
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

FOR DISCUSSION

**Title: CAIRNGORMS PEATLAND ACTION PROGRAMME
DELIVERY**

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Purpose

This paper presents the latest delivery update for the Cairngorms Peatland ACTION Programme.

Recommendations

The Performance Committee is asked to note the delivery update and consider:

- a) **project risks and mitigation;**
- b) **the scope and scale of the Peatland Programme and the resource implications for the Authority;**
- c) **whether any material impacts on the Cairngorms NPA's strategic risk management and mitigation measures arise from assessment of programme delivery.**

Background

1. Peatlands cover nearly a quarter of Scotland and contain over half of the total Scottish soil carbon. However, a high proportion of Scottish peatlands has been altered by land management practices to such an extent that it is now degraded, causing substantial greenhouse gas emissions. The Scottish Government's Peatland ACTION programme, established since 2012, aims to bring 250,000 hectares of degraded peatland under restoration management by 2030 supported by a £250 million funding package.
2. Over 25% of the Cairngorms National Park is peatland habitat with around 90,000 ha of that being degraded. This represents nearly one-fifth of the National Park being in poor condition. Damaged peatlands can lead to poor water quality, increased flood risk, reduced biodiversity as well as carbon emissions making peatland restoration management a high priority.
3. The programme of restoration management in the Cairngorms National Park is now entering its eighth year, with direct funding to the CNPA agreed in 2020, and the CNPA now one of five "Delivery Partners" in the Peatland ACTION Programme.

4. The Peatland ACTION Project Officers provide a full project management service from the initial project design, surveys and field work through to assisting with grant applications, contractor management and reporting for land managers.
5. The peatland programme will contribute to the delivery of the targets and priorities of the current National Park Partnership Plan and the next plan. It is also key for assisting in the implementation of the Heritage Horizon 2030 project, providing the majority of the project's matched funding. The programme is supporting the delivery of the Scottish Government's peatland restoration targets.
6. For this financial year, 2021/22, the Peatland Programme target is to deliver 557 hectares of peatland restoration management supported by £1.94 million (including staff and survey costs) of Scottish Government funding.

Performance Overview: Delivery update

7. The team will deliver approximately 511 hectares across 8 project sites on 5 estates by the middle of February. The majority of this work was drain blocking using the combination of wave dams and zipper re-profiling techniques to completely remove the drains. One legacy project from NatureScot was completed on 2 sites after work first started in 2017.
8. Contractors are currently working on three sites and should complete shortly. We have three new drain blocking projects with contractors appointed and about to start later in February (subject to weather, but these are low ground sites under 500 metres). If the weather holds those new projects should deliver a further 317 hectares (all drain blocking work).
9. One high altitude site could complete in March if weather permits delivering a further 11 hectares of work, plus contractors could also complete hand work on a further three sites (coir logs, geo-textile, stone dams etc.) also potentially in March.
10. This will bring the total delivery in financial year 2021/22 to a possible 839 hectares subject to weather and contractor constraints.
11. An audit of programme processes, controls, documentation and staffing resource is underway. This will be completed in February 2022 with any recommendations to strengthen governance and support delivery being implemented in financial year 2022/23. Additional resource funding to support an expanding programme of activity is allocated within the 5 year forecast submitted to Scottish Government.
12. The Programme is planning further data collection on breeding birds, peat depth and herbivore impact on peatland across potential restoration areas spring 2022. We are looking at a package of specific works as well as appointing several ecological consultants on a call-off basis for any future work.
13. We are developing, in liaison with NatureScot and other partners, a protocol to trial restoration work during the breeding bird season (April – June) on a number of suitable sites. This should follow the current, agreed protocols in the construction and

forestry industries, and will require the services of Ecological Clerk of Works to enable work to be undertaken during this period without disturbing birds. This should enable us to extend the project work season on suitable sites expanding the capacity of contractors.

14. The programme of works for summer and autumn 2022 is well advanced with a potential 21 projects identified on 19 estates across the National Park. If all these projects were to go ahead, and have contractors appointed they would deliver approximately 1,404 hectares of restoration management requiring funding of over £3.2 million. It is likely that team capacity, contractor availability and land manager agreement will scale back this potential making our target for financial year 2022/23 of 905 hectares, with a capital budget allocation of £2.9 million, more than achievable.
15. A further 20 projects on twenty estates are in the development stage and in the pipeline for delivery in 2023.
16. A 5 year budget forecast was prepared and submitted to Scottish Government on 2 February. This forecast is for a total budget of £23.2 million to deliver 6,525 hectares of peatland restoration management over 5 years.

CNPA Peatland Budget		2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Hectares		905	1304	1369	1438	1510
		£M	£M	£M	£M	£M
Restoration	Capital	£2.962	£4.143	£4.042	£4.307	£4.593
Staff costs, surveys, support	Resource	£0.505	£0.614	£0.645	£0.676	£0.710
Total		£3.467	£4.757	£4.687	£4.983	£5.303
TOTAL 5 YEAR PROGRAMME	6525	Hectares	£23.197	Million		

17. The New Entrant programme to train up local civil and plant businesses is proving very successful. Four contractors, with limited peatland experience prior to working with the programme have now acquired the skills to undertake the relatively straightforward drain blocking work using the techniques of wave damming and zipper re-profiling. Two of these contractors have subsequently won further work on CNPA peatland projects on the back of this training. A video showing some of the work was produced by Atholl Estates: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAHTgf9uF8g>

Performance Overview: Risks under Management

18. Programme staff are all working beyond capacity and this is impacting on team morale. There is not currently the capacity in the team to deliver the target for restoration in 2022/23. A review of current resource and an assessment of the resources required to deliver future aspirations is underway as part of the audit process. Finance sufficient to support recruitment into the project team is programmed into resource forecasts.

19. Much of the peatland restoration management this year is drain blocking as this is where there is adequate contractor resource. However, the Programme had anticipated more erosion work, which is 3 times the costs of drain blocking work and carried a large underspend as a result. A budget review in November 2021 identified £0.44 million capital that was not required this financial year and that was communicated to Scottish Government. They agreed to re-profile this finance back into our capital budgets in 2022/23 and 2023/24.
20. The Programme has spent £0.31 million to end January 2022 and there are grant claims, for projects completed, totalling £0.87 million due in February. A further £0.23 million is allocated to projects, with contractors, which could be delivered by the financial year end if weather and contractor availability allows. If this work is completed by the year end, the Programme will have an underspend in the region of £33,000 from a £1.94 million budget.
21. Going forward contractor capacity still remains a key issue, particularly for the more complex erosion work. The New Entrants programme will continue in 2022 with some additional training provided to those who went through it in 2021 on erosion techniques to develop their skill set.
22. Weather this winter has been exceptionally mild enabling projects to work in January and into February. There still remains a significant risk of snow in February and March that could prevent several projects starting and completing impacting on project spend and hectares under management.
23. Following the internal audit, Programme procedures and documentation will need further resource to ensure they meet the required standards. This will take place during early Spring.
24. A peatland mapping project is being undertaken using a contractor and this work will produce a map of impacted peatland for the whole National Park. It will show areas of drained peatland and areas of eroded peatland and will help inform our strategic planning and project development.

Conclusions: Performance Overview and Matters Meriting Strategic Review

25. The delivery and spend of the Peatland Programme is currently on track to exceed expectations in terms of hectares under restoration management with a lower risk of weather and contractor availability impacting on the programme. Resource requirements and programme management procedures will need to be addressed to ensure the Programme is able to scale up and achieve its potential.

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