



Appendix 7

Bringing back beavers to the Cairngorms: our approach to communications

Jonathan Willet, Beaver Project Manager, 19 October 2023

Outline the plan for communicating the process and outcomes of the translocation (including steps to inform future translocations, stakeholder communication and public engagement)

The initial communications for bringing beavers back to the Cairngorms began in June 2022. This took the form of a press release, announcing that the Park Authority board had agreed that we should take a leadership role in developing an application to bring beavers back to the Cairngorms. The board meeting was livestreamed and minutes were published on our website shortly afterwards.

This gained momentum with the appointment of the beaver project manager and a series of informal 'Beaver Blethers' drop-in events in March 2023, before moving onto promotion of the formal engagement and its in-person events and accompanying online survey. The formal engagement communications were centred around social media and website promotion, including the release of a series of pre-recorded videos featuring key stakeholders and experts involved in the project. The videos were viewed over 30,000 times in total. They were supported by further digital and offline promotion including posters, local and national press, website content, direct emails, leaflets, partner support, articles in our resident magazine *Cairn* and much more (see the full engagement report in appendix 8 for full details).

In terms of local press activity, the Badenoch and Strathspey Herald is a key weekly print title in the area and has substantial reach locally, with a circulation of 2,296 and readership of 5,344. Good relationships were built with a key journalist, resulting in eight articles about beavers, translocation plans and the engagement activities from June to September 2023. Other print titles such as the Press and Journal were also interested in



the story, and the BBC and STV have covered the story as part of their news bulletins and are very keen to cover the release of beavers in future.

The five-hour informal and formal engagement events that have been run so far (a total of 11, with nearly 200 attendees) have been very successful in engaging and informing those attending, and have also created strong lines of communications and productive working relationships between NatureScot, National Farmers Union, Scotland, Spey Fishery Board, The Beaver Trust and the Park Authority. Though these organisations don't agree on everything, they have shown they can work together very effectively and this informal communication has been a real strength.

The communication plan post-licence application will build on the communications pathways used thus far to keep residents, visitors, land managers and other key stakeholders informed. It will use multiple channels, platforms and media to ensure that everyone has the chance to hear about key decisions and how the project proposal is progressing. In addition, the project will continue to have a presence at public events and will prioritise face-to-face engagement, something that has proved to be very popular so far.

The development of an ongoing communication plan has considered three discrete phases: the pre-decision phase of the licence application, the decision on the licence and the next steps following that decision. The first two phases will be relatively light touch, with a limited number of online resources being shared and no face-to-face events planned (to avoid 'consultation fatigue').

Depending on the decision on the licence, the options are to regroup, reconsider and reapply or take forward the release.

If successful in gaining a licence, the plan will again be split into three phases: the release itself, immediate post-release territorial establishment and ongoing 'living with beavers' communication. Again, the first two will be time-limited out of necessity, but the third will be an ongoing narrative about the beavers themselves but also their interaction with the biodiversity around them (including humans) and how they modify their habitat. This will include highlighting the management techniques used e.g. flow devices, tree protection and fencing, to avoid or mitigate any potentially unacceptable impacts to impacts whose levels are acceptable.



Of the two initial release sites, one will be promoted publicly – Rothiemurchus. This will allow members of the public wanting to watch beavers to be directed to an appropriate, staffed location where their questions can be answered and any potential impacts carefully managed. We would anticipate this engagement to be relatively substantial given the nature of the species and the location in question, providing a positive opportunity for high-quality engagement both with visitors and residents within the National Park. We are working with Rothiemurchus to waymark a beaver trail loop with facilities and parking at each end, as well as installing temporary interpretation by the time of release and permanent interpretation by the end of the winter. This will go hand-in-hand with responsible access messaging and advice on minimising wildlife disturbance. There will be an all-abilities section of path and new seating close to the water's edge, an upgrade to existing infrastructure.

Beaver habitat modification and how it impacts (or doesn't impact) humans will be a key part of the communication going forward. We are very keen to highlight any mitigations being utilised and report on how successful – or otherwise - they are. The first dam on an Atlantic salmon spawning burn will of course be of great interest, and we will be highlighting our monitoring and research efforts with partners as this progresses, e.g. beaver impacts on rare lichens on riparian trees. These updates, plus news from our regular site visits, will be communicated monthly via the beaver project manager, other project staff and partners, and will over time broaden to include other stakeholders and their beaver stories.

Another key strand of the communications that will begin before the release of beavers is how we should behave around beaver territories to ensure that we do not disturb them. This should also give all those who want to watch beavers the best opportunity to see them safely. This will be done in partnership with the landowner of the release site and their staff, the Park Authority Ranger Service and NatureScot. We and our partners will use all the channels mentioned above and also a regular on the ground presence to engage with the public, answer questions and demonstrate good behaviour around beavers.

Alongside this, we will continue to develop relationships with landowners and managers surrounding the release sites (and any new territories that are created); we will keep local communities – including community councils – informed directly through updates to their meetings and offers of presentations. An annual beaver report will be produced, giving an insight into how the beavers have settled in, what they have been up to and what mitigation, if any, has been required.



In parallel with the release on the Spey, the Park Authority will start informal conversations about beavers in four other catchments within the National Park, piggybacking on existing Park Authority engagement events already in the diary. A clear plan for the four catchments will be agreed internally and a timeline identified in the new year.

One learning from the current formal engagement process was that the farming community in particular wanted more time to consider the release of beavers and felt the process had been rushed. In response to this, we will publicise a timetable for action prior to any formal work on further beaver translocation proposals.

Another request was that we run an engagement event downstream of the National Park boundary on the Spey catchment, and we took this forward with the help of the Spey Fishery Board organising an event in Aberlour as part of the formal consultation. Two events in Fochabers have also been organised in mid-November, one for farmers and another for general interest, to allow us to hear peoples' thoughts and opinions and answer any questions people may have about beavers and what they do. Also in mid-November, we are organising two farmers' visits to South Clunes Farm, a 100-acre landholding where captive beavers have been resident since 2008. This will give farmers the opportunity to see what beaver do and speak to a farmer who actively sought out beavers for his land.

Outwith the National Park, we will be promoting our desire to share our experiences and learnings with anyone looking at future beaver translocations. We have already done this with the Cornwall Wildlife Trust and the Ettrick Valley Project, who attended our Nethy Bridge and Aberlour formal engagement events.