



For discussion

Title: Wrap up of Climate Adaptation Fund 2025/26

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Purpose

This paper presents the status of the Climate Adaptation Fund as it completes delivery of year two (2025/26) and looks forward to delivery of year three (2026/27).

Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

- a) Review the delivery of the fund and note how the application processes and criteria have changed to respond to capacity and user experience.
- b) Review and note the impact of two years of funding.

Delivery

1. Following the delivery of the initial 2024/25 fund the 2025/26 delivery was refined and some changes made.
 - a) Timeframe - It was identified that the timeframe for the application process was too short. Expressions of interest opened in mid-February 2025 instead of in May as in the previous year.
 - b) Following trailing Microsoft Forms (online) in the 2024/25 round alongside Microsoft Word (hard copy) application processes: Word versions were available but only by request to help streamline the process. This ensured that the information received for scoring was consistent between applicants, whilst still supporting those preferring to work on a hard copy.
 - c) Expressions of interest phase was open from mid-February 2025 to 13 April 2025. A total of 70 expressions of interest were received. 47 were invited to complete full applications, five were invited to complete full application for other available funds, the remaining 18 were given advice on other potential funding streams out with the Authority; or given capacity by Conservation and Land Management teams to develop their ideas within core work.
 - d) The expressions of interest were considered by officers from the Land Management and Conservation teams.



- e) Common reasons for expressions of interest not being invited to apply were: large scale projects that risked not delivering within the funding timeline, projects at conception not delivery stage, projects for revenue not capital, not meeting fund criteria (ie food production not climate adaptation), fund not supporting projects where a national fund exists (ie EV Chargers)
- f) Restriction on grant value to 30% intervention was implemented for those applying for alternative energy sources. This was to avoid replacing existing national schemes.
- g) Applications were open from 13 April to 11 May 2025. We received 28 full applications. Of those invited to apply 19 did not complete an application, 12 were successful, 16 were unsuccessful with common reasons being; Project not deemed to be climate adaptation, were still requesting too high an intervention rate, did not have a good project plan or unable to show wider impact.
- h) Applications were reviewed by two Directors and two Board members with decisions made to award a total of £283,775.97.
- i) The panel agreed conditions on several of the projects. For example, those installing alternative energy sources to have a Business Energy Scotland assessment completed and share the report. This helped them to plan their project and identify where other sources of grant were available for other parts of the wider project. This was particularly popular with community projects who actively engaged with the CARES scheme with good success.
- j) At the end of programme delivery there was an underspend of £16,224.03. Three projects underspent; one gained alternative funding, one didn't start the project, and the third struggled to deliver within the timeframe of the fund.

Fund impact

- 2. This funding has strengthened climate adaptation, biodiversity, renewable energy use, and wildfire resilience across the Cairngorms National Park.
 - a) Projects supported local businesses, improved land management capacity, and accelerated investment that would otherwise have been delayed.
 - b) Funding enabled environmental, economic, and community benefits that align with the Park's long-term climate and conservation goals. Several projects, notably solar installations and the robotic mower, highlighted they would not have progressed without the Park Authority support due to high upfront costs.



- c) Wildfire resilience, nature friendly farming, riparian planting, alternative energy solutions and supporting local businesses were all outcomes.
- d) There has been a positive link with farming, land managers and businesses that has carried through into other funding streams.
- e) Unsuccessful applicants have always been presented with a positive destination.
- f) Awareness of C2030 and other core projects has been raised by the promotion of this funding.

Next steps, forward look

- 3. Wildfire equipment applications have dominated applications to the 2026/27 fund, far exceeding the total available for distribution. Funds were targeted at an effective response to wildfire, rather than managing fuel load which was considered to be a land management decision and practice. Funding for multi-purpose estate equipment was restricted and funding for specific firefighting equipment prioritised.
- 4. The demands for fire-fighting equipment are likely to remain high with a similar impact on future Climate Adaptation Fund programmes. An asset register, as per the Integrated Wildfire Management Plan, will support the targeting of Climate Adaptation Fund both spatially and based on the type of equipment and human resource, however there could be opportunity for the Park Authority to work with Scottish Government in developing a specific strand of funding for wildfire management.
- 5. More complex nature-based projects are often ill-defined and present significant delivery risks, largely as a result of lack of capacity for project development. There is currently no provision in operational planning for Park Authority staff to meet this need. An option could be to build capacity in third party organisations to support project development, eg The Spey Catchment Initiative.
- 6. A mid-term meeting to discuss the forward look, potentially combined with some site visits could offer opportunity for the panel to further develop the fund's aims. A series of case studies, maps and impact reports will form part of the year three delivery reporting now the fund has distributed just under £950,000 over three years.



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