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## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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### FOR DECISION

**Title: VOLUNTEER CAIRNGORMS**

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#### **Purpose**

To review the CNPA's support for more environmental volunteering opportunities and developing Volunteer Rangers.

#### **Recommendations**

##### **That the Board:**

- a) **Note the successful outputs of Volunteer Cairngorms to date;**
- b) **Agree that over the next 18 months we should continue to deliver the agreed pilot programme and ensure that the programme is sustainable thereafter.**

#### **Executive Summary**

Delivering more environmental volunteering opportunities and developing Volunteer Rangers are a key means of delivering National Park Partnership Plan. Volunteer Cairngorms is half way through a three year LEADER supported programme of work. This paper outlines the achievements to date, that in several areas exceeds those of the project plan, and discusses what is required to ensure that this work is sustainable.

## VOLUNTEER CAIRNGORMS – FOR DECISION

### Strategic Context

1. CNPA Board Paper of 11 December 2015 identified the opportunity to, ‘develop a Volunteer Ranger network to support the work of the existing services.’
2. Volunteering was further supported by National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) 2017 – 22 agenda for action 5e; ‘delivering more environmental volunteering opportunities and developing Volunteer Rangers.’
3. This work was also reflected in the NPPP visitor target; ‘support 30 Volunteer Rangers and 500 days of annual volunteering.’

### Project Development

4. Volunteer Cairngorms is a three year pilot programme, funded jointly by CNPA and LEADER, supporting and developing environmental volunteering opportunities in the Cairngorms National Park. Funding support from Leader covers the cost of supporting the Volunteer Rangers; training, clothing, transport, etc.
5. The project consists of three key strands:
  - a) Developing a Cairngorms National Park Volunteer Ranger scheme
  - b) Raising awareness of existing volunteering opportunities across the Cairngorms National Park
  - c) Supporting and developing new, community-based, environmental volunteering groups.
6. This paper summarises the work delivered to date at the ‘half way point’ of the LEADER funded element of this work.

### Project Delivery

7. Work to date has covered three related areas as detailed below:-

#### Cairngorms National Park Volunteer Rangers

8. Fourteen Volunteer Rangers have been formally ‘recruited’ following an appropriate application, interview and training process.
9. Volunteer Rangers are now active with six partner ranger services, all of whom provide an on-site orientation/induction as required to supplement the ‘core’ training to site-specific conditions:
  - a) FCS Glenmore;
  - b) Glenlivet Estate;
  - c) Highlife Highland;
  - d) Balmoral;
  - e) Angus Alive (Glen Doll);
  - f) Atholl Estates.

10. Work to date undertaken by Volunteer Rangers amounts to some 133 days with activities including:-
  - a) Wildlife monitoring and recording
  - b) Engaging with visitors on busier paths and trails, and in visitor centres
  - c) Path inspections, waymarking and maintenance
  - d) Practical conservation including managing invasive species, tree removal, building an otter holt
  - e) Guided walks, advocacy, supporting in the running of days for particular groups including sessions for those living with Alzheimer's
11. Annexes 1 and 2 summarise some of the key results of surveys recently undertaken with both Volunteer Rangers and partners. While there is still scope for improvement the feedback is overwhelmingly positive.

#### Raising awareness of existing volunteering opportunities

12. Three launch/awareness raising events have taken place across the CNP area (Boat of Garten, Braemar and Killiecrankie). Collectively, these:
  - a) Attracted 53 potential volunteers
  - b) Helped over 20 volunteers get involved with the 'give it a go' sessions
  - c) Shared information about opportunities with over 30 different groups and organisations
13. A subsection of the CNPA website now hosts a 'live' volunteering opportunities area which acts as a 'shop window' for information about specific opportunities to volunteer for nature and the environment across the CNP area. To date over 60 opportunities with 13 different organisations have been advertised on [www.cairngorms.co.uk/volunteers](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/volunteers)
14. An E-Newsletter is now circulated to a mailing list of 210 subscribers, with information about new opportunities to volunteer circulated regularly.
15. A Volunteer Cairngorms Twitter account is established, with over 380 followers, through which information is shared. See: <https://twitter.com/cnpvolunteer>. Cross-promotion is also taking place routinely across CNPA social media accounts.

#### Supporting and developing community volunteering

16. Two community groups are supported by Volunteer Cairngorms and are at different stages of development. They are both supporting Cairngorms communities to engage with nature and the environment through volunteering.
17. In partnership with Atholl Estates Ranger Service, Perth and Kinross Council Ranger Service and NTS Killiecrankie Ranger Service the 'Care for the Cairngorms: Perthshire' group has been established. This group undertakes environmental volunteering opportunities approximately every 2 weeks. In addition to the launch event, to date 6 community volunteering days have been held, involving 19 different volunteers to date. Volunteer Cairngorms has supported this group through:
  - a) Coordination of the three Ranger Services
  - b) Providing publicity and hosting a launch event

- c) Ongoing administrative and coordination support through the provision of a central point of publicity and online registration for interested volunteered (see [www.cairngorms.co.uk/volunteers](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/volunteers))
18. In partnership with Highlife Highland Ranger Service, 2 community volunteering days have been held at the Roche Moutonne site in Dulnain Bridge. This has resulted in 17 volunteer attendances. Over 200 trees have been planted, access has been improved and interpretation has been renovated, in addition to litterpicks being undertaken. Volunteer Cairngorms has supported this group through:
- a) Supporting the coordination, publicity and registration for the days
  - b) Supporting the delivery of the days including the provision of tools and equipment
  - c) Working towards forming a group which regularly meets and is supported by a CNP Volunteer Ranger, along with the location of key tools and equipment provided by Volunteer Cairngorms within Dulnain Bridge to be used as a tools hub for all groups and organisations.
19. The programme has also supported environmental volunteering through the lending of tools and equipment to environmental conservation groups, and through the development of regular staff volunteering opportunities.
20. Of the three areas of volunteer work this is the one that requires more support over the next period.

## Discussion

21. The feedback on the three way partnership of CNPA, volunteers and partners indicate that work to date has been very successful in encouraging a new group of people to support the long term National Park outcomes of making this; 'a special place for people and nature with natural and cultural heritage enhanced; and people enjoying the Park through outstanding visitor and learning experiences.' (Annex 1 & 2)
22. Annex 3 shows that the project is meeting the agreed aims of the LEADER programme.
23. The project has capacity to expand across the range of agreed activity but needs to ensure that the quality is maintained throughout. Moving forward there is a need to develop ways of expanding community volunteering and volunteering associated with cultural heritage.

## Recommendations

24. **That the Board:**
- a) **Note the successful outputs of Volunteer Cairngorms to date:**
  - b) **Agree that over the next 18 months we should continue to deliver the agreed pilot programme and ensure that the programme can continue to deliver thereafter.**

## Implications

25. Our experience to date has indicated that having successfully started the work the annual cost, post project, of maintaining volunteering with training, clothes, transport etc. will be some £10,000 per annum. This is affordable within current budgets with potential sponsorship opportunities further reducing this cost.

## Success Measures

26. The key measure is that the project will deliver NPPP visitor target; 'support 30 Volunteer Rangers and 500 days of annual volunteering'. However, in addition to this the work will continue to effectively survey both volunteers and partners to ensure that the work is delivering.

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**May 2018**

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## Annex I Survey of Volunteer Rangers

The survey was distributed to the first intake of Volunteer Rangers who have now been involved with the programme for 9 months. Of the 8 eligible Volunteer Rangers there were 6 respondents. Below is a selection of the feedback provided:-

Question	Score (/5)
Overall, to what extent has the programme met your expectations?	5
How would you rate the training available as part of the programme?	4.6
Overall, how would you rate the opportunities provided to volunteer as a Volunteer Ranger?	4.4
Overall, how would you rate the kit/equipment available as part of the programme?	4.2
Overall, how would you rate the clothing available as part of the programme?	3.6

The below provide some extracts of feedback illustrating positive aspects of the programme and areas for improvement, reproduced verbatim from the survey responses:-

### **What was good, what did you learn, what have you most enjoyed?**

Training: “Meeting the other volunteer rangers and park personnel; developing skills I would otherwise not have had a chance to learn; visiting the different locations in the park and seeing how they are managed in different ways”. “[Learning]...how the various organisations in the park fit together; crucial first aid skills that build confidence of dealing with an emergency situation (useful outwith the volunteer role); how to engage with the public i.e. with reference to the Outdoor Access code.”

Clothing/equipment: “The clothing is practical and of a high quality”.

Volunteering Activities: “Seeing the different areas of the park and wildlife, and learning more about them than I would have as a regular visitor. It's also rewarding to know that I am helping to protect the area and helping the public engage with the park.” “Great days outdoors, hopefully enhancing visitors' experience and leaving the environment in a better condition than we found it.”

### **What could have been improved? What have you least enjoyed?**

Training: “The Safety and Navigation in the outdoors course seemed to lack structure (although I understand the latest session was much improved).” “Some sessions arguably could have been condensed; perhaps any extra time could be used to conduct the on sight induction for where it was being held to allow those interested in volunteering there to get their hands dirty earlier!”

Clothing/Equipment: “[...] the sizing of the Keela clothing was poor”. “[...]women's cut and sizes would help us look less dwarfed!”

Volunteering Activities: “Some months I have struggled to match my availability with the opportunities which are available...”. “I'm conscious of some of the politics/ethics surrounding use of volunteers.” “Having to have two vols as a minimum as this has prevented me volunteering on some days. Some volunteering could be done by one person , such as trail checks.”

## Annex 2 Survey of Volunteer Cairngorms Partners

This survey was distributed to partners involved with Volunteer Cairngorms to understand the impact of the Volunteer Cairngorms programme. Ten respondents in total; six rangers, one manager and three other support roles. Below is a selection of the feedback provided:

Theme	Question	Score (/5)
Overall	To what extent has overall support from Volunteer Cairngorms met your expectations?	4.3
Volunteer Rangers	To what extent have Volunteer Rangers been of help to you in your work	4.2
	To what extent has involving Volunteer Rangers met your expectations	4.0
Awareness Raising and Promoting Opportunities	To what extent has advertising volunteering opportunities been a help to you?	3.8
	Could you comment on whether there has been any impact on volunteer numbers as a result?	3.2
	To what extent has advertising volunteering opportunities through Volunteer Cairngorms met your expectations?	3.3
Establishing Groups	To what extent has support from Volunteer Cairngorms helped in starting/running the volunteer group?	5.0
	To what extent has support from Volunteer Cairngorms met your expectations [in starting/running the volunteer group?]	4.7
Other	To what extent has [other] support from Volunteer Cairngorms met your expectations?	4.6

The below provide some extracts of feedback illustrating positive aspects of the programme and areas for improvement, reproduced verbatim from the survey responses:-

### Volunteer Rangers

What has worked well/positive impact: “Working alongside existing ranger services, Volunteer Rangers are learning from rangers and rangers are getting support and assistance and sharing their knowledge”. “It has increased the capacity of work on the site hugely and allowed the presence of the organisation to be far more visible in the local community.” “More has been achieved”. “The level of initial supervision at peak visitor periods (weekends) can detract on the time we can devote to public engagement but on the other hand when working together the Volunteer Rangers can carry out supplementary duties that we could not otherwise get to”. “Once an established routine is underway with a mixture of weekend and mid-week sessions I think the programme has great potential to positively enhance the [area] in terms of both the visitor experience and the natural environment”. “Very capable and enthusiastic volunteers selected. Availability of tools”.

Areas for improvement: “Very poor turnout when advertised. We need more Volunteer Rangers based [in area].” “Induction is quite intensive, spread it out a bit?” “First time volunteer rangers at our [area] could do with having a day just with me as an introduction and could work 1 on 1 with me on a job.”

**Awareness raising and promoting opportunities**

What has worked well/positive impact: “It has increased the number of Volunteer enquiries and it has diversified the type of volunteer enquiry we get”. “It provided another platform for us to reach to potentially interested folk”.

Areas for improvement: “Good to have on wider platforms, but hasn't generated any volunteers yet”.

**Supporting the establishment of groups/other activities**

What has worked well/positive impact: “Co-ordinated approach advertising the volunteer opportunities and the registration/web system works really well keeping admin to a minimum on our end so we can concentrate on the practical projects”. “Activities would have gone ahead but would have been less inclusive, or would have resulted in purchasing of tools that are little used on other occasions so have saved organisations and community group crucial funds for other projects.



**Annex 3: Performance against LEADER indicators  
November 2016 - May 2018**

Indicator	Population	Year 1 Target	Year 1 Achieved	Year 1.5 Target	Year 1.5 Achieved
Number of individuals participating in community projects for first time <sup>2</sup>	Volunteer Rangers	3	8	3	6
	Volunteers	10	72	-	34
Number of hard to reach <sup>3</sup> people who have begun an active role in community projects	Volunteer Rangers	-	1	-	1
	Volunteers	3	8	-	7
Number of participants in environment focused or heritage focused projects, events and initiatives	Volunteer Rangers	3	8	-	6
	Volunteers	10	72	-	34
Number of participants who have gained skills or knowledge related to preserving and enhancing of the CNP landscape, wildlife, local heritage and wider environment	Volunteer Rangers	3	8	3	6
	Volunteers	-	-	-	-

<sup>1</sup> These figures reflect activities for which data is available in the required format

<sup>2</sup> Defined as involvement in newly formed groups/initiatives, or those who have become involved with an existing group for the first time.

<sup>3</sup> Defined by the LEADER Local Development Strategy as: Earning less than £15000/year, being a carer, being a young person, being elderly, living with a disability, being a member of a Black or Minority Ethnic population. For the purposes of reporting 'Young Person' is considered those aged 21 or under. 'Elderly' is considered to be those aged 70 or over.