



Jan-Feb 2023

NPE Bulletin

A Message from Andrew McCloy, NPE Chair:

"The Government's recently-published Environmental Improvement Plan contained some positive commitments, most notably building on the success of FiPL and taking some of the Landscapes Review recommendations forward. But, as others noted, there was scant mention of National Parks and the role we already play in nature recovery and public engagement, nor how the panacea of green finance will pay our day to day bills. We need to be bolder and smarter in getting our message across to Government; and while overt lobbying and PR might not come naturally to some of us, it's clear that it has to be our focus now if National Parks are to assume a more strategic national role - and secure the resources that go with it."

Meetings & correspondence

- **APPG for National Parks:** following the postponement of the last APPG in November and a planning session with Sir Gary Streeter, Chair of the APPG, the next meeting will be 7th March, entitled: *'National Parks: our offer to the nation'*. Minister Trudy Harrison has accepted our invitation to speak along with Richard Benwell, CEO of Wildlife and Countryside Link, and outdoor enthusiast/advocate Charlotte Ditchburn. We are aiming to launch our new infographic, highlighting some of the key benefits that National Parks bring.
- **Landscapes, Parks and Trails Partnership (LPT):** we were pleased to see the Partnership mentioned in the EIP, though the budget attached to the Partnership has yet to be signed off by the Secretary of State. Two workshops are taking place in February relating to Partnership workstreams: nature recovery, and equality, diversity & inclusion. Specialists from all of the partners will be joining, to brainstorm draft objectives for the Partnership under these headings.
- **Letters to Ministers and parliamentarians:** we have recently written to Rachel Reeves MP, Shadow Chancellor and Alex Sobel MP, Shadow Defra Minister, introducing them to NPE and inviting them to the Yorkshire Dales. We had a positive response from Mark Spencer, Defra Minister, stating his support for FiPL and expressing his thanks to National Parks team for the "valuable contributions" they have made to the programme. He has also welcomed our invitation to visit a National Park.

- **NPE Board:** we were pleased to hear from Jim McMahon, Labour MP for Oldham West and Royton, at our board meeting in January, while on a visit to Dartmoor. This was an opportunity for us to set out our priorities and also hear his, which included access to nature, the right to roam and the water industry. Defra's Sion McGeever also attended and suggested that a Government announcement relating to the Landscapes Review is due soon. The next NPE Board meeting is on Thursday 8th June, venue tbc.
- **ENPOG:** at the January meeting, we had a presentation from the Princes Countryside Fund on partnership working and their Farm for the Future programme. Further updates on our priorities later in this bulletin.

Key events & activities

- **New staff:** we welcome our new **Strategic Engagement Manager** Deborah Brookes, who will be working with partners across all the protected landscapes, including National Parks, AONBs, and National Trails. She'll be leading for NPE on the development of DEFRA's new National Landscape, Parks and Trails Partnership (as mentioned earlier) and also supporting NPE priorities. We also welcome our new **Strategic Lead for Nature Recovery**. Helen Byron will be joining us on a short term contract to work on National Parks role in delivering our offer for nature recovery. Helen brings a wealth of experience from the RSPB, AONBs and elsewhere.

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Spotlight

Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP): as mentioned above, the EIP was published at the end of January. NPE attended the Ministerial launch event and published an initial media statement, as well as social media activities and more in-depth articles on LinkedIn. The inclusion of an extension to FiPL in the plan is a huge success - a real testament to the hard work of lead NPO for sustainable farming Kevin Bishop, and colleagues from across the National Parks who have been supporting, delivering and promoting the Programme. Other key elements include investment in the new Landscape Partnership, a commitment to strengthening Management Plans and reference to the Access for All funding. However, with the exception of private green finance and using the levers of farm policy, it's unclear where the balance of cost will come from to fund delivery of the Plan. With our own figures indicating the cost of achieving 120,000 hectares running to £800 million, it's important the ambition is matched with the means to achieve it.

Key Events & activities

continued

- **Communications Plans:** we have finalised our topline strategy, and are engaging with Heads of Coms across the National Parks in England. We will be working closely with them to ensure a collaborative approach to the crucial months ahead, building the case for increasing support and resources for National Parks.
- **Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB):** NPE worked with CNP to provide briefings and coms activities around the 2nd Reading in the Lords on 17th January. Several Peers referenced National Parks, particularly in relation to implementation of Glover, including Baroness Willis, Lord Randall and Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, who will be taking forward amendments from CNP. In her response, the Minister did not address the specific issues raised during the debate regarding National Park purposes and Glover, but is open to meeting people to discuss any issues not covered. The Lords Committee stage begins on 20th February, and we are discussing next steps with CNP.
- **Nature Recovery:** as discussed previously, our work is continuing through the our Strategic Lead Helen. Ali Barnes, Lead NPO, is continuing to co-ordinate the various strands on Nature Recovery being pursued through the Landscape Partnership, Protected Landscape targets, EIP and 30x30. This will aim to ensure that National Parks are front and centre for delivering nature recovery.
- **Climate Leadership:** Chris Fairbrother, Landscape and Biodiversity Strategy Lead for the South Downs, and Jo Swiers from NPE are meeting with Natural England to discuss possible funding for the next stage of our climate change work. It is hoped this will build on the work carried out by Small World Consulting around carbon baselines.
- **Sustainable Farming and land management:** as referenced earlier, the extension of FIPL until March 2025 is a very positive outcome for National Parks in England. We will be building on this work in the coming months, and are aiming to use the summer APPG, due to take place some time in June, to focus on our asks.

- **Social Media highlights:** on 31st January, we tweeted from the launch of the EIP, and as highlighted in the *Spotlight* section in this Bulletin. We used social media to raise our profile as part of the narrative, including LinkedIn, which provides a good space to share more detailed analysis of key themes. We utilised social media during the **LURB debate** to include messaging about strengthening National Park purposes, and produced a more detailed blog, setting out our views on the importance of including National Parks in this Bill. Over the last few months, we also highlighted activities across the NPAs tackling the biodiversity crisis. We used **Cop15** as a hook to showcase fantastic initiatives like the South Downs **Re:Nature** campaign, and the extensive work tackling **Himalayan balsam** in Dartmoor. We also celebrated **International Volunteers Day**, reflecting on the crucial role volunteers play in supporting the work of National Parks.

- **Consultation responses:** we submitted a response from NPE to the Forestry Commission Review of Consultation Procedures. We called for efficiencies and streamlining where possible, and avoidance of duplication to get good and timely outcomes.



Did you know?.....41,000
volunteer days have been
supported by National Park Authorities in
England in 2021/2022



Sphagnum moss, Peak District, © Moors for the Future

UK Collaboration

- **National Parks Partnerships:** following a General Meeting including vote with the 15 NPAs on 20th January, NPP is working with DEFRA and alongside the NAAONB on the finalisation of the Grant Agreement to fund a 2 year programme of work focussing on private finance into nature. This grant agreement for private finance will work alongside the new Landscape Parks and Trails Partnership, with NPP also participating in 'nature' themed workshops and thinking as part of the LPT Partnership activity.
- **NPUK:** NPE and the NPUK Comms Unit will be coordinating Discover National Parks Fortnight from April 3-16 with the theme nature recovery and conservation. In February the second phase of National Parks Green Pathways goes live featuring Green Leaders - those we are supporting to deliver outdoor learning experiences and inspiration to young people. DEFRA has been liaising with National Parks on appropriate ways of celebrating the Coronation on May 6, reflecting His Majesty The King's longstanding interest in landscape, nature, and rural affairs. Funding for the UK Comms Unit concludes in June and a review of collective communications activities, addressing NPUK, NPP and NPE, has started. Tom Hind is representing NPE on this Review Panel, which also includes UK Comms Unit leadership, Chief Executives from Scotland and Wales, and a Head of Communications from each of the nations. Gordon Watson of Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority is representing NPP.



Volunteers clearing invasive privet at Seaford Head, East Sussex; © Roger Kiernan