intensive model of sport shooting; how to maintain sporting resource with fewer deer.
2. Woodland management for biodiversity versus other uses (particularly commercial forestry use and recreational use), Interest in how arguments are formulated and who can help with credibility of proposals (e.g. planting trees on upper catchment may be more acceptable to grouse moor managers if it is seen as coming from another extractive/exploitive sector such as the salmon fisheries boards).
3. Woodland expansion and conflicts with designated sites: developing designated site management planning that is more flexible. This is a conflict between landscape scale management for ecological processes versus more narrow species conservation. Understanding the barriers, e.g. which actors are willing to develop flexibility in management of designation and which are not, is of interest.

Two other issues regarding woodland expansion and multiple benefits were:

4. Conflict over type of woodland to be expanded (especially native v. non-native, and natural regeneration versus planting or assisted regeneration).
5. Implications of urban development on woodland protection and expansion.

Stakeholders articulated their wish to understand better:

- ) How associated trade-offs and win-wins can be effectively negotiated to generate multiple benefits from woodland management and expansion, particularly including the role of cultural, economic and institutional barriers and motivations.
  - o Land managers often perceive barriers due to designations (the historical basis for designations does not always fit well with current landscape scale objectives) but some influential stakeholders believe these are surmountable and that AM processes can explore this.
- ) Cultural and institutional dynamics: tracing changing perceptions through to changes in actual woodland management practices and the take-up of related schemes and interventions (especially in woodland expansion priority areas).
  - o How to motivate different groups and cultures (and indeed sub-groups or sub-cultures, of which several might be present within a single organisation) of woodland managers and users to change behaviour, including:
    - Exploring the cultural acceptability (amongst both land managers and the public) of interventions and of 'hybrid' management of land. Land uses are often polarised (e.g. grouse/deer v trees, or conservation woodland v productive woodland) but anecdotal evidence suggests that examples of more mixed use – within the Park and from abroad – can constructively challenge previously established categories and ways of thinking.
    - Exploring the extent to which zoned or hybrid areas are necessary and workable.
    - Exploring the role of knowledge on opportunities for woodlands in higher altitudes (this may include taking a historical perspective using tree related place names).

- )] How multiple objectives can be managed in different stages of the woodland expansion process.
- )] How stakeholder views on woodland expansion issues become visible in particular ways (could include visualisation through media or through actual experience, as on a field visit). This links to how best to share/translate knowledge and practices (a) amongst local land managers (i.e. within the CNP), and; (b) between other countries, like Norway, and CNP land managers:
  - o Regular meetings, field-visits and study tours were highlighted as seemingly influential 'contact zones' in which practices and attitudes were influenced
  - o Stakeholders were interested in the difference between abstract and experiential learning and sharing.
- )] Some stakeholders express a very pragmatic commitment to take heed of new evidence (whether peer-reviewed papers or the experiences of nearby estates), but there is felt to be little critical thinking about the basis upon which the evidence is deemed creditable (and by whom) and practical enough to change practices.

The main outcome required is a system that provides practical guidance on where trees can go.

### How issues might be addressed

Ways in which stakeholders agreed that this research opportunity could address such issues included:

- )] Speak to key individuals to find out what ecosystem services they are interested in.
- )] Speak to individuals to establish where woodland planting has been a success and where it has caused conflict and the reasons behind this.
- )] Track these attitudes and interests over time.
- )] In general: examining how land managers and other policy and public stakeholders perceive, articulate and negotiate multiple woodland objectives in CNP, and how this shapes the adaptive management of related win-wins and trade-offs.
- )] To explore the opportunities and barriers of woodland grant scheme take-up in priority woodland expansion areas - especially exploring the 'cultural block' that many different stakeholders articulated in relation to hybrid approaches to multiple objective delivery. (explore the socio-economic consequences of shifting from intensive hunting management for grouse/deer to managing for multiple benefits (including hunting at lower densities as part of a mix of estate activities) i.e. the effect on jobs. What are the consequences of alternative ways to manage big estates? Can you charge a premium for different experiences that provide higher quality in some respects?)
- )] To follow the social, cultural and institutional processes through which AM woodland management interventions are planned, negotiated, implemented, reflected upon, learned from (including who learns what and why, what makes particular knowledges and ways of knowing credible and useful) – using particular interventions as case studies (stakeholders were especially interested in managing situations where different biodiversity objectives clashed, and where biodiversity objectives clashed with recreation objectives and/or timber production objectives)
- )] Helping to work through possible future scenarios. For example, using visualisations to help with Cairngorm Nature Action Plan (particularly of changing particular management practices and of changing recreational/housing pressures).
- )] To explore where meeting multiple objectives can be achieved starting with particular 'hybrid spaces' e.g. estates/areas that are allowing greater overlap between different land uses, such as sporting and forestry use.

## Identification of case study sites and participants

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) has used native woodland model to identify areas for woodland expansion that a) can benefit capercaillie by being within 5km of existing suitable habitat and b) that will lead to connectivity between existing native woodland to help species adaptation to climate change (e.g. dispersal corridors). CNPA has worked with Forestry Commission Scotland (FSC) to agree a 12.5% locational premium added to woodland grants is proposed woodland is 50% or more in areas identified in a) above. There are 5 types of woodland that are eligible. No premium is available yet for the corridor planting. Research relevant to this involves understanding the barriers to uptake of grants to plant in these areas: cultural perspective (open landscape); lack of appreciation (of what a woodland can bring for biodiversity); impact on grouse shooting.

To explore processes relating to the delivery of multiple benefits from woodland expansion, the following nodes of AM activity would be most relevant and useful to engage with (the first two are partnerships being developed between estates to help co-ordinate expansion goals, the third exemplifies partnership working around woodland management and expansion for species protection) and the fourth is an example of partnership working in communities for engagement with nature:

1. 'Cairngorms Connect' (4 estates on the west side of CNP taking a partnership approach to woodland expansion. Motivation is linked to benefits of ecosystem health. The group is working on a landscape scale vision. It is interested in understanding the potential of woodland at higher altitudes. It aims to challenge conventional views on, for example, the natural treeline and too what altitude trees can grow to. It has been initiated by the members rather than the CNPA and has applied for ECAF funding. There is proposed woodland expansion (including proposed use of SRDP top-up) in the area between Mar Lodge (North Geldie beat) and Glenfeshie estates.
2. East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership (a partnership of estates Mar Lodge, Mar, Invercauld, Balmoral, Glenavon and Glenlivet). This group is interested in the economic benefits of woodland and has been facilitated by CNPA to date. It is focusing to some extent on how to integrate scrub and woodland expansion, peatland restoration, conservation and landscape features alongside sporting use such as grouse shooting. It has also applied for ECAF funding.
3. The Capercaillie Framework: An explicitly AM process focused on how woodland can be expanded and better managed to improve biodiversity whilst meeting other important stakeholder objectives. It is being implemented through: dedicated CNPA staff; the Caper Biodiversity Action Plan group, and; a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid currently being developed to fund interventions.
4. Explore the role of community involvement in land use decision-making. At present, there is only one case where community involvement has been established (the Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group).

## Next steps

AM principles and questions (developed in 1.4.3a) will frame our analysis of how actions to address these key stakeholder-identified conflicts can be put in place.

For each node of AM activity we need to:

1. Organise access of researchers to observe, engage with or otherwise examine adaptive management processes.

2. To use these engagement opportunities to select together a small number of specific adaptive management actions – with ongoing or planned interventions - that merit particular attention.
3. To conduct individual interviews with key actors in the identified study cases
4. (where and when possible) to observe meetings in which AM strategies for managing woodland are being discussed.
5. (If appropriate) to hold a stakeholder workshop by end March to reflect on pilot fieldwork and finalise main approach.

Work on AM processes in the Capercaillie Framework can start immediately because this strand builds from existing research and stakeholder relations established in the previous programme. Specific next steps are:

- To secure formal agreement from the leader of the HLF capercaillie bid for researchers to engage with related discussions on adaptive management plans and priorities [secured 30.6.16].
- To secure formal agreement from Caper BAP group to approach members for interview, and to engage with related meetings and field visits on adaptive management plans and priorities [informal agreement from Convenor and most members secured by 5.7.16, awaiting formal confirmation].
- To observe meetings in which AM strategies for managing woodland are being discussed (e.g. for capercaillie management, 2 meetings – one of each of Caper BAP Group and HLF bid team – are planned for the autumn).
- To conduct individual interviews with key actors in the identified study cases, e.g., members of the Caper BAP Group and HLF bid team.
- To write a piece for community newsletter in Boat of Garten that summarises the research needs arising, making clear its relevance to woodland benefits the community identified as important in previous research programme.
- Researchers to present 143c plans and results from Boat of Garten-based research in previous programme at next Caper BAP Group meeting (January 2017) [agenda slot confirmed].

Work on AM in collaborative woodland expansion processes will take a little longer to establish as we build relationships and trust with the estates in question, and as coherent management groups and management interventions take shape. The advice from stakeholders is to begin with Cairngorms Connect as it is more established. East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership (ECMP) may be brought in at a later stage. Specific next steps are:

- To liaise with CNPA in Oct/Nov to get updates on whether Cairngorms Connect and ECMP are ready to engage with, and to be advised on how best to approach them.
- To seek further engagement/interviews with land managers considering or doing woodland expansion in priority areas.
- To collate information on institutions and governance relating to woodland expansion and management, and possible intervention mechanisms.

### **Integration with other parts of the Strategic Research Programme 2016-2021**

This RD (1.4.3) focuses on processes of decision-making and governance, using adaptive management frameworks as a lens. Working in the same study areas, RD 1.3.2 (ecosystem services supply) will examine the ways in which the production of ecosystem services is influenced by different management interventions and approaches, and the trade-offs that result from these interventions. RD 3.4.3 will specifically look at well-being that people

derive from these areas. We have also been working with Scott Newey on the integration of this case study with work in RD1.3.3 (on CaperMap: A participatory GIS tool to facilitate communication and understanding of Capercaillie distribution scenarios under land use and habitat change), and have helped him make constructive links with established stakeholders.

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## Appendix I: List of key stakeholder meetings

A meeting of JHI researchers and CNPA staff was held on 8.8.16 in Grantown-on-Spey to discuss the specific SRP requirements and opportunities and how they related to and synergised with CNPA objectives, activities and case study suggestions. Researchers have also attended several stakeholder meetings and relevant stakeholder events in the CNP case study area since April 2016. These discussions have included one to one meetings with key informants in the CNPA (31.5.16, Grantown), Boat of Garten community (26.4.16), a meeting and fieldvisit of the Capercaillie BAP Group (comprising land managers and policy advisors from FCS, RSPB, private estates, SNH, GWCT, and CNPA) (22.6.16, Inshriach), and liaison with the capercaillie HLF bid team (which includes many of the aforementioned stakeholders, communications consultants and researchers from UHI, including a meeting 4.8.16). The team also attended the multi-stakeholder event 'Cairngorms Forests: What next?' (28.6.16, Strathdon) and were able to talk in depth with:

1. Land managers (private, state body, NGO owned)
2. CNPA
3. CKD Galbraith
4. FCS
5. RSPB
6. SRUC
7. Caper BAP officer

Meetings to date have provided the opportunity to listen to a wide range of stakeholder views on the most pressing relevant issues and, through site visits, experience some of these issues first hand. A significant part of the associated discussions between the researchers and the other attendees focussed on how the issues raised related to the idea and practice of adaptive management. In particular, there were useful discussions on the proposed research parameters. Ongoing dialogue is focussing on the co-construction of appropriate research questions, and possible approaches to case study issues/interventions and areas. We also discussed the use that could be made of existing qualitative, quantitative and spatial data (held by CNPA and JHI). Notes were taken at each event/meeting. These discussions were also supplemented by ongoing email contact with a range of stakeholders including CNPA, FCS, RSPB, SNH and community contacts, through which issues for the research agenda continue to be discussed.

These discussions extended and refined the understanding of research needs developed as part of the previous Strategic Research Programme (SRP). This led to proposed new research in the current SRP focussing on how communities interact with their environment. For example, Carrbridge community was earmarked in the proposal as a key case study community area. However, we await verification from stakeholders of where likely adaptive management interventions will happen first in order to focus further stakeholder engagement. Community contacts have been identified and will be followed up as appropriate.