

MORE AND BETTER NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PARKS



SCOTTISH GREEN PARTY
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Over the last year we have embraced our magnificent countryside, and realised the value of our parks, wildlife and greenspaces. As we emerge from the pandemic, the Scottish Greens are calling for a renewed commitment to and investment in our parks. This briefing note sets out the approach we will take to national and regional parks.

INTRODUCTION

Scotland's exceptional landscapes of lochs, glens, mountains and unparalleled coastlines are world famous. Yet of the 3500 or so National Parks across the world and 15 in the UK we only have two: the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Parks, and even these are underfunded, lack visitor facilities and under threat from development and intensive land management like grouse shooting. Even though wildlife protection is meant to be a key aim of our National Parks, biodiversity is in decline just as it is everywhere else, and because the vast majority of land in our parks is privately owned and managed for private interests, particularly bloodsports, Park Authorities have little power to protect wildlife other than appealing to landowners' good will.

A wide-angle aerial photograph of Loch Lomond, showing the large body of water surrounded by green hills and mountains. The water is a deep blue-grey, and the surrounding land is lush green with some patches of brown. The sky is overcast.

GREEN IMPACT

The Greens led a successful campaign to protect Loch Lomond from a massive development that would have destroyed woodland and the Lochside

In addition to two National Parks, Scotland has three Regional Parks that were created primarily to facilitate access to the outdoors near to Scotland's most built-up areas, and between them they now enjoy over 2 million visits a year. This is likely to have grown as the pandemic has encouraged more communities to embrace their local green spaces, yet they suffer the same problems as our National Parks but amplified by neglect and low budgets. For example, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park operates on a budget of approximately £7m pa compared to the Pentlands Regional Park budget, which is provided for by Local rather than National budget, of c. £350k.

New National Parks proposed by the Scottish Campaign for National Parks

Existing
National
Parks

Potential
New
Parks

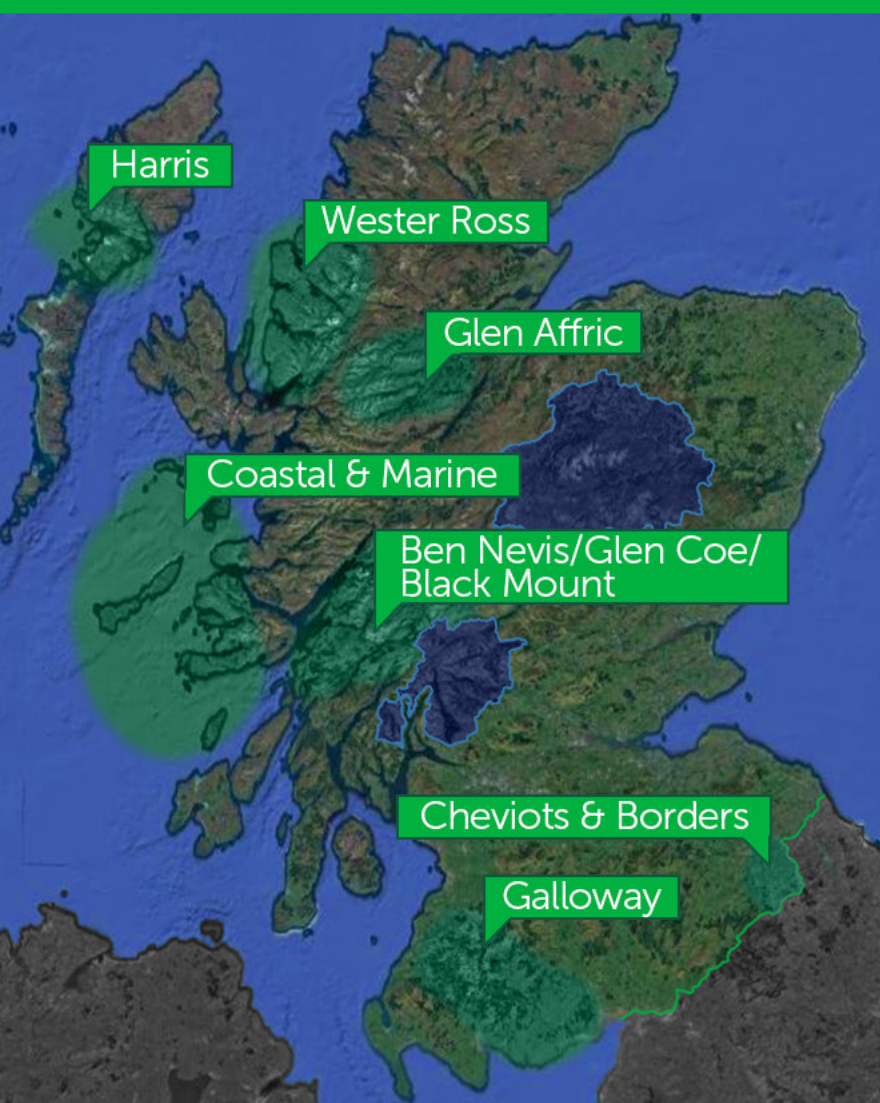


Legend

Harris

Wester
Ross

Glen
Affric



Coastal
& Marine

Ben Nevis/
Glen Coe/
Black Mount

Galloway

Cheviots &
Borders



Over the last year we have seen enormous pressure on national and regional parks as more and more Scots discover them and enjoy the outdoors during the pandemic. The positive impact this has on people's wellbeing means this should be welcomed and encouraged, but this pressure has also revealed an urgent need to invest in our Parks. That's why we want to provide the long-term funding and investment to ensure all National and Regional Parks have an adequate Ranger service, good quality visitor infrastructure including footpaths, easy access by public transport, and provision for informal camping.

Park status should also confer protections and investment on communities within and around the Parks. Additional investment will relieve pressure from visitors and stimulate the local economy, creating more jobs and opportunities for sustainable businesses, and new powers and responsibilities for Park Authorities will mean that affordable housing is provided. This includes regulating second homes so that local housing is prioritised, and encouraging the development of accommodation specifically for visitors.

The Scottish Greens are calling for an ambitious programme of reform and expansion of our National and Regional Park network, with the aim of making them a centrepiece in our efforts to tackle the climate and nature emergencies, creating green jobs in rural areas and providing the people of Scotland with unparalleled opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation and to connect with nature and our magnificent landscapes. In total, we want to invest an additional £50m a year in this programme, creating vital green jobs in rural areas, supporting access to our most treasured countryside, expanding outdoor learning opportunities, and restoring our environment.

THE SCOTTISH GREENS' PLAN TO RENEW OUR NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PARKS

- 1 Double the funding for existing National Parks** and allocate long-term funding from the Scottish Government directly to Regional Parks to allow investment in Rangering, outdoor education services, wildlife protection, and visitor facilities.
- 2 Establish at least two new National Parks** and allocate sufficient long-term funding to allow the new Parks to establish a Rangering service, and invest in outdoor education services, wildlife protection, and visitor facilities. We note that there are already a number of local campaigns for new National Parks, and will select according to a range of criteria, including local support, the potential contribution to public access and enjoyment, and the potential for wildlife restoration and protection.
- 3 Support the creation of new Regional Parks** where there is support from local communities, councils and other stakeholders. Possible new Regional Parks include the Campsie Fells and Ochils, which would provide vital outdoor recreation opportunities for the people of Glasgow, Stirling and Falkirk.
- 4 Empower National Park Authorities** by giving them the responsibility to distribute agricultural and land management subsidies within Park boundaries, using this funding primarily to support nature restoration and protection, tackling the climate emergency, and public access and enjoyment. Central to meeting these goals will be an ambitious programme of native forest regeneration and, where appropriate, planting. We would anticipate Regional Park Authorities being given this responsibility once they are formed and fit for purpose.
- 5 Create a national land acquisition fund** to allow National Park Authorities to purchase land within Parks for environmental restoration, protection and public enjoyment, building a national network of publicly owned land in national parks that is managed by the people, for the people, as is common in other countries around the world such as the US and France.
- 6 Reform National Park law** to ensure wildlife protection and restoration is the overriding priority, alongside public access and enjoyment, and to give Park Authorities new powers to support this goal and to deliver our long-term aim of bringing as much unoccupied land within our Parks into public ownership as possible - owned by the people of Scotland for the people and for future generations. These powers will include compulsory purchase and right to buy for National Park Authorities, as well as additional development control powers to, for example, regulate second homes and ensure access to affordable housing.
- 7 Review and reform the governance of Parks** to ensure nature conservation and outdoor recreation, and the wider public interest is adequately represented.
- 8 Establish a Scottish Parks Service** to oversee and support the management of our National and Regional Parks, coordinate Park and Local Authority rangering across Scotland better support and develop this service and to establish rangering as an attractive profession, support the acquisition of public land, and to ensure they meet their wildlife protection and public access objectives.
- 9 Support cycling, walking and cheap public transport** connections between centres of population and Regional and National parks to make them accessible to all and to encourage visiting without cars.