

**NEWS RELEASE**

CALL FOR SCOTLAND TO FOLLOW ENGLAND’S LEAD AND REVIEW THE SCOPE FOR MORE NATIONAL PARKS TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE COUNTRY’S WEALTH OF OUTSTANDING LANDSCAPES

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Following the announcement that UK Environment Secretary Michael Gove has launched a review of National Parks in England, to ensure they continue to benefit people and nature and to consider the scope to expand the number of National Parks beyond the current 10, the Scottish Campaign for National Parks (SCNP) and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS) have called on the Scottish Government to undertake an urgent review in Scotland too.

Scotland had to wait more than 50 years longer than England to secure its first and only two National Parks.  It remains near the bottom of the world league in terms of the number of designated National Parks, despite independent consumer research consistently confirming Scotland as one of the most beautiful countries on the planet.

John Thomson, the recently appointed Chair of SCNP, claims that there is considerable momentum building at grass roots level in rural communities to grow the family of Scottish National Parks, with a number of specific proposals at various stages of development.  He believes this would be an ideal time for the Scottish Government to commit itself to a similar initiative and to the creation of more National Parks.

John said:  “Our two existing National Parks – Cairngorms and Loch Lomond & the Trossachs – have now been up and running for a little over 15 years.  By almost universal consent they have in that time done much not only to safeguard and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of these special areas but also to boost their economies and nurture their communities – just as National Parks south of the border have been doing for well over half a century.  With all the uncertainties now surrounding the future of traditional rural industries, it becomes all the more important to grasp the contribution that National Parks can make to securing the future well-being of rural Scotland”.

John Mayhew, Director of APRS, added:  ’’The recent announcement by Michael Gove underlines how pivotal National Parks are likely to be to the future of Britain’s rural areas.  Yet despite the superb quality of so much of its countryside, Scotland currently lags far behind England in the efforts that it makes to look after and make the most of it. England’s National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, all of which benefit from dedicated resources and management effort, cover almost 25% of its land area.  Contrast this with the mere 7% of Scotland covered by our two National Parks”.

If the review south of the Border results in a further expansion of National Parks, this disparity will become even starker.  SCNP and APRS argue strongly that this could cost Scotland’s rural areas dearly at a time when they will need all the help that they can get to overcome the loss of income likely to result from Brexit and the consequent removal of the support currently provided by the Common Agricultural Policy.  With future public funding expected to be based far more on the provision of so-called “public goods”, areas identified as being of major value to the nation, such as National Parks, will be much better placed to secure their share of whatever money is available.  They also stand to benefit from the greater economic dynamism that can flow from a higher public profile, whether through increased tourism or an enhanced ability to attract footloose businesses and sought-after professionals.

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