

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

FOR DISCUSSION

Title: Cairngorms Peatland ACTION Programme

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Purpose

This paper presents an update on the delivery of the CNPA's Peatland ACTION programme for 2022-23.

Recommendations

The Performance Committee is asked to note the programme update.

Strategic Background

- I. The peatland programme will contribute to the delivery of the targets and priorities of NPPP4. It is also key for assisting in the implementation of the Heritage Horizon Cairngorms 2030 Programme, providing the majority of the Programme's planned match funding for the delivery phase commencing mid 2023 subject to bid approval. The programme is supporting the delivery of the Scottish Government's peatland restoration targets.

Performance Dashboard

Performance Measure for 2022/23	Rating	Commentary
Finance: maximise use of £2.962 million capital finance available in 2022/23 for peatland restoration	Amber	Costs are still not finalised for a few projects but we estimate our capital expenditure is likely to be around £2.0 mill leaving a capital underspend of around £0.9 mill. We will notify Scottish Government of this likely underspend shortly. Our resource budget of £0.505 mill is likely to be fully spent.
Finance: impact on Cairngorms NPA budget management	Green	No wider unplanned demands currently made by programme on financial resources.

Performance Measure for 2022/23	Rating	Commentary
Area of restored peatland: 905 hectare target 2022/23 (Restoration Area)	Green	Machines are now on the ground on seven estates and we are on schedule to exceed the target of bringing 905 ha under restoration this year.
Programme risk profile	Amber	Currently we have sufficient contractors to tackle projects and the weather remains mild (at end October). A snowy winter remains a risk to the programme.
Future funding profile	Amber	We have a four year funding profile agreed, albeit while continuing to operate within single year allocations.
Future delivery profile	Green	Over the summer we have recruited two peatland officers and now have an experienced, competent team. We are confident the 22/23 programme target of 905 ha (Restoration Area) can be achieved and hopefully exceeded. Landowners continue to come forward with projects and there are now more contractors in the market to tackle restoration. We will aim to continue to increase the area of restoration work carried out in 2023/24.

Target for 2022-23

- In 2022-23 we planned to deliver 905 hectares of peatland restoration (Restoration Area). This compares to a target of 557ha for 2021-22 (Restoration Area). This target for 2021-22 was exceeded, with 730ha being brought under restoration (Restoration Footprint) and 900 ha as measured by Restoration Area. If the winter is kind, we are currently on schedule to exceed our target of 905 ha.

Finance and staffing

- Financial support from Scottish Government is £3.47 million in 2022/23. This comprises £2.962m capital funding (primarily supporting grant awards to land managers) and £0.505m resource funding (supporting staffing and other delivery costs). As of 31st October there are a few projects where costs are not finalised and costs in general continue to rise across the sector. However we estimate our likely underspend will be in the region of 900K. We will discuss re-allocating a significant proportion of the 900K with Scottish Government in November, but we will seek to retain a proportion in case there are further unpredictable cost increases.
- As of 31st October, we have issued Grant Offer letters to nine estates. The total grant offered to date is 1.98 mill (approx. two thirds of budget) and this could bring up to

1225 ha of peatland under restoration management (which exceeds our hectare target). Of this, 785 ha involves the restoration of actively eroding peat, with an additional 440 ha of drain blocking. All measurements are Restoration Areas at this point.

5. We have recruited Ewan Campbell and Simon Thomas as Peatland Officers to replace Emma Stewart and Matt Watson who now have management responsibilities for the Peatland Action programme. Both Ewan and Simon bring a wealth of peatland restoration experience to the team and have been quickly able to take over project supervision. We will soon seek to recruit a Trainee Project Officer on a 3 year contract to complete the team. This new post recognises the skills shortage which exists at all levels of peatland restoration and the aim is to equip a new graduate with the skills and knowledge of a peatland officer over 3 years. There is no certainty that this person will then be employed as a CNPA Peatland Officer, but it is likely there will be employment opportunities elsewhere in the sector.
6. We now have an experienced, expert team which is almost at full strength. We are at the point when our two Programme Managers can spend more of their time on wider strategic issues rather than on direct project delivery. This will include a focus on implementing the recommendations of the Internal Audit.

Progress to date on the programme for 2022-23.

	Project work to date (31.10.22) in financial year of 22/23
No of estates with grant offers	9
Total grant offer to 31.10.22	£1,985, 136
Potential total number of hectares under this offer	1225 ha
Potential total number of hectares in drain blocking	440 ha
Potential number of hectares in erosion	785 ha

Table 1: Project work in 2022-23.

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Head of Land Management
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