All,

I refer to my post today on the retrospective planning application for a hill track that will be considered by the Planning Committee tomorrow <http://parkswatchscotland.co.uk/2017/01/26/hill-track-cairngorm-test-case-national-park-2/>

The implication of my article is that IF vehicles were needed, wouldn't it be better they use the ski uptrack rather than approve a new track?  What in effect NR is proposing is two tracks instead of one, double the impact on landscape (both tracks will stand out as green lines) and double the impact on water run-off.    Skis impact on heather which does not survive repeated compression under snow such as happens on ski uptracks which is why ski uptracks are generally either green (as was the old sheiling poma uptrack that has been replaced) or bare ground, as on the brow of the hill in the middle of the Car Park t-bar uptrack (where the lack of vegetation has been added to by vehicle use).     Natural Retreats planting a proportion of the heather plants they managed to recover/dig up from elsewhere around the shieling ski tow on the line of what will become the new uptrack under the rope tow demonstrates  complete incompetence as the heather will not survive as soon as there is enough snow for the lift to operate.

Since the rope tow has no intermediate stanchions there is no restriction on the width of vehicles that could use it - which makes the case for the CNPA rejecting the hill track even  stronger.  There is no need for it.

What NR should have done, if vehicles access really needed, was to consider whether any further work might be required to make the uptrack suitable for vehicles

The main problem with using the uptrack for occasional use by vehicles is the short steep section at the top of the tow.  Park Officers however have identified this as not fitting into the landscape and in the Committee Report recommended the slope be smoothed out.  This would make it accessible for vehicles for occasional use.

NR in their Management and Piste landscaping document - which officers recommend should be made a condition of the application says the three point turning circle at the bottom of the track will likely remain vegetated because of light use.

If this argument is right for the turning area, its also right for the track and means there is no reason why there needs to be a separate hilltrack for access.  The uptrack can be used occasionally.

Any bare track that runs up and down this ski slope in a straight line is bound to keep washing out.  So the solution, if vehicles are really needed, is to use the uptrack as a "green track".

This solution would avoid the CNPA setting a precedent that every uplift facility at Cairngorm needs it own hill track for maintenance.

Regards,

Nick Kempe