



Research, Evaluation and Monitoring

Figure 1.3 depicts in a simplistic fashion the basic steps involved in the management process. This chapter summarizes the steps necessary to complete the process, following on from developing actions and implementing them. This encompasses ongoing monitoring and evaluation not only of the priority actions needed to achieve the desired outcomes (and ultimately the vision for the National Park) but also of the Park's state. Whilst there is value in viewing parts of the management process from a linear perspective, it is best thought of as a circular process because of its iterative nature (see Section 9.4).

Park management is on-going and never-ending. There is always something to learn from past activities and decisions. Today's management agenda may not be relevant to Tomorrow's circumstances and drivers of change. Visions and aims for the Park's future will change, too. The results from the actions of this Plan will influence the future state of the Park, potentially shifting the vision and therefore the priorities. For these reasons, the Plan is a static representation of a dynamic process, requiring research, monitoring and periodic evaluation and review to ensure that management keeps pace with an ever-changing world.

10.1. Research

To manage any system properly, one has to understand what the state or condition of the resource is (a baseline) and have knowledge of how it has fluctuated over time (trends). It is also important to know what key factors (drivers of change) are likely to influence the resource of concern and how the resource might respond to these factors or to management actions (often represented in conceptual models). Unfortunately, managers very often have limited data and information to help inform decision-making.

Scientifically-sound research provides the baseline and trend data necessary for managers to understand the state of the Park's resources, and allows managers to evaluate how

these resources are responding or may respond to change, including management activity. Research is, therefore, a vital component to the management process.

The breadth of topics discussed in the Management Plan and the number of organizations involved in Park management dictates that existing data sets are compiled and analysed so that they are available to decision makers in a useful format. Relevant research also needs to be coordinated and focused on the priorities identified in the Management Plan to make the most effective and efficient use of resources. This includes data collection and data sharing activities. There are a number of universities, agencies and organisations who conduct research in and around the Park but do not share their information and findings with the Local Authorities or the BBNPA. Greater coordination will maximize the value of research to a range of partners and make the results easily accessible to all with an interest.

Here, too, the BBNPA has a coordinating role to play, identifying and prioritizing research needs associated with the Management Plan and sharing the information that results from this research. Several research needs have been identified in the Plan and more are likely to result during the implementation (see Chapter 9) and monitoring (see Section 10.2 below) phases of this process. Research efforts can also help identify and develop indicators to be used in monitoring the state of the Park.

Where possible, research should also assist managers in gaining a better understanding of how drivers of change (see Chapter 5) are likely to impact the Park. In so doing, researchers and managers can work cooperatively to develop innovative approaches to mitigating for and adapting to these changes. Much of this work can be conducted in conjunction with and to the mutual benefit of the forthcoming Local Development Plan.

10.2. Evaluation and Monitoring

How does one know if the Park's Vision is still in sight? Are the outcomes attainable? Without monitoring and evaluation of the Plan's activities, there is no way of knowing whether the desired outcomes have been achieved or if the issues that were meant to be solved were actually exacerbated. All partners associated with the delivery of the priority actions in this Management Plan have a role to play in monitoring progress and the state of the Park's resources. Evaluation and monitoring conducted by the BBNPA and its partners will comprise three forms:

- Annual reports summarizing progress being made toward the actions identified in the Action Plan;
- The statutory, five-year review of the National Park Management Plan and SEA objectives; and
- Periodic monitoring of the state of the Park's resources, published in the State of the Park Report.

10.2.1. Annual Reports

Again, given its coordinating role, the BBNPA is responsible for collating monitoring information with respect to the Park and its resources. To be of use to managers and decision makers, this information must be presented in a coherent form. Annual reports will be prepared by the BBNPA to help monitor progress toward completing the actions and achieving the outcomes. These reports will include the collective monitoring efforts of all partners, to the degree feasible. Under the Section 62(2) duty, there should be a clear understanding amongst partners that data relevant to National Park should be collected, analysed and updated by Park area. By the very nature of this task, annual monitoring will require collaboration and frequent communication among all of the Park's management partners. Annual monitoring reports will be separate from the BBNPA's organisational annual report, though there should be direct links to annual

reporting for the Local Development Plan.

Because of the varying scales at which change occurs and management interventions are implemented, progress toward some outcomes will be imperceptible over the course of a year's time. Other actions and outcomes may be monitored over a very short period. For example restoration of peat bogs may be slow, but the installation of micro-scale hydroelectric structures may occur in months. For these reasons, only relevant action items from the Action Plan will be included in the annual reports. The distinction between long- and short-term reporting should be made clear in the reports. Long-term and broad-scale monitoring is more likely to be reported in the five-year review of the Management Plan and in the State of the Park Report.

10.2.2. Five-year Review and SEA Monitoring

The National Park Management Plan must be reviewed every five years. Because the Park's vision, aims and many of the strategic objectives operate on a 20-25 year timescale, these are likely to require only minor adjustment, if any, during the review process. However, many of the actions and some of the strategic objectives may have been completed or need to be refocused in light of changing issues, policies and drivers of change that have become more pertinent during the Plan period. It is also time to take stock of the success of the Plan's implementation.

To this end, the annual reports will inform the review of the National Park Plan at this stage. They will - through the monitoring and evaluation process - help to determine whether sufficient progress towards the long term vision has been made and whether the actions still require a particular focus within the next five year period. The priorities for action will change if the issue is no longer considered pressing, the outcomes have been successfully achieved or national policies dictate that resources be shifted elsewhere.

As part of the SEA process, monitoring of environmental and

sustainability objectives will be necessary, particularly of issues or actions raised in the Sustainability Appraisal Report. As per CCW Guidance, SEA monitoring should be incorporated within the overall Management Plan monitoring programme. If done properly, this integration of monitoring elements should conserve financial resources whilst improving the environmental soundness and sustainability of the Plan.

10.2.3. State of the Park Report

The State of the Park Report (SOPR) gives an indication of trends across the Brecon Beacons National Park in relation to: the Park's special qualities, environment and cultural assets; how well these are understood and enjoyed by the public; and the well-being of local communities.

Like the Management Plan, the SOPR relates to the Park area and its people, not just to the work of the BBNPA. The most recent State of the Park Report 2006 contains 23 indicators carefully chosen from the available data to evaluate changes in the condition of the Park over time. Long-term monitoring of trends from these or similar indicators will:

- Show whether policies in the Management Plan are being effective;
- Help identify key issues;
- Highlight areas where more information and research are required;
- Help target resources where they are most needed; and
- Support bids for funding.

Indicators within this SOPR will need to be reviewed and updated as appropriate to allow measurement of both the Plan objectives and the SEA objectives.

Hence, the SOPR is a critical component of the Management Plan process and will be updated periodically as part of its monitoring programme. By updating the SOPR approximately



Brecon



Houses in Brecon

every five years, it will aid in the review of the Management Plan, inform the SEA monitoring and assist in evaluating the implementation of the NPMP. According to CCW's National Park Management Plan Guidance (2006, para. 3.19), the SOPR should "develop a seamless link, through identified indicators, between the State of the Park Report, the Management Plan objectives, the SEA objectives and potentially aspects of the annual monitoring report for the Local Development Plan of the National Park."