Scottish Natural Heritage’s *Natural Heritage Futures* is our contribution to putting sustainable development into practice. It has been called “a bold and imaginative way of establishing some high level objectives for the natural heritage of Scotland.” It aims to ensure that we in SNH take an integrated approach to our work across our whole remit and at the same time to identify common goals that we hope others will share. The programme aims to encourage all sectors to work together to achieve these goals.

This statement provides an update to the *North East Glens Prospectus* that was one of a suite of documents published in 2002 to guide the future management of the natural heritage towards 2025. It identifies significant changes in policy drivers or legislative context, new mechanisms or changed priorities and the implications that these have for the objectives and actions for the natural heritage. The Update should be read in conjunction with, and follows the same structure as, the original document (available at www.snh.org.uk).
The Cairngorms National Park was established in 2003. The North part of the Park falls within the areas of this Plan. A change in the boundary to include Blair Atholl and Eastern and Highland Perthshire is planned, as part of a larger review of National Park authorities. Further information about the National Park is available at www.cairngorms.co.uk.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has led partnerships to develop a number of Plans and Strategies for the Park. The most important is the Cairngorms National Park Plan (http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/parkauthority/nationalparkplan/index.php). The Plan sets out a 25-year vision, a set of long-term Strategic Objectives, and also a 5-year prioritised Action Plan. Public sector activity in the Park is increasingly focused on the delivery of the Plan. The Plan is consistent with this updated North East Glens Prospectus, and complements this Prospectus by setting out a more detailed set of objectives and actions which aim to deliver natural heritage priorities in a manner that is integrated with delivery of wider social, economic and cultural objectives.

In addition to the National Park Plan, the Cairngorms National Park Authority has also led the preparation of a number of subject-specific plans and strategies. These set out in more detail how particular areas of work will be delivered, and are referred to in the update where relevant.

Key influences on the Natural Heritage

Agriculture & Forestry

The introduction of the Single Farm Payment in 2005 has removed the link between production and payment, following Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform. In order to qualify farmers must demonstrate cross-compliance, increasing the focus on sustainable land use practices. Since Spring 2008, the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2007-2013 has become the main source of funding and support for land management and rural development in Scotland, and replaces existing support mechanisms such as the Natural Care and Scottish Forestry Grant Schemes. Environmental benefits are delivered through Rural Development Contracts – Rural Priorities (RDC-RP), and land managers must adhere to cross compliance and GAEC (Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions). The Government’s priorities for RDC-RP are reflected in a set of regional priorities under the SRDP. This includes a set of priorities for the Grampian region and is likely to affect future land use in this area. The revised Scottish Forestry Strategy was agreed in 2006, with an increased emphasis on the role of forestry in addressing climate change through biomass production for energy, carbon sequestration and habitat adaptation.

These changes may have a significant influence on the future role of livestock, which in turn could create expansion of native woodland, the loss of improved grasslands on lower level moorlands and significant landscape change in the North East Glens area.

Recent efforts in the area have focused on reversing the catastrophic decline in capercaillie populations. Work on fence removal and marking, predator control and habitat management have met with some success and included parts of Strathspey, Deeside and Donside. There is now a greater appreciation of the importance of woodland to invertebrates and the particular importance of dead logs, especially large logs, and of aspen is now more widely recognised.

Sporting Management

The Water Environment & Water Services (Scotland) Act came into force in Scotland in 2003 to implement the Water Framework Directive, and sets out a long-term framework for the protection, restoration and sustainable management of freshwater resources. The control of water abstraction for agricultural activities, like slurry disposal, now comes under the Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2005, and this should have a positive effect on natural heritage interests. The Rivers South Esk, Spey and Dee are now Special Areas of Conservation and, through Salmon LIFE, Natural Care and partnership projects like 3 Dee Vision (Scotland’s contribution to the EU funded NOLIMP Water Framework Directive Project), which began in 2002, significant and ongoing improvements have been made, on both the Dee and the Spey, to reduce siltation, remove man made barriers to fish movement and utilise more sustainable engineering works. The Spey has had a catchment management plan for some time now and work through the 3 Dee Vision project has led to the production of a catchment plan for the Dee, which will be taken forward as river basin planning under the Water Framework Directive. A South Esk Catchment management Plan is also underway.

Growing concerns about ticks and louping-ill has led to attempts to control the spread through using deer fencing, (re)introduction of sheep, killing of potential tick hosts and even moorland drainage proposals, which in turn have implications for access, habitat change and biodiversity. Illegal killing of protected species has continued to such an extent that in 2006 SNH, Grampian Police and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) initiated a 3- year North East Scotland Raptor Watch Project which aims to reverse this trend. The introduction of reared game is a continuing trend in the area and this needs to be carefully managed to avoid damage to designated sites or other natural heritage interests.

A number of Deer Management Groups have adopted collaborative Deer Management Plans (DMPs), that integrate and coordinate deer control policy and guidance throughout each Group area. Upper Deeside is one of several areas where this is in place. Work is underway to consider a number of designated sites to assess the level of damage, as defined by the Deer Act, from deer grazing. If a site is damaged, a resolution is agreed with owners and this is often through the mechanism of a DMP. A joint agency fencing policy has also been approved which recognises the need, in some situations, for fencing as a means of encouraging regeneration of woodland. Any deer fencing proposals supported by public funding will require mitigation of its impact on other interests (e.g. designated sites, road safety or important landscapes).

Recreation

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gives greater rights for land ownership and public access, and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code guides the new access rights and responsibilities. The Speyside Way Long Distance Route (LDR) has now been extended to the Aviemore, an alternative spur to Craigellachie is being considered due to erosion, and many settlements have,
at least, partial local footpath networks. Accessibility generally continues to improve, both through path projects like the Eastern Cairngorms Access Project and initiatives like Hillphones.

**Conservation Policy and Legislation**

The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act came into force in Scotland in 2004, and places a biodiversity duty on all public bodies. There has also been a review of National Nature Reserves (NNRs), leading to changes in the suite of sites. A major round of investment in NNR infrastructure and management planning is also underway, improving accessibility for visitors.

**Built Development**

A programme of planning reform has been underway since 2002, including passage of The Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006, and the development of a National Planning Framework (1 & 2) whose national priorities must be reflected in development plans. This provides a change of focus to a more development plan-led system. The Scottish Government is rationalising the Scottish Planning Policy and National Planning Policy series into a single statement of national planning policy. The new consolidated Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) will be published in late 2009. This is likely to affect future development planning in the North East Glens.

The Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive was implemented in Scotland in 2006, placing a requirement on all public sector bodies to assess the environmental implications of all new plans, programmes and strategies.

During the last 5 years, mobile phone masts have continued to appear across the area, albeit at a reducing rate. Housing development in Strathspey is and will probably continue to be a significant issue in terms of volume, location and design. With the National Park Authority now exercising their call in powers, it does appear as though natural heritage interests are gaining a higher and more consistent significance.

The Scottish Government has a target to generate 50% of energy from renewables sources by 2020. This is supported by national planning guidance SPP6: Renewable Energy, which is intended to help guide renewable energy developments in Scotland by directing each local authority to develop plans for renewable energy development in their area. Wind farm proposals have increased greatly, mainly around Auchenblae and Keith.

**Climate Change**

Our understanding of climate change is improving. An increase in winter rainfall and/or extreme rainfall events is also becoming apparent and this is leading to demands for better protection of communities from the effects of flooding. This presents either a threat or an opportunity to the natural heritage, depending on whether sustainable management is followed rather than a reliance on hard engineering, for example where whole catchments are managed to accommodate flooding. Within the floodplains on the main rivers within North East Glens flooding does appear to be occurring more frequently, and often at some considerable distance downstream from this area. The Scottish Climate Change Act sets out clear and demanding Scottish emissions targets. A Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Framework is also under development.
A number of Objectives and Actions refer to agri-environment schemes, positive management agreements for work to benefit designated sites, and the Woodland Grants Scheme. **RDC – Rural Priorities** now provide the key source of integrated support for land managers, and embrace almost all the funding under these previous schemes. This will include funding for works to enhance landscapes, access and habitat networks, for scrub restoration, and for positive management on SSSIs and European sites.

**Objective 1 – To promote multi purpose management of the forest resource, with emphasis on maintaining and enhancing the predominantly native character of the forest, while increasing the natural heritage value of non-native woods**

**Amend 1st Action:** Immediately after the bulleted point add a new, first line which reads... **continue to utilise developing techniques and management tools such as BEETLE (Biological and Environmental Evaluation Tools for Landscape Ecology).**

**Objective 2 – To maintain and improve the quality of freshwater habitats (including rivers, burns, lochs and mires) and promote responsible use of water bodies for outdoor recreation**

In light of the introduction of the Water Framework Directive:

**Amend 1st Action:** Implement the Water Framework Directive, through Area Advisory Groups and Area Management Plans for the South Esk, Spey and Dee. Within the framework of River Basin Planning, include strategic approaches for:

**New Action:** Raise awareness of natural flood management techniques

**Objective 3 – To maintain the extent and diversity of moorland habitats, including heathland, blanket bog and scrub, and the animal communities dependent on them**

1st and 3rd Actions – should now be medium term.