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 **West Central Belt 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 **Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park** was designated in 2002, and includes much of the north-east part of the area in its boundaries. Further information about the National Park is available at [www.lochlomond-trossachs.org](http://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org).

The Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) has co-ordinated the development of a number of Plans and Strategies for the Park. The most important of these is the National Park Plan. The Plan sets out a 25 year vision, a set of long-term Strategic Objectives, and also a 5-year prioritised Action Plan to be delivered by the Park Authority and its partners, including SNH. The Plan is consistent with the relevant themes of this updated West Central Belt 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 the delivery of wider social, economic and cultural objectives.

In addition to the Park Plan, the Loch Lomond & Trossachs 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 this Update where relevant.

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**Key influences on the Natural Heritage**

### 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. 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.

There has been significant development pressure in West Central Belt over the last 5 years, including infrastructure, housing and wind farm proposals. Pressure is likely to intensify further as transport infrastructure projects are implemented. Development of Riverside Inverclyde and the Clyde Corridor at Clyde Waterfront continues and the success of the 2014 Commonwealth Games bid heralds new activity in Clyde Gateway in urban regeneration. Where new housing development is increasing in the countryside, the challenge is to ensure sensitive design and siting.

Major transport infrastructure projects are underway which seek to contribute to increases in population and economic activity in the area. These include the completion of the motorway network with work on the M74 extension, upgrading of the A8 and A80 to motorway standard east of Glasgow, removing the bottleneck at the Raith junction on the M74 and building the Glasgow Airport rail link. New hovercraft services and ferry services are proposed in the Firth of Clyde. The Airdrie-Bathgate rail link will also be implemented.

The Scottish Government has a target to generate 50% of energy from renewables sources by 2020. This is supported by national planning guidance

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**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. There have been a substantial number of commercial-scale, onshore wind farm applications in the area, predominantly in the Whitelee Forest, Gargunnock Hills and Renfrewshire Hills. This is resulting in a change to the character of the landscape. The number of applications is expected to remain high. Applications for single/small turbines are increasing, particularly in lowland and urban areas. Offshore wind farms and wave power are also expected, including proposals in the Firth of Clyde.

Lack of capacity in drainage infrastructure is seen as holding back development in the east end of Glasgow, and in addressing this the Glasgow Strategic Drainage Scheme offers opportunities for concerted sustainable urban drainage schemes, deculverting and resultant biodiversity gains.

### People and Settlements

The Government’s priorities for rural development are reflected in a set of regional Rural Priorities under the Scottish Rural Development programme (SRDP) 2007-1013. This includes a set of priorities for the Clyde and Ayrshire regions and is likely to affect future land use in this area.

The value of greenspace is increasingly recognised. Greenspace Scotland has pioneered this with national and local partners and a higher profile has been secured. Greenspace initiatives have expanded in Glasgow and the Clyde Valley (GCV) under the aegis of the GCV Green Network Partnership. Under the National Planning Framework (NPF2), the Scottish Government has recognised that “the creation of a Central Belt Green Network will complement improvements in rail, road and communications infrastructure...” This is likely to continue and links to health improvement are being made.

Fresh Water and Coasts

The Scottish Government is preparing a Scottish Marine Bill, which is expected to be in statute by 2010. The Bill will set a framework for integrated planning and management of Scotland’s Seas. A new system of marine planning is proposed, to be based on the principles of sustainable development and including planning at a Scottish Marine Region scale. Improvements to marine nature conservation provisions are also proposed, including new Marine Protected Areas, as well as streamlined licensing and enforcement and better coordination of marine data and science. A Scottish marine management organisation ‘Marine Scotland’ will coordinate many of these aspects as well as marine fisheries management. The Clyde is a pilot area under the Scottish Sustainable Marine Environmental Initiative (SSMEI), which are currently testing regional marine planning approaches. The possible role of existing Integrated Coastal Zone Management partnerships, including the Firth of Clyde Forum, in helping to deliver regional marine planning is currently being explored.

Following the review of the Common Fisheries Policy a new Regulation was agreed in 2002. Importantly, the Regulation includes objectives relating to ‘the precautionary approach in taking measures designed to protect and conserve living aquatic resources, to provide for their sustainable exploitation...’

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**Further information about the National Park**

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and to minimise the impact of fishing activities on marine ecosystems. The 2002 Regulation also provides for greater stakeholder involvement through the formation of Regional Advisory Councils (RACs). There are three RACs of particular relevance to Scotland: the North Sea RAC, the North Western Waters RAC and the Pelagic RAC. The process for the 2012 review of the CFP is currently underway.

In Scotland, the Sustainable Framework for Scottish Sea Fisheries and the Strategic Framework for Inshore Fisheries in Scotland have provided the context for the development of sustainable fisheries. In 2007 the Scottish Fisheries Council was established and Inshore Fishery Groups are to be set up around Scotland to improve regional management of Scotland’s inshore fisheries. These are expected to become the main fora for addressing fishery management issues in Scotland.


**Recreation, Access and Education**

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 development of Core Path Plans is underway by local fora and a Core Path Plan for the National Park is in the process of being adopted. A number of new middle distance routes are being developed to complement existing long distance routes in the area.

There are a range of more formal recreational and leisure opportunities. This includes the 19 Country Parks and the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, while parts of the Pentland Hills Regional Park and the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park also lie within the West Central Belt. Some of the best know golf courses in Europe are situated here, such as the championship courses at Royal Troon and Turnberry. The traditional holiday locations along the Clyde coastline include seven bathing beaches identified under the EC Bathing Waters Directive. The Clyde itself provides one of the most popular locations for sailing in Britain and is catered for by the increasing number of marinas. More formal water sports facilities exist and are popular, including those at Loch Lomond, Strathclyde Park and Castle Semple Loch. The Lowland Canals provide a variety of land- and water-based recreational opportunities as well as linking east and west coasts to small craft. A proposed new canal provides a link for small craft from the Clyde (estuary) with the Loch Lomond for the first time.

**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 Forth 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 issues such as climate change – through biomass production for energy, carbon sequestration and forest adaptation – biodiversity, health and education.

Breaking the links between payments and production is likely to bring significant changes in West Central Belt, as farming responds more to market pressures, such as for energy crops (biodiesel and biofuel). Integrated habitat network modelling is being developed to inform the new applications and create more robust ecosystems, reversing the fragmentation of the natural heritage resource.

**Climate Change**

Our understanding of climate change is improving. A combination of sea level rise and increased storm surges in autumn and winter are thought likely to lead to an increase in the depth and area of tidal inundation, with consequences for coastal habitats. Where hard coastal defences prevent the spread of these habitats inland, their extent will reduce. Soft coasts are very dynamic and climate change is likely to add to the degree and rate of that change.

One of the possible impacts from a changing climate will be species dispersal. Currently the Central Belt is one of Scotland’s major barriers to the movement of species northwards, due to its dissection from east to west, and highlights the priority need for major connections between existing habitats through the large urban developments and intensive transport networks. The Scottish Climate Change Act sets out clear and demanding Scottish emissions targets. A Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Framework is also under development.

**Key Policy Drivers**

The key policy drivers, which will impact on the natural heritage over the coming years, should now include Nature Conservation Scotland (2004) Act; the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy; the Species Framework; The Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act; Scottish Climate Change Act; Scottish Marine Bill, Strategic Environmental Assessment; and the wider planning reform to include changes in local authority funding and a focus on outcome based agreements.
Objectives and Actions

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, and for positive management on SSSIs and European sites.

**Objective 1 – To ensure that developments complement and enhance local landscapes and wildlife, and use open space to create environments of value to the natural heritage**

The relevant Indicative Forestry Strategies have now been completed. SNH has developed a range of guidance to assist in the identification of natural heritage issues associated with wind farm development and to guide the assessment of developments.

**Amend 8th Action: remove ‘prepare’**

**New Action: Contribute to the delivery of the GCV Structure Plan Green Network Programme and the Central Scotland Green Network**

**Objective 3 – To maintain and enhance urban greenspace**

**Amend 1st Action: Develop open space audits and strategies and provide urban greenspace networks through strategic projects (e.g. GfC).**

**Objective 4 – To create opportunities for managed access to, and enjoyment of, the countryside and coast, close to where people live**

**Amend 5th Action: Continue to support The Scottish Outdoor Access Code**

**Amend 6th Action: Replace ‘Establish’ with ‘Support’**

**Amend 8th Action: should be medium term**

**Objective 6 – To allow freshwater and coastal systems to function as naturally as possible**

**New Action: Implement proposals for new marine protected areas, improved species protection and marine planning measures to ensure these provide effective protective mechanisms for the natural heritage of coasts and seas. These measures will be informed by survey and monitoring of the condition of marine habitats and species.**

**New Action: Maintain (and where necessary reduce) fishing capacity and fishing effort within levels set by target stocks and the wider marine environment, underpinned by a sustainable ecosystem-based approach.**

**New Action: Encourage both local and international marketing of sustainably produced, fresh, quality produce.**

In light of the introduction of the Water Framework Directive:

**Amend 1st Action: Implement the Water Framework Directive through Area Advisory Groups and the production of Area Management Plans, as part of River Basin Management Plans (RBMP). Within the framework of River Basin Planning, this should address: (maintain original list)**

In light of measures underway to address flood risk management in Scotland:

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

**Objective 7 – To improve the biodiversity and landscape quality of the managed countryside**

A National Park Biodiversity Action Plan is in the process of being adopted.

**New Action: Implement actions for species to meet the objectives of the Species Action Framework**

This Update and all the National and Local Prospectuses can be viewed at [www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk)

Front cover: Looking east over the River Clyde and the Erskine Bridge towards Glasgow. © P&A Macdonald/SNH

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