

Another consequence of muirburn – air pollution in the Cairngorms National Park

Description



The view looking south from Lochindorb, the massive fire on the right is outwith the Cairngorms National Park boundary, that on the left within it, possibly on the Glenbeg Estate. Photo Credit Gordon Bulloch

It's the height of the muirburn season and the clear blue skies at the start of the month helped highlight the folly as the Cairngorms National Park was dotted with plumes of smoke.



Muirburn plume over Carn Liath, south of Glenlivet. Photo credit parkswatch reader.

The pollution caused by muirburn doesn't just release carbon into the atmosphere, it reduces air quality and harms the health of people living in or visiting rural areas.



The closer you get the more obvious the pollution becomes. Photo credit parkswatch reader.

Glen Livet is owned by the Crown which claims ([see here](#)) it wishes “*to manage the estate as an outstanding example of a sustainable highly integrated multiple-use upland estate, which provides a commercial return*”. The Estate Management Statement also indicates that the Crown has leased out the sporting rights. It appears likely that, as at Dinnet ([see here](#)), the estate has granted the leaseholder the right to manage the land as they wish to produce large numbers of grouse. If so, the use of muirburn for this purpose will undermine any possibility of sustainable land-management and shows the Crown Estate is not acting in the public interest.



Another view of the fires at Carn Liath on the Crown Estate. Photo credit parkswatch reader.

One of the pleasures of lockdown has been the significant reduction in air pollution and the clear blue

skies unmarked by the vapour trails of aircraft. That, however, has helped show just how polluting muirburn is.



View from eastern slopes of Loch an t-Sithein looking south towards the National Park. The muirburn is on the southern or eastern slopes of Cam Sgriob, north west of Grantown, which marks the National Park boundary. Photo Credit Gordon Bulloch.

Most, if not all, of the “cloud” has been created by pollution, not the weather.



Smoke from one of the large fires at Lochindorb drifting over into the National Park and filling the glen west of Grantown where the hamlet of Achnahannet is located. Photo Credit Gordon Bulloch.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has some good staff, almost all based around Grantown on Spey, who unfortunately do not have the power to tackle the air pollution, even though this must be directly harming them and other local people. Perhaps its time for the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to act? But the CNPA could, through its conservation byelaw-making powers, prevent the destruction muirburn causes to the natural environment and through that the harm it causes humans.



View from Gorton Hill, 2.5km north west of Grantown. The wooded hill in the foreground is Creag Bheithe Mhor. The plume of smoke appears to be rising from the SW facing slopes on Carn na Loir on the northern boundary of the National Park. Photo Credit Gordon Bulloch 1st March.

The photo above illustrates just how much of the moorland around Grantown and over to Glenlivet could develop into woodland if the CNPA used byelaws to prevent muirburn in the National Park. If grazing levels were kept low, woodland would naturally generate on dryer areas while the wetter parts of the moor would develop as bog. That would be good for both carbon absorption and wildlife and would give a big boost to the Scottish Government's conservation objectives.

Unfortunately, there seems little will in the Scottish Government to tackle landowners and sporting interests. The result that not only are they failing to address the climate and nature emergencies, for a few days of the year they are allowing direct harm to human health through air pollution.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. conservation
3. grouse moors
4. land reform
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