



## For discussion

**Title: Bringing Back Beaver Project**

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### Purpose

This paper presents the latest delivery updates on the Bringing Back Beavers Project.

### Recommendations

The Performance Committee is asked to review delivery updates and consider:

- a) progress towards the project's objectives;
- b) any strategically significant impacts on delivery of the Cairngorm National Park Authority's Corporate Plan and National Park Partnership Plan;
- c) any material impacts on the Cairngorm National Park Authority's strategic risk management.

### Performance Dashboard

Project vision: A healthy population of beavers in the Cairngorms National Park, bringing maximum benefits for wildlife and people. This includes supporting land managers and communities to live alongside beavers.

<b>Performance Measure: Progress towards the project's objectives</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
Raise awareness and increase understanding of beaver ecology, behaviour, positive and negative impacts and interaction with landscapes and wildlife in the National Park.	Green	Informal engagement started in March 2023 with a series of four beaver blether drop-ins and ended at the Grantown Show in August 2023. Local farmers, land managers and residents were targeted to raise awareness and understanding of beaver ecology and the Park Authority approach. Event were supported by NatureScot, National Farming Union Scotland, Spey Catchment Initiative and the Beaver Trust. Blethers were followed up with a series of site visits and individual meetings on request.



Performance Measure: Progress towards the project's objectives	Rating	Commentary
		<p>Feedback from early awareness raising informed the formal 6 week consultation period from 14 August to 25 September. The formal consultation period included a further 6 drop in events targeted at groups that would be most directly affected (land managers, fisheries interests and the business community) as well as being open to a wider resident audience. Staff and partners went on 37 site visits with farmers and land managers and held 24 meetings with stakeholders. The online survey, from 515 responses, showed 75.8% support for the proposed reintroduction.</p> <p>Informal and formal engagement was promoted via the webpage, launched in February 2023, posters and leaflets, 5 press releases, 8 articles in the Badenoch &amp; Strathspey Herald, 2 editions of the Cairn magazine and across the Park Authority and partners' social media outlets.</p> <p>The full, 45 page engagement report can be viewed as part of the licence application on the <a href="#">webpage</a>.</p>
Release beaver families into the Upper Spey catchment to create a founder population to establish a thriving, sustainable population.	Green	<p>The licence application for release over the next five years into the Upper Spey catchment has been submitted to NatureScot.</p> <p>The licence application includes comprehensive ecological information including HRA, SEA, population modelling and site suitability assessments; the full engagement and consultation activities over 9 months; and a monitoring and mitigation plan.</p>



<b>Performance Measure: Progress towards the project's objectives</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
		<p>Potential release sites are in a state of readiness. Landowners / managers are fully briefed and well prepared for the result of the application decision.</p> <p>Beavers from the Tayside population have been identified for trapping and translocation with health screening arranged.</p>
Supporting the implementation of a mitigation scheme in the National Park, ensuring issues are dealt with in a timely and efficient manner in such a way that land managers and communities are supported to live alongside beaver.	Green	<p>The Park Authority's monitoring and mitigation plan is set out in the licence application.</p> <p>Resource is available within the staff team to support the mitigation plan. Excellent partner relations are in place with all identified release sites and neighbouring landholdings.</p> <p>The plan has been developed by building on the national mitigation scheme with additional resource provided by Cairngorm National Park Authority. The additional resource is applied to cover points raised in the consultation, largely around reducing response times and increasing the ease of accessing and applying mitigation techniques.</p> <p>Additional Cairngorm National Park Authority budget is secured to fund small scale remedial and mitigation measures at a site level. Cairngorm National Park Authority will pay for damage to flood bank, where proven to be caused by beavers, until 2026.</p>
Maximise opportunities for environmental and socio-economic benefits from beavers.	Green	<p>The Park Authority has supported the land manager at one of the first release sites with visitor management and information to provide a high quality nature-based tourism offering</p>



Performance Measure: Progress towards the project's objectives	Rating	Commentary
		<p>Pre-release engagement included work with the Cairngorms Business Partnership to raise awareness of beaver related tourism ad business opportunities.</p> <p>There have been positive conversations with other potential release sites about opportunities for eco-tourism.</p>
Implement a research and monitoring plan to provide an evidence base for the positive and negative impacts of beaver.	Green	<p>The Park Authority has commissioned a survey of floodbanks on the river Spey. Freshwater invertebrate survey are being carried out at release sites. The Park Authority is working with a floodplain farmer to establish an evidence based case study, gathering hydrological and ecological data.</p> <p>Work is underway with Spey Catchment Initiative to establish a research and monitoring programme specific to fisheries issues.</p>

## Strategic Background

1. In [June 2022 Board](#) the Park Authority Board agreed that the Park Authority take a lead role in making an application for beaver translocation. The Park Authority's strategic objectives of relevance to consideration of the delivery of the programme reporting presented with this paper are:
  - a) The National Park Partnership Plan action to 'Facilitate beaver translocation in the Cairngorms National Park' and the associated Corporate Plan objective to 'lead on beaver reintroduction'.
2. Strategic risks of relevance to consideration of the programme reporting presented with this paper are:
  - a) A1 Resources: public sector finances constrain capacity to allocate sufficient resources to deliver corporate plan.



- b) A27 Strategic delivery: Approaches to conservation and protection of endangered species may be insufficient to achieve associated strategic outcomes.

### **Performance Overview: Delivery Against Strategic Expectations**

- 3. The project is on track to deliver the Board recommendation. Positive progress has been made against all project objectives in line with the project timescales and within budget expectations.
- 4. The project is embedded in the activities of Cairngorms National Park Authority and partners in delivering the wider Corporate Plan and National Park Partnership Plan actions for species recovery, ecosystem restoration, future farming and developing a more complete understanding of the National Park's species, habitats and ecosystems.
- 5. Activities to inform Park Authority strategic planning and embed the project objectives in the wider work of the Park Authority and partners include:
  - a) Work with Cairngorms National Park Authority rangers to support their communication role with residents and visitors; and enable rangers to identify beaver field signs and monitor activity in the Park.
  - b) Work in tandem with Communication team in designing and delivering the engagement programme
  - c) Integration within the conservation team, notably with the farm advisor, freshwater ecologist, Cairngorms 2030 and Cairngorms Nature Index project.
  - d) The Cairngorms Beaver group is a sub-group of the Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group. Partners in the group represent land managers, farmers, fisheries boards, Environmental NGOs and public bodies. The group plays an important role in integrating the project into the work of key stakeholders.

### **Performance Overview: Risks Under Management**

#### **6. Strategic Delivery:**

The project vision is for a healthy and sustainable population. The application is for release over the next 5 years in multiple locations to establish a founder population. If releases are interrupted during this period, there is a risk the population is not sufficient to achieve this objective. Beaver release is only considered for locations and times of year when specialist advice and expertise recommend a very low risk of mortality. There is a possibility that



young kits are predated, only in extreme circumstances would this have an unsustainable impact on a population.

**7. Staffing and resourcing:**

The project is currently operating with a high level of demand on staff resource, primarily associated with the extensive communications and engagement programme and associated impacts on senior staff support. The high demand of intensive staff resource is predicted to decrease once the decision is made on the application and, if successful, following release. Current levels of engagement and communications are not sustainable but with a more normal activity predicted, staff capacity is sufficient to achieve objectives.

The monitoring and mitigation plan is centred on the Park Authority's ability to react quickly and effectively. Current staffing levels are sufficient within the predicted release schedule.

Operational budget for engagement work, baseline monitoring and pre-emptive mitigation in 2023 / 2024 is on track. The 2024 / 2025 budget for mitigation and monitoring is within the capacity of the Operational Plan forecast. Potential additional capital requirements relating to floodbank repair is within the envelope of the Park Authority's capital budget.

## **Conclusions: Performance Overview and Matters Meriting Strategic Review**

8. There are no matters of strategic significance which merit escalation at this time in the opinion of senior managers leading the Cairngorms National Park Authority's linkage to the areas of activity covered by this paper and associated reports.

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