

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

FOR DISCUSSION

Title: CAIRNGORMS CAPERCAILLIE PROJECT

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Purpose

This paper presents the latest delivery updates on the Cairngorms Capercaillie project

Recommendations

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

- a) Progress towards the project's agreed purposes;**
- b) Any strategically significant impacts on delivery of the CNPA's Corporate Plan and National Park Partnership Plan; and**
- c) Any material impacts on the CNPA's strategic risk management.**

Project Overview

1. Capercaillie populations are negatively affected primarily by a combination of habitat loss and fragmentation, disturbance, collisions with unmarked fences, predation, climate change and possibly genetic diversity. Each of these factors plays an important role, and activity in each has a significant and complementary effect.
2. In 2015 CNPA produced the Capercaillie Framework, bringing together knowledge on population status, pressures on the population, and the suite of measures currently being deployed to inform co-ordination of management measures and identify where further investment and activity would be most beneficial.
3. In March 2018 CNPA and partners were awarded National Lottery Heritage Fund development phase funding to take forwards recommendations in the Capercaillie Framework relating to population monitoring, habitat creation, sustainable recreation planning and enabling communities to play a part in capercaillie conservation.
4. In 2020 a further c£2.3 million was awarded for the delivery phase of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project (CCP), with the approved purposes to:
 - a) Enable communities to develop and deliver their own community-led actions for capercaillie;
 - b) Raise awareness of the plight of capercaillie and how people can help;
 - c) Research the genetic diversity of capercaillie in the Cairngorms National Park to help inform action;

- d) Improve and create more habitat for capercaillie and undertake predator control in key areas; and
 - e) Strengthen current Capercaillie monitoring to enable more informed decisions
5. The project does not include action for all factors affecting capercaillie populations. It centres on a more people focussed approach in the hybrid spaces where people and nature coexist. Habitat management, fence removal, legal predator control and many other aspects of capercaillie conservation have been going on for decades by land managers and agencies. The project works closely with, but does not look to duplicate, this already existing good work.
6. In 2021, in addition to the work of the CCP and the ongoing work of many partners, CNPA initiated discussions with key stakeholders at a senior level to investigate the desirability and feasibility of new approaches not already under consideration or being implemented, primarily around the management of protected species, translocation/ reintroduction and creating areas of minimum disturbance.

Strategic Background

7. The most recent update to the Board on delivery of the Authority's strategic objectives as set out in the agreed Corporate Plan for 2018 to 2022 was presented at the June 2021 meeting. The Corporate Plan delivery report may be accessed at: [Meeting - Cairngorms National Park Authority](#).
8. Delivery of the Cairngorms Capercaillie project directly impacts on the Corporate Plan key work area 'Deliver Capercaillie Framework' and Key Performance Indicator 'number of capercaillie'. The KPI is currently rated red, based on an assessment that the population target of 1,200 by 2022 target will not be met.
9. Action 1d of the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) priority 1d is to 'Co-ordinate habitat, recreation and development management to secure the capercaillie population through delivery of the Capercaillie Framework'. The most recent overview of delivery of the NPPP having been presented to the Board at its meeting in September 2021: [Meeting - Cairngorms National Park Authority](#).
10. The latest review of the Strategic Risk Register was considered by the Audit and Risk Committee in September 2021 and may be accessed at: [210910AuCtteePaper5AnnexI StrategicRiskRegisterV8.1.pdf \(cairngorms.co.uk\)](#). Strategic risks of relevance to consideration of performance of the programmes of work considered by this paper are:
- a) **A9.3 Staffing:** additional externally funded projects strains staff workload capacity with increased risks of stress and reduced morale.
 - b) **A11.2 Strategic Risk Resourcing:** the end of major programme investments (Tomintoul and Glenlivet, LEADER) requires significant ongoing staffing to manage audit and legacy which the Authority finds difficult to resource.

- c) **A14.1 Reputation:** One-off, high profile incidents and / or vociferous social media correspondents have an undue influence on the Authority's positive reputation.
- d) **A27 Technical:** approaches to conservation and protection of endangered species may be insufficient to achieve associated strategic outcomes

Performance Overview: Delivery of Approved Purposes against Strategic Outcomes

- 11. Positive progress has been made against all of the project's approved purposes. The quarterly report to National Lottery Heritage Fund highlights the programme is well advanced and on track to deliver project outcomes.
- 12. Corporate Plan and National Park Partnership Plan actions and indicators position the activities of the NLHF funded project within the context of wider CNPA and partner work on land management, visitor experience and rural development. The project maintains strong links with ongoing and developing wider activities to strengthen information flow and support adaptive project and legacy planning:
 - a) The CCP Board are updated on discussions at the joint meeting of key stakeholders and the terms of reference for the sub group of NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee, established to review the scientific evidence around capercaillie conservation.
 - b) Learning from the trial signage to encourage responsible behaviours around Carr-bridge and amongst the mountain biking community is informing CNPA access team strategic planning.
 - c) Research to understand visitors' perceptions and values relating to access and capercaillie in Rothiemurchus, Abernethy and Glenmore and work with the Cairngorms Business Community is forming part of CNPAs work on developing a 'sustainable tourism destination'.
 - d) Project staff are part of an internal working group sharing the learning from NLHF funded projects to strengthen delivery of Heritage Horizons.

Performance Overview: Risk Management

- 13. All project risks and issues, as identified in the quarterly progress report, are in a favourable status with mitigation plans in place.
- 14. Staffing: the project is operating with a full complement of staff. The recruitment of a CNPA ranger service presented the opportunity to incorporate activities in the project's ranger role into the work plans of CNPA rangers. This in turn created opportunities to support professional development and reduce over-commitments.
- 15. Resourcing audit and legacy: Review of work plans enabled re-allocations of staff time and responsibilities, with project board and NLHF approval, to facilitate more managerial time and strategic support to project and legacy planning.
- 16. Reputation:
 - a) Community-led work in Carrbridge: correspondence with the hosts and sponsors of the Scottish Land & Estates 'Making it Happen' Award, for which the

- project was nominated. Project staff liaised with SL&E to provide up to date information on project activities and no further recourse was necessary.
- b) There is a petition against path improvement proposals in the village. Proposals are currently on display and available on-line for comments until end Oct. All responses will be considered by the project team, landowners and community bodies in deciding which improvements will be delivered.
 - c) An article in the shooting times, and subsequent on-line sharing and posts on social media channels, criticised the project for not employing enough gamekeepers or advocating for the control of protected species. Partners and project board members with close understanding of the communities of interest supported a positive communications approach to raising awareness and understanding and demonstrating support from the sector.
 - d) The wider context of capercaillie conservation is a highly contentious and high profile arena, attracting much comment and polarised opinion. Misunderstanding about the relatively limited scope of the CCP can lead to the CCP, and by extension the CNPA, being associated with inactivity. This has been escalated in the project's risk register and communications.
17. Technical: In June 2021, the CNPA convened a meeting of key stakeholders to progress discussion on factors affecting Capercaillie conservation outwith the approved purposes of the project. A sub group of the NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee convened to review scientific evidence. A member of CNPA Board sits as an observer on the sub group. A report from the sub-group will be presented to CNPA Board members for discussion.
18. Evidence from the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project's genetic research will become available in 2022. The findings will underpin any future decisions on the feasibility and desirability of species translocation.

Conclusions: Performance Overview and Matters Meriting Strategic Review

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

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