

NEW NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE DECLARATIONS

Summary

1. This paper proposes that the Board declares two new National Nature Reserves (NNRs).

Action

2. The Board is asked to
 - Agree the declaration of the Mar Lodge Estate NNR.
 - Agree the declaration of the Glencoe NNR.

Preparation of the paper

3. Stewart Pritchard wrote the paper with comments from David Miller. Nick Halfhide is the sponsoring director.

Background

4. In August 2012 the Board approved a new vision for the National Nature Reserve accolade. This included setting up Scotland's NNR Partnership to oversee the NNR process and develop new criteria and standards for the accolade. The Partnership first considered new applications for the NNR accolade in April 2015 following which the Board agreed in August 2015 to the declaration of The Great Trossachs Forest NNR and an extension to The Flows NNR.
5. The NNR Partnership, chaired and supported by SNH, comprises representatives from a range of public, private and community land managing interests - Forestry Commission Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Wildlife Trust, South Lanarkshire Council, The National Trust for Scotland (NTS), Woodland Trust Scotland, Community Land Scotland, and Scottish Land & Estates.
6. The Partnership's aims are *"In line with the views of SNH's Board ... to drive the development, promotion, monitoring and support for the accolade"*. And specifically, amongst other work, to *"Consider applications for the accolade and make recommendations to SNH for declaration"*.
7. The Board's role is to make the final decision to declare an NNR, based on a recommendation from Management Team, and thereby authorise the Chief Executive to sign-off the document declaring the new NNR under Section 35 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

The Partnership's consideration of the proposed new NNRs

8. In February 2017, the NNR Partnership considered and unanimously recommended for approval the proposal to award the NNR accolade to Mar Lodge Estate and Glencoe.

9. The Partnership considered the two proposed sites against the selection criteria for award of the NNR accolade which it agreed in 2013. In brief these are that a proposed site must be:
- nationally important for one, or preferably a range of, natural features;
 - very well managed to ensure the continuity and, where necessary, the enhancement of these features in the long term;
 - suitable for presentation or demonstration of these features in an appropriate way to the public; and
 - likely to inspire people to value and enjoy Scotland's natural environment.
10. The Partnership found that both sites:
- comprise extensive upland areas of world renown and host diverse nationally important nature,
 - have in place established governance structures including various land and visitor management and monitoring plans,
 - are secure in the long term, being owned and managed by the NTS, an existing provider of NNRs at Ben Lawers, Corrieshalloch Gorge, St Abb's Head, Staffa and St Kilda, and a member of the NNR Partnership; and
 - are popular and inspiring visitor destinations with related infrastructure including visitor centre (Glencoe), footpaths, signage and interpretation and programmes of public events and activities.
11. For Mar Lodge Estate, the Partnership considered whether or not NTS was unduly constrained in its ability to achieve sustainable deer numbers. NTS has given assurances that it is committed to conserving the valuable ecological and landscape features in harmony with its maintenance as a highland sporting estate, and is committed to controlling deer without restriction on open public access. The Partnership was satisfied that, whilst NTS faced significant and ongoing challenges in deer management, it had the necessary commitment and resources to succeed.

Mar Lodge Estate

12. NTS acquired Mar Lodge Estate in 1995. At 29,175 ha, it would become the largest property to receive the accolade in Scotland. See Annex 1 for a map of the property.
13. More than 80% of the property is designated as a national (Site of Special Scientific Interest, SSSI) and/or European (Special Area of Conservation or SAC, Special protection Area or SPA) protected area for nature. The entire property is within the Cairngorms National Park and part of it is within the Cairngorms Mountain National Scenic Area (NSA). The property includes the largest area of montane plateau and some of the wild land least affected by human activity in the UK. There are 15 Munros within the Mar Lodge Estate. Additionally, Mar Lodge Estate includes 800ha of Caledonian pinewood, a number of rare species, and species and habitats that are on the edge of their geographical distribution and considered to be of conservation importance.

14. Around 100,000 people visit Mar Lodge Estate each year. NTS visitor management provides a variety of visitor experiences whilst respecting the site's special natural qualities.
15. Part of Mar Lodge Estate was previously within the boundary of a much larger Cairngorms NNR. In 2006 SNH decided to re-name the Cairngorms NNR as several separate NNRs along component estate boundary lines to facilitate management at a more manageable geographic scale. Declaration of Mar Lodge Estate will continue this process and bring 7,200 ha of the original Cairngorms NNR into a new NNR.

Glencoe

16. The NTS first acquired land in Glencoe in 1935 and now owns and manages 5,680 ha. See Annex 2 for a map of the property.
17. The property falls within the Glencoe SAC and Glen Etive and Glen Fyne SPA and contains the Glencoe SSSI and the Eas na Broige SSSI and eight Geological Conservation Review (GCR) sites. The property is also covered by the Ben Nevis and Glencoe NSA and the Lochaber Geopark. It is one of Scotland's best sites for high-altitude arctic-alpine flora and one of the British Isles top ten montane sites for arctic-alpine lichens, with many examples of Red Data Book species.
18. People are an important part of NTS' vision. More than 125,000 people walk the various paths in Glencoe, and 180,000 people visit the Glencoe Visitor Centre. Many of the 3 million who drive through the property on the public trunk road stop briefly on the roadside to admire the scenery.

Resource implications

19. There are no anticipated additional costs to SNH as a result of declaring the Mar Lodge Estate and Glencoe NNRs.

Risk management implications

20. Natural heritage impact The risk to the natural heritage is low. These properties are already of high natural heritage quality and NTS has plans in place to further improve them, for example through the expansion of native woodlands and improvement to upland deer-grazed habitats.
21. Local economic and social impacts Both sites are already popular destinations with well-established visitor infrastructure. NTS has plans for further improvements for example new signage and interpretation at Glencoe and alternative uses for vacant properties on Mar Lodge Estate.
22. Reputation By agreeing to the award of the accolade, SNH may be seen to be endorsing an approach to deer management on Mar Lodge Estate that others find inappropriate or insufficient. As noted above, the Partnership queried and was satisfied that NTS' was making satisfactory progress in meeting this challenge.

23. Publicity These are popular sites and we anticipate there will be considerable interest in them being awarded the NNR accolade. NTS will be looking to use news of the award of the accolade to promote NTS and its properties including existing NNRs. They will make significant additions to Scotland's NNR series, increasing the number of promoted NNRs to 43; increasing the extent of NNRs to 150,159 ha (+30%); and increasing the overall number of visits to nature reserves with the NNR accolade by more than 400,000 each year. See Annex 3 for a map of existing NNRs.
24. Financial There will be no additional costs to SNH as a result of these declarations. Award of the NNR accolade will not affect any existing or ongoing financial arrangements with NTS.
25. Delivery Subject to approval by the Board, staff will progress the declaration process and liaise with NTS over preferred declaration dates and publicity.

Publicity

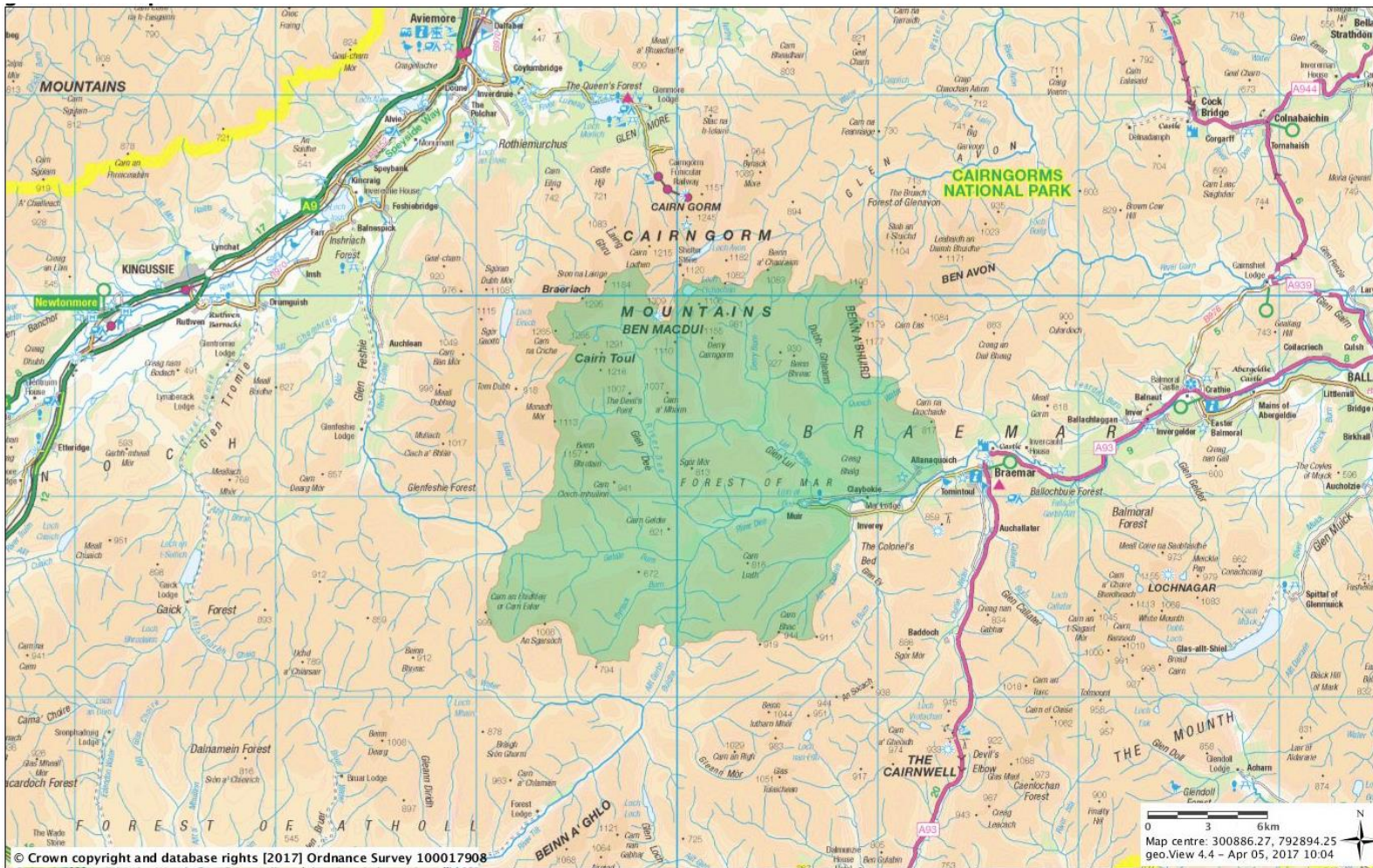
26. We have discussed with NTS how we would approach publicity around a decision to approve the declarations. We will issue joint publicity highlighting the roles of SNH and the NNR Partnership and NTS' commitment, using traditional and social media, member magazines and websites, and NTS will hold at least one launch event. Additionally, we are in discussion with NTS over securing some higher-profile media coverage such as mainstream television.

Conclusion and Recommendation

27. The Board is recommended to approve the declarations of Mar Lodge Estate and Glencoe as NNRs.

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Annex 1 Map of proposed Mar Lodge Estate NNR



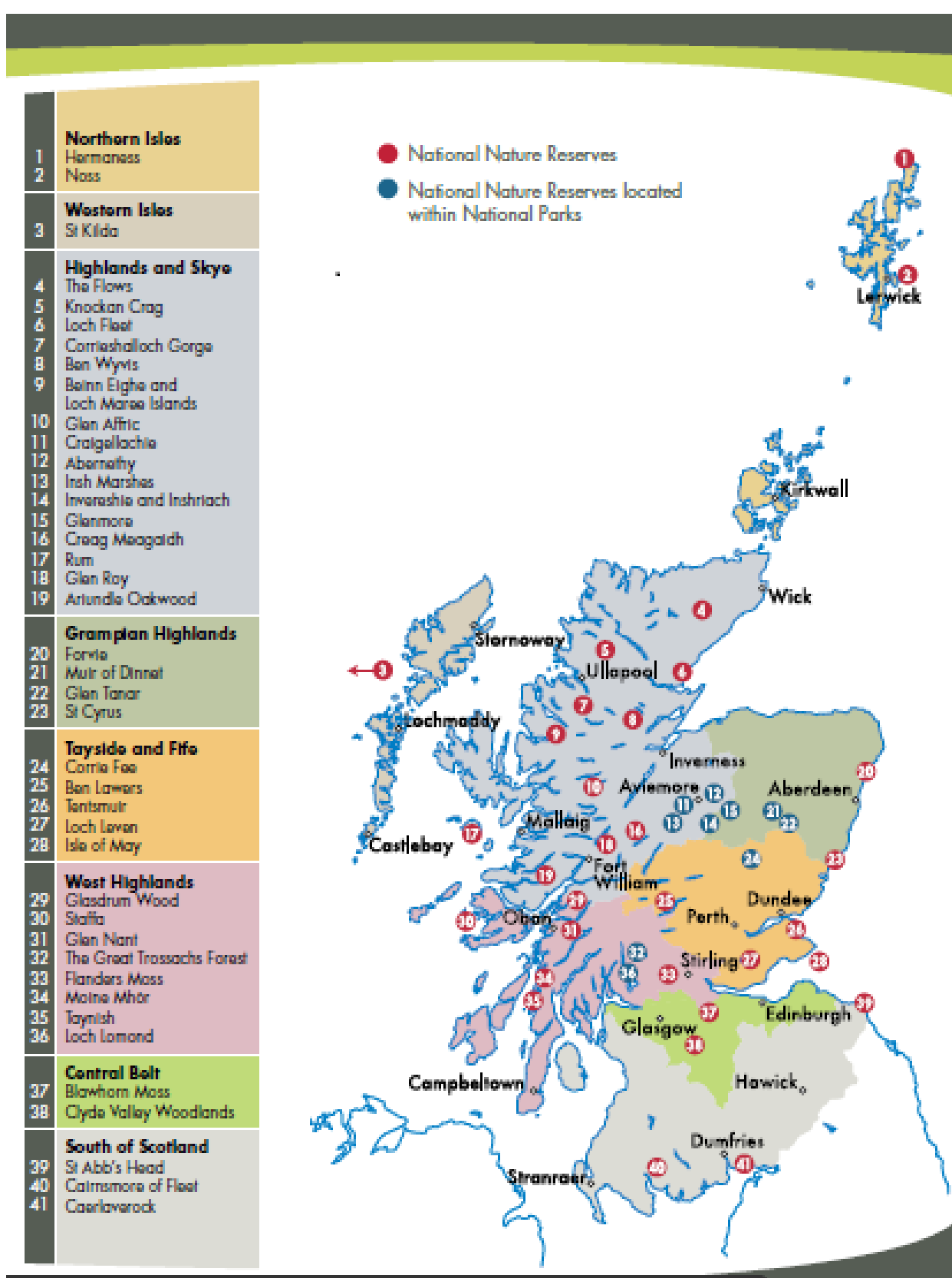
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Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

Annex 2 Map of proposed Glencoe NNR



Annex 3 Map of Scotland's National Nature Reserves



From Scotland's National Nature Reserves Visitor Guide (2016)

<http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/designatedareas/NNRVisitorGuide2016.pdf>