
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: ROLE OF CNPA IN BEAVER TRANSLOCATION

Prepared by: SARAH HENSHALL, HEAD OF CONSERVATION

Purpose

This paper presents the current position on beaver translocation in Scotland and the options for CNPA role in facilitating the Scottish Government policy to actively expand the beaver population in Scotland.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

- a) consider the options for facilitating the translocation of beavers into the Cairngorms National Park**
- b) approve the recommendation that CNPA takes a lead role in making an application for beaver translocation.**

Role of CNPA in Beaver Translocation– FOR DECISION

Policy Context

1. In 2016, Scottish Government announced it was minded to allow the two established Scottish beaver populations to remain, and that beavers “...would be allowed to expand their range naturally”. In May 2019 beavers were made European Protected Species in Scotland, meaning it is an offence to deliberately capture, kill or disturb a wild beaver, or damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of a wild beaver, without a licence.
2. In November 2021 Scottish Government announced a further change to policy to actively support the expansion of the beaver population, promoting translocation to help establish beaver presence in areas of Scotland outside their current range, beyond where natural expansion would be expected to reach in the short term.

Summary of work in Cairngorms to date

3. In November 2020 the Cairngorms Nature beaver sub-group agreed the commissioning of an assessment of how beavers may naturally colonise and disperse within and out of the Cairngorms National Park, the likely impacts on ecology and land use and the opportunities for benefits. The final report was made public in April 2022 [Beaver study reveals how they might reach the Park - Cairngorms National Park Authority](#)
4. The main findings of the report are: there are significant barriers to natural dispersal; around 20% of watercourses are suitable or highly suitable, primarily in the lochs and wetlands systems of the Spey; there are significant opportunities for nature restoration and building ecosystem resilience; predicted impacts, notably on agricultural systems, fisheries management and species conservation, can, and will need to be, carefully managed through the existing mitigation scheme; and, more work is needed to fully understand the likely rates of expansion and dispersal.
5. Following a meeting in January 2022 to discuss the findings of the report in light of the new national policy, the Cairngorms Nature beaver sub-group recommended CNPA work closely with NatureScot and Newcastle University to carry out simple GIS-based mapping for the Cairngorms National Park with the aim of developing and running population models for population expansion and dispersal from a number of different sites in the Park. This work is underway as part of the development of the national beaver strategy.
6. By summer 2022, the National Strategy will have identified priority strategic areas for beaver expansion. Given the high profile and suitability, it is reasonable to expect applications for release into the Cairngorms National Park soon after publication of the National Strategy.

National Beaver Strategy

7. In February 2022 NatureScot started the process of developing a National Beaver Strategy, working with stakeholders and partners, including CNPA. The National Beaver Strategy 2022-2045 identifies a programme of activity for the first 10 years that will facilitate beaver expansion into appropriate areas and agree objectives and actions relating to conservation translocation, mitigation & management, policy and programme links, research and development, stakeholder communication, decision-making and governance.
8. By the end of June 2022, the final National Strategy will be published. Alongside this NatureScot will identify 2-3 priority strategic areas for beaver expansion. NatureScot and partners are establishing the governance structures, protocols, procedures, and consultation mechanisms to facilitate expansion. As part of the governance structure, it is expected that the National Beaver Forum will be reshaped, and their remit and geographical coverage expanded to oversee implementation of the strategy. Should the Cairngorms National Park be one of the first areas in Scotland to be a recipient site, then it is expected CNPA would be part of the governance group.

Population Expansion and Dispersal Modelling

9. NatureScot are undertaking modelling at a national level (130 catchments) and are also working up a number of theoretical release scenarios to inform discussions with stakeholders and partners involved in the National Strategy development. Modelling is informing scoping of suitable new catchments and the requirements for consultations, engagement, and Habitat Regulations Assessments. Whilst the modelling work is not part of the National Strategy it will compliment it and support its implementation. Modelling work is also being used to identify 2-3 priority catchments for initial translocation focus.
10. The ongoing modelling work has identified the Spey catchment as one of the priority candidates for release. The NS modelling has built on the dam capacity and habitat suitability assessments commissioned by CNPA. The further data and examinations associated with the modelling establishes where beavers would be most likely to set up territories, the location of dams, opportunities, and constraints. This has shown there is approximately 7,000 ha of highly suitable habitat in the Spey catchment, the largest area of highly suitable habitat in the priority catchments modelled.
11. In parallel to the development of the National Strategy, NS and public body partners are investigating possibilities for expediting facilitated expansion by assessing opportunities for release on public land as soon as possible, where there are favourable circumstances.

The Scottish Code for Conservation Translocations

12. Any translocation must follow [The Scottish Code for Conservation Translocations | NatureScot](#) The Code sets out when conservation translocations may be appropriate and situations in which they could cause problems to wildlife, people and the environment. The process scores risks and benefits, focussing study on area of

greatest risk, includes considerations of biological and socio/economic factors and patterns of dispersal.

13. In summary, the key considerations in the Scottish Code for Translocation are:
 - a) Undertake an initial appraisal, to include a preliminary assessment of legal issues, benefits, and biological and socio-economic risks
 - b) Set goals
 - c) Obtain necessary permissions and licences
 - d) Maximise chances of success, and minimise chances of failure, by taking account of biological considerations, public and animal health factors, animal welfare, release site suitability etc.
 - e) Consult with relevant land users and other stakeholders
 - f) Monitor the translocation at an appropriate level and respond to issues that arise
 - g) Keep relevant people informed, and share information to guide future work
14. The organisation or individual leading on the translocation would be responsible for ensuring the above are adequately addressed. Permission must be agreed with the landowner responsible for the proposed release for any translocation, with extensive and comprehensive consultation with land managers, stakeholders and communities.

Application process

15. Beavers are a European Protected Species so translocation projects will need to apply for and be issued with a licence from NatureScot to possess, transport and release beavers. Projects are expected to follow the best practice guidance set out in The Scottish Code for Conservation Translocations (SCCT), which are based on the IUCN Guidelines for Reintroductions and other Conservation Translocations.
16. Translocation applications must satisfy the following criteria:
 - a) Identification of receptor site. Any receptor site would have to have the appropriate habitat and conditions to be able to support beavers and appropriate landowner permission and engagement with the relevant stakeholders.
 - b) Resources and Expertise. Translocation can be time-consuming and expensive. It has to be carried out professionally both to minimise welfare impacts and other risks, and to maximise the chances of success. Translocation will therefore only be acceptable if the licensing body are assured that sufficient resources and expertise are available to successfully undertake it.
 - c) Permissions. Permission needs to be secured from landowners at both donor and receptor sites and, if translocating animals outside of Scotland, the relevant licences to do so. The broad principles relating to landowner permission and engagement with other people potentially affected are set out in The Scottish Code for Conservation Translocations.
17. The sourcing of beavers for translocation projects is covered by a separate licence, in most cases held by a land manager experiencing land use conflict and where beaver removal under licence has been approved to prevent serious damage.

18. NatureScot (NS) will be seeking applications of a more strategic nature for proposed releases into new catchments informed by the National Beaver Strategy, rather than from small, isolated landholdings. When considering releases into new catchments, the assessment of risks and benefits will need to be at a whole or sub-catchment scale, rather than being specific to the land holding where they are released.
19. NatureScot are currently looking at refining and streamlining the application process by the end of summer 2022, supplementing the existing guidance and the Translocation Code with more detail on expectations for consultation and release site suitability assessments. Early discussion and assurance that proper stakeholder engagement will be undertaken is strongly encouraged. To support the process, NS will undertake catchment scale Strategic Environmental Assessments and HRA.

Cairngorms Nature Beaver Sub-group

20. The Cairngorms Nature Beaver sub-group was established to plan and prepare for arrival of beaver in the National Park by natural means. It comprises representatives from NatureScot, RSPB, NFUS, SL&E, Spey Fishery Board, River Dee Trust, South Esk Catchment Partnership and James Hutton Institute. As Scottish Government policy changed, the sub-group discussions and remit changed to reflect that.
21. Group members recognise that whilst membership already includes organisations that represent the interests of land managers out with the Park, e.g. NFUS, SL&E and Spey Fisheries Board, the membership and remit would need to change to reflect a changing objective and the need for a catchment wide consultation and engagement. With this in mind, FLS, Spey Catchment Initiative, CONFOR and RZSS have been invited to join the group and terms of reference are being drafted.
22. The Cairngorms Nature Beaver subgroup is highly regarded and well attended. CNPA has high levels of support from partners and stakeholders for continuing to take a leadership role as national ambitions for beaver expansion are being realised.

Options for CNPA role in beaver translocation

23. The National Beaver Strategy and associated modelling work will focus attention, resources and effort to facilitate translocation in the Park and it is fully expected that there will be applications to release into the Park as soon as is practically possible. Applications could come directly from land owners and managers in the Park or from organisations acting as a lead agent with the permission of land owners willing to release beaver on their land.
24. In each of these scenarios the CNPA could potentially have a different role:

Observer role

25. With this approach a translocation would have to meet the criteria assessed by NatureScot as the licensing body. CNPA, with advice from the Cairngorms Beaver Group, would provide comment to NatureScot as consultee on individual applications in the Park from third parties. The individual landowner would have ownership of and

responsibility for the translocation process and delivery. They would liaise with NS, appoint their contractors of choice and be directly responsible for stakeholder engagement and consultation. The applicant would have no requirement to provide ongoing landowner support.

26. If this approach is taken there would be no additional CNPA resource requirements as this could be absorbed into core business. However, CNPA could be exposed to reputational risk as it is often the *de facto* point of contact for issues in the Park. CNPA could end up managing negative issues and relationship that are not an effect of our actions regardless of where responsibility lies.

Facilitation and supporting role

27. Additional CNPA resource could be made available to support others with the consultation and application process and possibly complement the NatureScot role in supporting land managers with mitigation and management e.g. through disseminating information and best practice, sharing data, and supporting mitigation trials.
28. The benefit of this approach is that the landowner who makes the application has direct ownership and responsibility of the whole process. This will have less resource implication for CNPA. CNPA can provide advice, support and encourage an exemplar approach but there is no guarantee this will be adopted and there is no incentive for an individual landowner to do this and it may be challenging to resolve conflicts created by a process that we were not directly responsible for.
29. A potential risk is that the applicant will look at their site in isolation without a strategic whole Park approach, or a more holistic view of the multiple objectives and implications of beaver release, coming at it from a singular perspective. They may also not have the resource, networks, and expertise to undertake stakeholder engagement and provide the same level of landowner support as CNPA could.
30. There is still significant potential for reputational risk for the CNPA from this approach. We would be involved in the process but would not have control and because of our role in the overall management of the Park would likely be the have to deal with any issues without actually being the responsible party. There is a lack of clarity in this approach.

Leadership role

31. CNPA to take the lead with a strategic long term spatial and temporal approach to translocation across the whole Park. CNPA would instigate and closely manage the whole process including application, delivery, mitigation support and monitoring, working with partners and supported by Cairngorms Beaver Group.
32. CNPA are well positioned to take a leadership role, and has the confidence of a wide range of stakeholders to do so. CNPA is the first point of contact with land managers and owners in the Park through a wide range of existing projects, partnerships and relationships, and therefore well placed to better represent a wide range of views and take a balanced approach. Additionally, CNPA can ensure beaver translocation and

management is joined up with nature and land management projects such as riparian planting, wetland restoration, species conservation, research and mitigation trials as well as drawing on learning from UK and experience from Europe.

33. The benefit of this approach is that CNPA will be able to dictate the timings for translocations and the pace at which the process is rolled out; notably ensuring consultation is done properly with a whole catchment approach. There is significant opportunity to provide an exemplar approach that will also allow the realisation of multiple benefits including community and visitors/tourism benefits alongside conservation and land management.
34. The risk of CNPA not taking a leadership role is that others will introduce beaver into the Park and we may have little control or influence over the process. Any application from an individual landowner is unlikely take a whole park approach or have the resources and expertise to fully engage with and support landowners throughout the whole process.
35. The National Park Authority was also created to ensure coordination of contentious issues in the park and to ensure that the wider management implications of issues, such as, beaver translocations were well understood and were implemented correctly. This approach fits with the role of a National Park Authority and is in line with stakeholder expectations.
36. Following the discussion of the Cairngorms Nature Beaver sub-group on the 26 May, members strongly advocated for CNPA to be proactive and take a leadership role. A strategic, well supported Park-wide approach is required to ensure risks are minimised and opportunities are realised. Support for landowners, managers and communities is critical and CNPA is the ideal position to provide this. The group also identified benefits of CNPA taking a leadership role including the opportunity to deliver exemplar or 'gold standard' translocation that others can follow and giving land managers more support than anywhere else in Scotland.
37. **The recommendation is for CNPA to take a leadership role and develop an application to NS to translocate beavers into the Cairngorms National Park as soon as possible**

Costs and Resource Implications

38. Within the National Beaver Strategy there is a specific goal to 'secure availability of support and funding for beaver translocation', alongside an associated objective and actions. Whilst this outline the desired approach, to date there is no specific detail on the level of resource and funding that will be available. NatureScot have advised that they are currently recruiting two new members of staff to support the process throughout the whole of Scotland and that funding will continue to be directional and demand led. Directional funding will be available for specific practical elements associated with conservation translocations (trapping, transport, captive care, health screening), together with associated mitigation actions.

39. Indicative resource requirement for CNPA to take a leadership role is £70,000 per annum for 2 years. The costs of this order can be accommodated in the Nature and Climate Change Directorate operational plan budget as per 2022/23. Ongoing support for land managers will be required as part of ongoing core business.

Sarah Henshall

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sarahhenshall@cairngorms.co.uk