



For discussion

Title: Cairngorms Peatland ACTION Programme

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Purpose

This paper presents an update on the developing programme for 2026/27.

Recommendations

The Performance Committee is asked to:

- a) Note programme targets and plans for 2026/27.

Strategic policy consideration

1. The National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) action is to restore a minimum of 6,500 hectares (ha) of peatland by 2027, as a contribution towards the target of a minimum of 38,000ha of peatland under restoration by 2045, 80% of all drains restored by 2035, and all erosion features restored by 2050.
2. Peatland Action funding is a significant component of the match funding for the Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) Programme. As one of the five Peatland ACTION delivery partners, the restoration work delivered by the Park Authority plays an important part in reaching the Scottish Government's (SG) target of 250,000ha of peatland being restored by 2030.

Performance dashboard

Performance Measure for 2025/26	Rating	Commentary
Finance: Maximise use of £3.5 million capital finance and £705,000 resource finance available in 2026/27 for peatland restoration.	Green	There are currently 11 projects in the programme with an additional two held in reserve. Resource funding is fully allocated. The estimated overall grant requirement is £3.25 million. The remaining £250,000



Performance Measure for 2025/26	Rating	Commentary
		is allocated to a specific trial to restore bare peat.
Finance: Impact on the Park Authority's budget management.	Green	No wider unplanned demands currently made by programme on financial resources.
Restoration target 2026/27: 1,300ha Restoration Area	Green	There are sufficient hectares in the programme to meet this target.
Pipeline for 2027/28	Green	One project is secured, being year two of a multi-year project starting in 26/27, and plans are in development for a further 10 projects.
Programme risk profile	Amber	At this stage in the programme cycle, changes in the programme are to be expected and reserve projects are in place. There are uncertainties around the potential impacts of wildfire on resources.
Future funding profile	Green	The Scottish Government four-year spending review indicates an increase in the overall Peatland ACTION programme from £28 million in 2026/27 to £30.6 million in 2027/28.
Future delivery profile	Green	Landowners remain engaged with Peatland ACTION with demand now roughly in line with budget.

Delivery against strategic outcomes

- At this early stage in the peatland year, the programme for 2027/28 is developing well and is broadly on track to achieve the agreed target of 1300ha for 2026/27. This year's target is a reduction in the hectares achieved recently where, over the



last two years, we have achieved at least 1800ha under restoration annually. This reduction is due to having fewer drain blocking projects which restore relatively large areas at relatively low cost per hectare. Many of the most accessible drain blocking projects in the Cairngorms have already been treated. We are now predominantly restoring eroded sites, treating smaller areas at higher cost.

4. Since 2022, approximately 9,400ha of peatland has been brought under restoration. The NPPP action to bring 6,500ha under restoration by 2027 has been achieved and we remain on track to bring a minimum of 38,000 ha of peatland under restoration management by 2045.
5. Scottish Government has maintained the peatland restoration commitment to restore 250,000ha of degraded peatland by 2030, backed by a £250 million investment. Commitments in the four-year spending profile reflect this status and offer a high degree of confidence that Peatland ACTION funds will continue to be made available to the Park Authority during this period. This presents a low-risk environment in which the Park Authority can forward commit funding and enter into multi-year grant offers, providing increased security for both land managers and contractors.
6. Levels of forward commitment have been agreed to a maximum of £1.5 million in year two and £1 million in year three, representing approximately 43% and 28% of predicted grant respectively. All forward commitments will be agreed by Executive Team. There is one forward commitment of £254 972 planned for expenditure in 2027/28, relating to stage two of a project initiated in the 2026/27 programme. Although, the work may be delayed by a year as the site is within an area affected by wildfire.
7. Staffing in the Peatland Team has remained stable at nine members since the last report to the Performance Committee.
8. At this point in time not all projects have been tendered so it is unclear if contractor capacity remains sufficient to tackle the planned programme. However, attendance at early "bidder's days" demonstrates continued contractor interest.



9. One peatland restoration site is within the area impacted by the wildfire in Glenmore and Abernethy. Previous, completed restoration does not seem to be affected, indications are the wildfire may have been arrested and / or moved around the site, the next stage was planned to have been in this year's programme with a forward commitment to next financial year. Should this work be delayed, the impact on the 2026/27 will be small and reserve projects are available to ensure maximum spend.
10. During the emergency, Park Authority staff, vehicles and equipment were assigned to duties supporting firefighting efforts. The impacts on the peatland team were mainly in providing qualified drone pilots and reallocation of Park Authority 4x4 fleet vehicles. The consequence of these re-allocations of resource are not considered to be significant on delivery of the programme, however the wider effect on helicopter service providers and contractors are not yet understood.
11. After five years of pioneering landscape-scale nature finance projects across the UK's National Parks, the Revere collaboration has now concluded. Palladium will exit the peatland restoration partnership on Delnadamph in July 2028. Palladium's withdrawal will cause minimum disruption to the operational programme and peatland restoration on Delnadamph will continue. Agreements have been reached between Canup Ltd and Palladium for maintenance of the site, managing peatland code requirements, ensuring PIUs are converted to PCUs and for management the project budget and profit allocation. There is no additional requirement on the Park Authority as a result of Palladium's exit.

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