
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

FOR DISCUSSION

**Title: CAIRNGORMS PEATLAND ACTION PROGRAMME
DELIVERY**

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Purpose

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

Recommendation

- a) **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	We are unlikely to use the entire capital budget but, at this stage, project tenders are still being submitted and costs are rising across the sector. It is therefore currently difficult to assess the level of likely underspend.
Finance: impact on Cairngorms NPA budget management	Green	No wider unplanned demands currently made by programme on financial resources.
Area of restored peatland: 905 hectare target 2022/23 (Restoration Area)	Green	At this early stage in the restoration year, we have approved grant to

Performance Measure for 2022/23	Rating	Commentary
		bring 591 ha under restoration (Restoration Area).
Programme risk profile	Amber	Currently we have sufficient contractor interest in projects to achieve targets. This may change as the tender process continues.
Future funding profile	Amber	Future levels of funding from Scottish Government are uncertain given the current review of public finance. However, we do have a four year funding profile agreed, albeit while continuing to operate within single year allocations.
Future delivery profile	Green	The requirement to recruit new Peatland Officers and project assistants introduces a degree of uncertainty around the achievement of targets in the short term. We are optimistic the 22/23 programme target of 905 ha (Restoration Area) will be achieved while action on developing the staff team currently underway will underpin successful long-term programme delivery.

Target for 2022-23

2. Areas of bare peat are spread through the landscape and may be concentrated or widely dispersed. We measure peatland restoration areas in two ways. First we measure Restoration Area by capturing all areas of bare peat within a polygon. This polygon will include vegetated areas between eroded areas. We often measure Restoration Area before work begins, so we have a measure of the hectares involved without going into fine detail. We also measure Restoration Footprint, which is more detailed and takes much longer to record. Restoration Footprint involves measuring each individual eroded feature and adding a buffer area of standard size around each feature. Restoration Footprint is used as a measure within the Peatland Code. If a landowner wishes to register a project under Peatland Code, then they must measure the Restoration Footprint of the site before work begins. Both measurements of Restoration Area and Restoration Footprint are useful, but there is potential for confusion between them.

3. Under Peatland Action we measure Restoration Area at the start of a project. Both Restoration Area and Restoration Footprint are recorded at the end of a project. These means that annual Peatland Action programme area targets have been set using Restoration Area, but target achievement has been recorded using both Restoration Area and Restoration Footprint. This has led to confusion in recording work achieved

against target and we need to standardise measurements across Peatland Action at national level.

4. In 2022-23 we plan 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.

Finance and staffing

5. 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, team operations and other delivery costs). As in previous years, we are unlikely to spend all this budget. However rising costs across the sector make it currently difficult to estimate the amount of potential underspend. We will aim to establish a robust outturn projection by the end of September 2022 to feed into an anticipated Scottish Government autumn budget review exercise.
6. As of 19th July, we have issued Grant Offer letters to four estates. The total grant offered to date is £956,282 (approaching one third of budget) and this will bring 591 ha of peatland under restoration management (over 60% of hectare target). Of this, 466 ha involves the restoration of actively eroding peat, with an additional 125 ha of ditch blocking. All measurements are Restoration Areas at this point. Work will begin on these projects in late July/ early August.
7. Stephen Corcoran, Programme Manager left CNPA in May 2022. We are grateful for Stephen's efforts in establishing the Peatland Action Programme within the CNP. Stephen's departure allowed us to re-structure the Peatland team and to tackle persistent capacity issues within Peatland Action. We have replaced Stephen's post with two programme managers. Emma Stewart is now Programme Manager (Operations) and will have responsibility for the delivery of projects on the ground. Matt Watson is now Programme Manager (Programme Development) and will have responsibility for progressing strategic issues like contractor capacity, interaction with the Peatland Code, Green Finance and how we scale up the programme. Alongside Senior Management, Matt will work to implement the recommendations of the Internal Audit, which is nearing finalisation with recommendations expected on development of systems and procedures. Management specifically requested this internal audit recognising the Peatland ACTION Team is a new area of direct responsibility operating within a dynamic environment.
8. Both Emma and Matt are internal appointments and we are now recruiting replacement Peatland Officers. Later this year we plan to recruit a project assistant and we also plan to second a Peatland Officer. This person will work as an additional project assistant until the end of the financial year. All the costs of this recruitment can be met within our existing resource budget of £0.505 million.
9. The summer of 2022 is a period of considerable change within the Peatland team. New managers have the challenge of taking on new roles while continuing to oversee projects from their previous roles as Peatland Officers. There is an unavoidable time

lag surrounding the back filling of promoted posts. New recruits will need time to become familiar with projects and with CNPA processes. This transition period will inevitably constrain project progress to some extent in 2022/23. However, re-structuring should enable the programme to expand in future years.

Progress to date on the programme for 2022-23.

10. The peatland restoration programme has a seasonal cycle. Little restoration work on the ground is possible during spring and early summer as we are constrained by the need to protect breeding birds etc. Spring and early summer are used for survey work and project planning, with most restoration work beginning from mid July onwards.
11. Tenders have been issued for further projects throughout the Park and the area being brought under restoration will expand rapidly over late summer and autumn.
12. Contractor capacity continues to be an issue, but to date, tenders have been received for all projects which have been advertised on PCS. We will continue to consider new ways of increasing contractor interest and capacity.
13. Currently we feel we are on track to achieve the programme target of 905ha in 2022/23. However there are continuing risks that issues like Peatland Code validation, lack of contractors and adverse weather may slow progress in the autumn and winter.
14. Table 1 and 2 below summarise the current position of all current and pipeline projects.

Table 1: Committed grants-projects which gained grant approval in 2021-22 but where work remains to be carried out in 2022-23.

Type of restoration	Current status	Cost
Erosion	Work being carried out	£38,754
Handwork	Work being carried out	£15,000
Drains	To start Aug/ Sep 2022	£40,812
Handwork	To re-start Aug 2022	£26,376
Handwork	To re-start Aug 2022	£12,000
	Total	£132,942

Table 2: New projects approved in current year or seeking grant approval in 2022-23.

Type of restoration	Current status	Cost
Erosion	70% complete and work on going	£151,949 grant approved
Drains	In prep	£110,000 estimate
Erosion	Active	0 repair work from previous project
Erosion	Tenders being scored	£119,000 estimate
Erosion	Tenders being scored	£320,000 estimate
Drains + 5ha of erosion	In prep	£240,000 estimate
Erosion	Active	£27,000 estimate
	Total	£967,949 estimate
	Committed grant in 2022-23	£956,282
	Estimated total project spend in 2022-23 to date	£1.924 million out of capital budget of £2.962 million

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