



For discussion

Title: Bringing beavers back project
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Purpose

1. This paper presents the latest delivery updates June - November 2024 on the Bringing back beaver's project.

Recommendations

2. 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 (NPPP).
 - c) Any material impacts on the Cairngorm National Park Authority's strategic risk management.

Performance Dashboard

3. 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.

Performance Measure: Progress towards the project's objectives	Rating	Commentary June - December 2024
Raise awareness and increase understanding of beaver ecology, behaviour, positive and negative impacts and interaction with landscapes and wildlife in the National Park.	Green	At the request of the Upper Spey beaver management and mitigation group, a visit is being organised to farms in Tayside. Between June and November, 20 posts have been shared across the Park Authority's social media platforms, reaching 738,350 impressions, 394,515 video views, 1,492



		<p>comments and approximately 3,416 clicks to links. This activity is supplemented by work with partners.</p> <p>The Beaver Project Manager attended the Grantown Show and has given seven talks, to a total audience of over 300 people.</p> <p>Park Authority rangers promoting responsible access and providing information whilst on patrol in beaver areas.</p>
Establish and maintain effective communication and engagement with the farm and croft sector regarding beavers and their potential impacts.	Amber	Engagement with the farming and crofting community remains a key issue. The amount and nature of public discourse has altered significantly since 2023 / 2024 releases, and it is expected this trend will continue with ongoing dialogue.
Release beaver families into the Upper Spey catchment to create a founder population to establish a thriving, sustainable population.	Green	<p>Year two (October 2024 - April 2025) releases have been completed. 15 beavers were released across four sites, bringing the total number of releases in the upper Spey catchment to 33.</p> <p>One pair released in December 2023 have successfully bred, one kit has been confirmed.</p>



<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.</p>	<p>Green</p>	<p>The Park Authority's monitoring and mitigation plan sets out how the Park Authority will provide additional support for land managers in the National Park.</p> <p>Two beaver rangers have been appointed to support Beaver Project Manager with delivery of the monitoring and mitigation plan.</p> <p>The Upper Spey Beaver Management and Mitigation group is scheduled to meet quarterly. The group receives monthly updates of beaver activity.</p> <p>Flood bank surveys, conducted in collaboration with a local farmer, have been completed and results will be shared widely in the new year.</p>
<p>Maximise opportunities for environmental and socio-economic benefits from beavers.</p>	<p>Green</p>	<p>The launch event for the beaver trail at Rothiemurchus was attended by three local families and covered by STV.</p> <p>Beaver project Manager attended the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Scottish Tourist Guides Association highlighting the opportunities that have arisen.</p> <p>Two wildlife guiding companies are now running a programme of beaver tours.</p>
<p>Implement a research and monitoring plan to provide an evidence base for the</p>	<p>Green</p>	<p>Following each release, feeding stations, cameras and site patrols are used to monitor beaver activity.</p>



<p>positive and negative impacts of beaver.</p>		<p>Regular surveys, including canoe surveys, record feeding signs, lodge building and territory marking activity.</p> <p>The Park Authority has responded to sightings and field signs, informing landowners of activity on their landholding within days of the first report.</p>
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Strategic Background

4. In June 2022 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 the 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’.

5. Strategic risks of relevance to consideration of the programme reporting presented with this paper are:
 - a) One Resources: public sector finances constrain capacity to allocate sufficient resources to deliver corporate plan.
 - b) 11 Reputation: Disagreement between the Park Authority and stakeholder groups within The Park.

Performance Overview: Delivery Against Strategic Objectives

6. The project has delivered the second phase of releases, continuing to deliver the Partnership Plan action and Corporate Plan objective. Positive progress has been made against all project objectives in line with the project timescales and within budget expectations. The Park Authority continues to take lead role in releases, land manager engagement, monitoring, and implementing the management and mitigation plan.

7. The project supports wider delivery of 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.



Performance Overview: Risks Under Management

8. Staffing and resourcing: The high demand on staff resource associated with surveys, monitoring, mitigation and land manager engagement, is predicted to continue throughout, and beyond, the five-year licence period. With increasing numbers of beavers released, an associated increase in monitoring and mitigation requirements and a continuing need to maintain lines of communication, staff capacity is an escalating risk.
9. In mitigation, staff capacity has been augmented with the support of two full time beaver rangers for a three-month period to support monitoring and mitigation. Partners are assisting with delivery of all project objectives and volunteer support is being explored, although likely to be limited. Further consideration of staff capacity is being progressed through the operational plan cycle. Subject to budget availability, the intention is to have dedicated ranger time allocated in support of the project.
10. The Park Authority's policy is to manage the risk and impacts of beaver activity, rather than managing the presence of beavers. As beavers become more widespread in the Park, monitoring beaver distribution will become less significant, and resource will be more focussed on ensuring a swift and effective response to mitigation.
11. Current and projected capital spend for surveys, monitoring and pre-emptive mitigation is within operation plan budget allocations. Potential additional capital requirements relating to flood embankment repair is within the envelope of the Park Authority's capital budget.
12. Reputational risk: The key areas of reputational risk for the Park Authority are in a perceived lack of communication and engagement with land managers, the speed of response, and the efficacy of the management and mitigation plan.
13. A perceived lack of communication and engagement remains a reputational risk to the Park Authority. The risk is declining as lines of communication are being strengthened, notably via the [Cairngorms Agricultural Advisory Group \(CAAG\)](#) and the Upper Spey Beaver Management and Mitigation group. The Management and Mitigation group has the specific remit to consider implementation of mitigation measures. The group has met twice to date and is not yet sufficiently operational to be considered fully effective. A new project objective has been introduced to reflect the prioritisation of this relationship as a key performance measure.



14. Communication is expected to improve significantly with re-recruitment of the vacant Park Authority agricultural advisor post. Two seasonal rangers have been recruited to support the beaver project manager in providing a prompt response and implementation of the monitoring and mitigation plan.
15. The management and mitigation plan has been implemented on five occasions: a collapsed embankment; removal of gnawed roadside trees; protection of a high biodiversity value site; activity near an area of high risk; and damming of a ditch on farmland. In each case the response was prompt, impacts were mitigated, and landowners are satisfied with the outcome. Ongoing site monitoring remains in place.
16. Pre-emptive tree protection is in place at several sites identified as having a high likelihood of impacts on biodiversity, business and property.
17. CAAG has a remit to act as a direct line of communication between the Park Authority and the farming and crofting community, supporting collaboration and fostering a wider understanding of, and more engagement with, Park Authority activities within the agricultural sector.
18. The management and mitigation group comprises land managers who are directly impacted by beaver activity and/or have beaver territories on their land. The group has a remit to ensure an adaptive approach to the on the ground application of support available to farmers and crofters, informed by first-hand experience.

Conclusions: Performance Overview and Matters Meriting Strategic Review

19. Good progress is being made in the delivery of the project's vision and objectives. Staff capacity is currently sufficient to deliver programme objectives. The risk of staff capacity not being sufficient to meet future demands is under consideration as part of the operation plan process.

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