

# ENPAA Position Statement



## Climate Change

Climate Change represents a serious threat and challenge to the special qualities of England's National Parks and their communities and our environment more generally. We believe urgent action is needed to reduce emissions, to adapt to those changes in our climate that are inevitable, and to raise awareness amongst residents, visitors and decision makers of the effects of climate change on these special areas. The National Park Authorities of England are committed to do their bit and becoming carbon neutral, as part of a wider co-ordinated response to climate change.

### **England's National Parks**

Our National Parks are a truly national treasure. They are also living landscapes peopled by farmers, others who manage the land and people living in rural communities. Each of the nine National Parks in England has a National Park Authority. These are independent bodies, funded by central Government. National Parks have two purposes, to:

- conserve and enhance their natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage; and
- promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of National Parks by the public.

In carrying out these purposes, they have a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park.

### **Climate Change and National Parks in England**

While the climate is a dynamic system that changes over time, human influence is having a profound effect on the rate of change. There is considerable consensus that rising emissions of greenhouse gases are leading to significant unmanaged changes. Knowledge about what the precise effects will be is still growing. Indeed, managing the National Parks within an environment of considerable uncertainty is likely to become the norm.

The effects on National Parks in England are likely to be varied and represent both threats and opportunities. More work needs to be done to identify these in more detail and the National Park Authorities (NPAs) support Natural England's strategic outcome to provide a 'secure environmental future'. Some effects are likely to include:

- increased risk of fire and erosion of sensitive habitats;

- coastal re-alignment caused by rising sea levels leading to inundation;
- increased flooding and erosion along coasts and river corridors;
- changes in patterns of tourism caused by changing temperature and rainfall;
- increased erosion to paths caused by changing visitor behaviour and environmental conditions;
- loss of inter-tidal habitats;
- threats to wildlife habitats and ‘protected species’ unable to adapt to the drier summers and changing climate;
- an increase in some species (like bracken) and decline in others including the potential for local extinctions;
- flooding, subsidence and erosion leading to structural damage of transport infrastructure, traditional buildings, and archaeological features;
- threats to traditional farming caused by altered growing conditions for crops and livestock;
- opportunities to grow new crops;
- increased pressure on water resources (especially from farming) from drier summers;
- greater abstraction of water leading to the effects of diffuse pollution on wildlife to be magnified; and
- changes to the distribution of different trees species that contribute to the landscape.

The effects of climate change will have a cumulative impact on the National Parks that will go beyond the isolated changes noted above.

The response to climate change must be carefully managed or the special qualities of the National Parks might be degraded from inside and beyond their boundaries. Examples include large scale wind developments, or inappropriate planting of forests to act as ‘carbon sinks’.

## **ENPAA’s Position**

The National Park Authorities are committed to doing their bit to tackle climate change. Protecting the special qualities of the National Parks from the effects of climate change and helping them to adapt (where possible) is a central element of fulfilling our statutory purposes, as is helping others to understand how they can help too.

Our collective aim is to move towards a situation where we have National Parks that are ‘Carbon Neutral’. As part of this aim, the National Park Authorities (in keeping with the rest of the Government estate) are committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2012.

The National Park Authorities already contribute to tackling climate change in a large number of ways.

### Working with land managers

National Park Authorities actively influence the management of 5% of England's land area, and raise awareness of environmental, social and economic concerns threatening these fragile areas.

The NPAs help land managers to support the management of large carbon sinks. The peat contained within upland landscapes found in seven of England's National Parks is huge. The Peak District, alone, holds 22 Mt C. If these peat uplands are eroded this will significantly undermine efforts elsewhere to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide. Good management of soils in all areas will also be important.

The National Park Authorities aim to support farming practices in upland and lowland landscapes that protect this resource and deliver many other benefits. A number are involved in projects to restore upland moorlands and lowland valley mires. They are also helping farmers to promote local food produced to high environmental standards, thereby reducing air miles.

We will also support appropriate woodland planting initiatives as part of landscape restoration schemes.

### Planning for a low carbon future

National Park Authorities are planning authorities, and through this role have been encouraging the use of small scale renewable energy schemes and sustainable transport that uses less energy. We support the energy hierarchy, of seeking to reduce energy consumption; improving energy efficiency; increasing the contribution of renewables; and making those fossil fuels that are burnt more efficient.

National Park Authorities will:

- actively support projects that promote energy conservation, energy efficiency, and small scale renewable projects that are both sympathetic in design and for local use;
- encourage planning to reduce carbon emissions through the orientation, design and location of new development;
- seek to reduce the need to travel and the use of more sustainable forms of transport, where possible; whilst also
- object vigorously to proposals that damage the special qualities of the National Parks.

### Supporting local community action

Through the Sustainable Development Fund, the Authorities have been able to provide vital financial support to schemes that explore ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We will support, where possible, community inspired schemes that achieve this, including through local Energy Saving Companies (ESCOs).

Moving to a low carbon economy brings with it opportunities. NPAs wish to support initiatives that deliver economic benefits to rural economies from low carbon practices or technology – providing they are consistent with protecting the qualities of the National Park.

It will be important for economic, social and environmental reasons to understand the inter-action between visitor behaviour and environmental capacity with changing climatic conditions. NPAs will assess the effects of climate change on tourism in their area, and support green tourism practices that limit emissions or raise awareness of climate change.

#### Raising awareness on climate change

Over 75 million people visit England's National Parks every year. Through visitor centres; Ranger guided walks, their websites and education centres; the Authorities are able to highlight key points about climate change to visitors. And through publications for local residents are able to reinforce these messages.

National Park Authorities will:

- continue to encourage the use of public transport by visitors and local communities;
- explain to visitors and residents how the National Park will be affected by climate change and what they can do to help; and
- support demonstration and research projects that assist with this task within their area.

#### National Park Management Plans

The National Park Management Plan will be a key mechanism for ensuring all those whose operations affect the National Park are committed to take action on climate change. We will, working with others:

- seek to obtain robust assessments of the effects of climate change on the special qualities of the National Parks;
- include information on climate change within State of the National Park Reports;
- adopt a risk management approach to the uncertainties of the future environment;
- include policies on climate change mitigation and adaptation in Management Plans when they come to be reviewed;
- assess the degree to which the current or draft Management Plan will deliver a carbon neutral National Park, and identify further measures that will assist in this aim; and
- report annually to Members of the National Park Authority on progress being made (with partners) to deliver reductions within the National Park.

## Demonstrating solutions

The English National Park Authorities believe they have a key role to play in demonstrating how through more sustainable lifestyles, it is possible to reduce carbon emissions.

A number of Authorities are using renewable energy to power their own buildings, or transport (eg. vehicles run on bio-fuels, or the 'Ra' England's first solar powered boat).

We will aim to reduce carbon emissions within the National Park Authorities by:

- reducing energy consumption;
- assessing the scope for reducing car mileage through the greater use of car sharing, car pools, public transport, and other alternatives like working arrangements; and
- improving the environmental performance of the vehicle fleet of the NPAs; and
- agreeing top level indicators that can be used across NPAs to monitor activity.

## Adapting to inevitable changes ahead

Changes will continue to occur because of the delayed effects of greenhouse gas emissions that have already been emitted into the atmosphere. NPAs have an important role in relation to adapting to this change and providing opportunities to ensure there are robust environmental ecosystems that are resilient to climate change. We will:

- assess what changes may be required in an uncertain future to protect the qualities of the National Park (from open landscapes to the historic environment) from the effects of climate change;
- adopt a landscape scale approach to managing wildlife that helps wildlife adapt, and minimises losses; and
- consider if measures are needed to support the social and economic well being of communities longer term from the effects of climate change, and to make the most of opportunities where they exist.

## Monitoring and review

ENPAA will review this Position Statement, and progress towards achieving it, on an annual basis.

## **Supporting action**

National Park Authorities are committed to doing their bit, but must be supported in the task. It is imperative that others with an opportunity to make a difference and sometimes greater resources do likewise.

We look to Government to:

- recognise the valuable contribution of National Parks in protecting large reservoirs of carbon;
- provide the significant funds required to help NPAs deliver on this agenda;
- publish a Policy Position Statement on Climate Change that reflects the potential for reducing energy demand and promotes micro-renewables without reducing the protection afforded to National Parks through planning; and
- support National Park Authorities with establishing the baseline data on carbon emissions and other information necessary to measure progress.

We also look to:

- the Regional Assemblies to support the National Park Authorities planning policies;
- Regional Spatial Strategies to seek to reverse the fragmentation of landscapes, and to restore and enhance the wider countryside in order to allow species to move in response to climate change;
- the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) to assist the Authorities in assessing the needs of rural communities in terms of changing patterns of tourism, and the potential for low carbon economic developments;
- the RDAs and Utilities to support work by NPAs in promoting small scale, community-owned renewables;
- Natural England to work with NPAs on supporting land management techniques that protect carbon sinks, and adapt to a changing climate;
- the tourism sector to engage with NPAs in promoting green tourism initiatives that reduce emissions and protect National Park qualities; and
- all other bodies and local organisations whose work contribute to the implementation of National Park Management Plans to actively support this agenda.

The English National Park Authorities Association (ENPAA) provides a collective voice for the National Parks. This statement sets out their shared position on Climate Change. Each Authority works to implement the Management Plan for its area, and so each National Park Authority will need to implement this and other policies in ways that are compatible with this plan and appropriate to local circumstance.

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