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## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

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### 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;**
- c) any material impacts on the CNPA's strategic risk management.**

#### **Performance Dashboard**

Performance Measure: Progress towards the project's agreed purposes	Rating	Commentary
Empower communities to help ensure the survival of capercaillie through community led conservation, by implementing the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy and developing, agreeing and implementing action plans with additional communities.	Green	The latest Action Plan for the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy has been approved by the Project Board and delivery is underway. Action plans with the business, visitor and mountain biking communities are also in the implementation phase. A Deeside action plan is now in place following positive engagement with stakeholders. Members of the dog walking community have engaged positively with the project's initial research to identify areas of consensus within the dog walking community around which actions can be developed.
Raise awareness and increase understanding of the challenges facing capercaillie through a variety of means including social media activities and events, a new online	Green	Social media engagement and website traffic continues to increase. Volunteers have donated over 2,760 hours to the project. Genetics work has experienced some delays but remains on track to

Performance Measure: Progress towards the project's agreed purposes	Rating	Commentary
Engagement platform, volunteer work, a public app, new resources for schools and genetics analysis.		effectively inform conversations outwith the project related to the NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee Report.
Work with landowners to implement plans to improve and manage around 9,000 hectares of habitat across six estates for the benefit of capercaillie; enable landowners to play their part in capercaillie conservation via a third-party grant scheme targeting landholdings in capercaillie areas.	Green	Habitat improvements have been taking place on Balmoral, Seafield, Rothiemurchus and Abernethy. Predator management continues on Seafield and Rothiemurchus. The project grant scheme to enable landmanagers to improve and create more habitat for capercaillie received 4 successful applications including from Dorback and Invercauld.
Monitor, test and evaluate ideas throughout delivery, applying learning from the project to refine activities including habitat improvement work, survey techniques, promotional activities and the community action planning model.	Green	An Evaluation Framework is in place and qualitative and quantitative data is in the process of being gathered and analysed to begin identifying the project's impact.
Develop an innovative and replicable model for community-led species conservation that enables communities to successfully coexist with their natural heritage, sharing the project's findings internally and externally with UK organisations, and further afield, to create a legacy of learning.	Green	The model developed through initial work with Carrbridge and subsequently modified through adaptive learning is used effectively across the project. Insights and learning from the model have been shared with members of the Heritage Horizons: Cairngorms 2030 team. Work by the James Hutton Institute is ongoing to document on film the process and outcomes of the project's work with the mountain biking community to provide inspiration, learning and evidence in a way that can stimulate further debate and learning.

### **Strategic Background**

- I. 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](#) The Authority's strategic objectives of relevance to consideration of the delivery of the programme reporting presented with this paper are:
  - a) 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.

2. The latest review of the Strategic Risk Register was considered by the Audit and Risk Committee in [May 2022](#). 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
  
3. The programmes of activity under consideration here also fit with the priorities of the current National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP), 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](#). The relevant elements of the NPPP delivery relating to these programmes are:
  - a) 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](#).

### **Performance Overview: Delivery Against Strategic Expectations**

4. 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.
  
5. 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 CNPA visitor management and access teams are actively contributing to the work now underway to develop detailed proposals in response to the NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee Report on capercaillie conservation and management. Transitional planning is in place to manage the project’s legacy regarding access management as part of core CNPA business
  - b) Members of the CNPA Access and Recreation Team are actively involved in the project’s work with the dog walking community which will see the development of a 5-year programme of actions, representative of the dog walking community’s views, for delivery post-project led by CNPA.

- c) Learning from the trial signage to encourage responsible access around Carrbridge is continuing to inform CNPA access team strategic planning.
- d) The visitor segmentation model developed as part of the research to understand visitors' perceptions and values relating to access and capercaillie in Rothiemurchus, Abernethy and Glenmore is continuing to help inform CNPA's wider work related to managing for visitors, audience profiling and Heritage Horizons.
- e) Insights and learning from the project's model for community-led species conservation and work with communities has been shared with members of CNPA's Heritage Horizons: Cairngorms 2030 team to help the team's thinking as they develop their delivery phase application.

### **Performance Overview: Risks Under Management**

6. All project risks and issues, as identified in the quarterly progress report, are either in a favourable status or being managed closely at Project Board level with mitigation plans in place.

7. Staffing: the project is operating with sufficient staff capacity to achieve its objectives.

Additional capacity has been secured in a part time Trail Development Co-ordinator who will support the project's work with the mountain biking community until July 2023. The post is fully funded by the project (NLHF).

The project's Community Ranger assigned to Carrbridge has moved from the project to become a full time Countryside Ranger in the CNPA Ranger Team where they will continue to support the project as part of the CNPA Ranger Team. The Countryside Ranger post is core funded by CNPA.

The Project Coordinator has left the project for a permanent external post. Project staff and CNPA core staff will cover the Project Coordinator's work for the remaining 12 months of the project.

Two post holders within the project (Project Manager and Project Officer) have now been in post for 4 years (+). CNPA policy requires that these post holders are offered new roles commensurate with grade when their current fixed term contracts end at the end of the project.

8. Resourcing audit and legacy: The Project Board agreed in June that the project should seek an extension to the current grant expiry (30 July 2023) in order to secure a firm legacy across all areas of work within the project. NLHF have approved the extension in principle, which will see the project's activities end in December 2023 and the project formally end in January 2024. No additional funding is required. The extension will be financed by the project's current underspend. To enable the Board and NLHF's decision regarding an extension, a full assessment was made of the project activities which are currently anticipated to be completed by 30 July 2023 and those which need or would benefit from more time to secure a firmer legacy.

9. Reputation:

- a) An Evaluation Framework is in place for the project to monitor ongoing work, to understand the successes and challenges involved in delivering the project and to report on the extent to which the project has achieved its goals. With effective ongoing monitoring and evaluation, it will be possible to learn from

achievements and issues, adapt ways of working in the light of experience, and share learning within and beyond the project. It will also provide the basis for reporting the outcomes and impacts of the work to others, internally and externally. An interim evaluation report will be discussed with NLHF, Project Board and the project's Operational Management Team in January.

- b) The wider context of capercaillie conservation remains a highly contentious and high-profile arena, attracting much comment and polarised opinion. Current discourse is focused primarily on the outcomes of the NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee's recent report and the recommendation therein regarding predator management. Project staff, with support from Project Board members where relevant, are continuing to ensure the project scope and legacy is clearly communicated in this context.
10. Technical: Project staff will continue, where required, to help co-ordinate the work outwith the project which is now underway in response to the NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee Report. CNPA and NatureScot are continuing to progress work on a Spatial Strategy in response to the report, consultation with stakeholders and CNPA and NatureScot Board discussions about the report earlier this year. The recent national survey result strengthens the need for this work to continue and at pace. The Spatial Strategy will include the creation of refugia and safe spaces for capercaillie to minimise human disturbance. There is a risk that the CCP's bottom-up, collaborative approach that has proven very successful with groups to date (eg mountain biking community, businesses and visitors) is confused with, and therefore undermined by, a more top-down, instructive approach to defining and managing refuges.

Initial evidence from the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project's genetic research will become available this autumn. The findings will underpin any future decisions on the feasibility and desirability of species translocation.

### **Conclusions: Performance Overview and Matters Meriting Strategic Review**

- 11. 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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