

ENCLOSURE 10

Issues affecting Brecon Beacons National Park Authority resulting from the Environment Agency 'Strategic Plan for Water Related Recreation in Wales 2008'.

Richard Ball, Access Officer.

Background

The Environment Agency were commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government to produce a strategic plan for water related recreation in Wales (**Annex I**) and, in conjunction with Brighton University, the plan was published in June 2008. The strategic plan is not a statutory document but, at its launch, the Minister (Jane Davidson) expressed her strong support for it and a desire to see it implemented.

At the PAROW meeting on 8th July 2008 members requested that they receive a report summarising the main elements of the plan and to discuss the implications of it. Currently although the Authority has a remit to promote enjoyment and understanding of the special qualities of the area there has been little active promotion of water related recreation within the Park over the past 10 years at least. (Apart from a joint promotion of angling by the 3 Welsh NPAs last year). The following report attempts to draw out the main issues covered in the plan and is therefore only a brief summary of the Plan. The final paragraph also explains what steps officers are taking as a result of the Plan.

The 'Strategic Plan for Water Related Recreation in Wales 2008'

The Plan which is attached at **Annex I** is based on two sources of information collated in **Stage I** of the development of the plan:

- the **demand** for WRR, informed by projections about social change in Wales and the economic, social and health benefits of WRR which are also reflected in Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) policy,
- the **supply** of water and facilities for WRR, based on an inventory of the water resources that exist in Wales and their current and proposed recreational uses.

These are used in **Stage 2** to identify current gaps in provision. **Stage 3** involves addressing the gaps in provision by strategic initiatives and actions (initiatives that need to be implemented to fill the gaps) and opportunities (initiatives that would supplement the priorities and improve WRR).

Stage 4 of the plan considers how the priorities and opportunities might be provided, with a monitoring and evaluation loop to check progress in addressing the gaps.

In broad terms, The Plan states that 'there not reliable enough to draw clear conclusions on either recent changes in participation or in likely future demand for individual sporting activities'.

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The plan however has taken 'gaps' identified within other plans (such as 'Climbing Higher') and WAG policies and used these to partly identify 'gaps' in WRR provision. Thus the plan states, for example, that: 'WRR initiatives seeking to increase participation must target low participation social groups and areas, especially those in urban/Communities First areas'.

The Plan identifies potential benefits such as social inclusion, Health benefits and environmental protection.

In it's response to the consultation to this Plan BBNPA stated that: 'There is a lack of empirical evidence to identify what demand there may be for activities and proposals made in the plan. We have a real concern that this may lead to the strategy proposing supply led rather than demand led developments and opportunities. Additional research is therefore required into demand for WRR.' The Plan now acknowledges that more research is required.

A number of Strategic Initiatives, Actions and Opportunities are identified;

- SI1: Creating a robust evidence base upon which to plan for WRR
- SI2: Information and Marketing
- SI3: Safety and Liability issues
- SI4: Sharing Good Practice
- SI5: Developing a strategic regional agenda for WRR
- SI6: Celebrating Culture and Language

Initiatives SI1 – SI4 seem entirely sensible and worthwhile.

SI5 includes the proposal that Mid Wales (Brecon) should be developed as a Paddlesports Hub. The plan states that:

'There is potential around Brecon to provide for most paddlesport disciplines, using the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, Llangorse Lake and the Rivers Wye and Usk. The BCU centre at Symonds Yat should be included in the network, while there are significant commercial interests and outfitters in the Glasbury and Hay area, to provide equipment and training'

Flowing from the Strategic Initiatives are a number of Strategic Actions such as :

Improving the use of reservoirs has been highlighted as a strategic priority (SA2). Some reservoirs occupy a strategic location for attracting significant numbers of users, for a range of activities. In these cases, steps should be taken to ensure that the full potential is developed. Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water (DCWW) is willing to receive approaches from recreational users to use/manage recreation on their reservoirs.

It is suggested that there is a significant opportunity to extend the recreational canal network in Wales.

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It is stated that there is a considerable property estate owned by the public sector in Wales³⁶. WAG is keen to encourage access to this land where it is practicable and beneficial to do so. Closer examination may reveal that some of these sites are unsuitable for legal or other practical reasons.

There are major opportunities to secure additional water resources for WRR. It is important that a full inventory is prepared, and that initiatives are monitored, to ensure that the full benefits of public and quasi-public ownership are realised. Monitoring could be led by a single body, but it will need a partnership.

Steps should be taken to identify and develop sustainable new resources *where significant numbers of people can be given the opportunity of enjoying WRR*. While there is a need to consider how to overcome barriers to access, particularly in areas of social deprivation, the emphasis should be on the quality and quantity of opportunities.

There is considerable demand for both long and short distance travel on moving waters, for a range of activities, particularly on sections of river that are near population centres. These are often not the rivers most in demand for white water experiences, but are those that are capable of supporting use by people with a range of skill levels (subject to suitable instruction and guidance).

Community First Angling is a proposed to develop coarse angling linked to Community First Areas. Whilst many angling clubs and federations are actively involved in attracting marginalised and excluded people into angling, the purpose of this initiative would be to address inclusivity and deprivation issues amongst young people and disabled people in particular. Given that rivers throughout most of Wales are mainly used for game fishing it is proposed to focus attention on the development of still water and canal coarse fisheries, which have the advantage of being accessible throughout the year.

Delivery and Funding are considered in the final stage of the plan and it is recommended that cross agency working will be required (including the private sector) to implement the actions. The NPAs are identified as partners in some of this work.

The Welsh Assembly Government has made £400,000 available during 2008 – 09 with a likelihood that it will also be available for the following 2 years to implement the Plan. Officers are working on submitting a bid to the ‘Splash Challenge fund’ that will allow certain elements of the strategy to be implemented in the Park. (Likely to include, development of WRR ‘Forum’, further research, information and interpretation, working in partnership with DC/WW and Forestry Commission Wales at the reservoirs adjacent to the A470, managing Talybont reservoir and environs as an area for quiet recreation etc.).

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Recommendation

1. That members note the report.
2. That members support the bid to the Splash Challenge fund
 - a) **Financial, Staffing and Improvement implications:**
If the bid to the Splash Challenge Fund is successful this would result in employment of 0.5 FTE project officer on a fixed term contract. The cost of the post would be entirely covered by the grant.
 - b) **Equality Issues:** None
 - c) **Sustainability Appraisal:** None
 - d) **Human Rights:** No implications
 - e) **Background Papers:** *A Strategic Plan for Water Related Recreation in Wales 2008*
 - f) **Corporate Objective:** 5,12