**Cairngorms Agricultural Advisory Group (CAAG) Meeting, Grantown on Spey 05/03/24**

Present: Grant Moir, Andy Ford, Lewis Pate (CNPA), Nikki Yoxall (PLF), Neil Smith (Farmer), Allan MacDiarmid (Farmer), Ian Wilson (NFUS), Rory Cameron (Farmer), Duncan Miller (CNPA Board), Robert Macdonald (Farmer/CFCC), Gordon McConnachie (Farmer/Advisor), Bobby Mackenzie (Farmer), Viv Montgomery (Crofter/SCF), Lucy Grant (Farmer/CFCC), Andrew Macdonald (Farmer), Bruce McConnachie (Farmer/QMS), Chris Donald (Nature Scot).

Online: Davy McCracken (SRUC), Eleanor Mackintosh (CNPA Board), Douglas Bell (STFA)

**Terms of Reference and membership**

AF set the scene with reference to current functioning CNPA working groups, including Cairngorms Upland Advisory Group and the Economic Steering Group that have clearly defined roles, purpose and membership. It was agreed the new group will be called the Cairngorms Agricultural Advisory Group (CAAG).

The Cairngorms Farming and Crofting Community (CFCC) has an objective to liaise with the Park Authority. The role of the group is not to act as the Park Authority’s sole route of engagement with farmers and crofters. Whilst the CFCC is making progress in encouraging attendance from all parts of the National Park, it is not currently fully representative of farms and crofts in the area, however the group hopes to be in the long term. Ensuring engagement and consultation with a wide range of farm businesses in the National Park lies with the Park Authority.

Representatives from CFCC felt the CAAG should act as a means of representing the views of the farming and crofting community to Scottish Government. It was clarified that this is not the role and remit of the Park Authority. The opinions of CAAG members will be considered in the Park Authority’s work, including development of plans, policies and activity.

Attendees discussed proposed objectives for the CAAG, including the following:

* Act as a line of communication between the Park Authority staff and Board and representatives of the farming and crofting organisations and farm businesses in the National Park.
* Provide advice and guidance to the Park Authority on agricultural issues in the National Park.
* Support and collaborate on projects associated with delivery of National Park Partnership Plan objectives.
* Foster and facilitate an exemplar of good practice engagement with the farming and crofting community.

**ACTION: Park Authority to draft Terms of Reference for circulation, comment & agreement.**

In order to ensure proper representation, it was suggested that membership be extended to include the Crown Estate Tenant Farmers Group and that the Park Authority work with regional NFUS committees, existing contacts and other farmer and crofter groups to ensure membership of CAAG reflects the whole Park. Final member numbers were not defined at this stage. It was suggested that CAAG could move around the Park and meet to facilitate wider representation.

**ACTION: Park Authority to agree membership of CAAG at the present time with input from others.**

A range of opinion was expressed on the merit and practicality of reviving the functions of a wider, open to all, Farmers’ Forum. It was recognised that previous Farmers Forums were good for encouraging events into the Park, hosting guest speakers and as a means of communication with Park Authority staff. It was also recognised that more groups would be a further demand on farmers and crofters available time, there’s an existing programme of meetings and events hosted by a number of different groups and agencies, and there’s a limited capacity to keep multiple groups going. There was no clear consensus from the discussion and it was agreed further thought was required. Identifying what’s already going on, and where the gaps are, would be a good way of looking where the Park Authority can add value to the programme and use it to best effect for increasing communication between farmers, crofters and the Park Authority.

**ACTION: Park Authority to identify opportunities for a programme of activity that adds value and supports communications.**

 **Beaver Management and Mitigation**

AF explained that the beaver management and mitigation plan was now in place and that the establishment of a beaver working group would be to see how the plan is working on the ground, not to re-negotiate the existing plan.

It was felt very important that there was opportunity for the plan to be amended if demonstrated not to be working. It was agreed that the group’s function was to inform an adaptive management approach, using practical experience to advise on how the application of the management and mitigation plan is working in practice. The national mitigation scheme is adaptive in nature and this will be the same for the Park Authority’s additionality. The group’s experience of using the mitigation available will shape and inform future adaptations if required.

CFCC representatives expressed further concern that the current mitigation scheme does not go far enough and is not sufficiently pre-emptive. Collaboration on the floodbank survey was highlighted as a good example of where working in partnership with land managers is adding value to the work. It was suggested NatureScot could convene a beaver working group and that there might be other working groups dealing with adaptive management, for beavers and other species, that we could learn from in setting up a Cairngorms beaver working group. It was noted that the group membership needs to be carefully balanced, reflecting fisheries and other land management issues and a range of perspectives. It was suggested the current Cairngorms Beaver Group could be reconfigured to act as a beaver working group, with some members no longer having a direct interest and the need to invite fresh membership with practical experience of how the mitigation plan is working in practice.

It was suggested that 2 members of the CCFC join the Beaver Working Group.

**ACTION: Park Authority to establish Cairngorms Beaver Working Group and organise a visit to Tayside beaver mitigation sites.**

 Questions regarding the Cairngorms 2030 Future Farming projects, and National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) objectives were deferred as an option to cover these subjects directly with the CFCC at later date, to be agreed with the group.

Concerns were raised on the lack of consultation for the NPPP and the perception that the NPPP advocated flooding the Spey valley. AF replied that there had been significant consultation on the NPPP and that the objective was not for whole-scale flooding but was for looking for opportunities for river restoration and re-connecting floodplains in the context of other activity, for example that done by the Catchment Management Partnerships.

**ACTION: CFCC to agree a date for Park Authority staff to provide information and updates on NPPP and C2030.**

**A.O.B.**

Confirmation was requested on the Park Authority’s position on Lynx reintroduction. It was stated that the Park Authority has no agreed position on Lynx reintroduction. The Park Authority has no plans for Lynx reintroduction, there is nothing in the NPPP, nothing in the Operational Plan, and the subject has not been discussed by the Park Authority Board.

It was agreed the CAAG would meet 2 or 3 times per year which will be included in the draft ToR. The next meeting is to be arranged for June 2024.

**ACTION: Park Authority to confirm dates and venues for 2024 meetings.**