

# **Building connections** between *land users* in the Cairngorms National Park and *researchers* in the Scottish Government's Strategic Research Programme



***The Scottish Environment, Food and Agriculture Research Institutes (SEFARI) Gateway  
and the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) Fellowship***

**Beth Wells, Moredun Research Institute, June 2017**





# Report Summary

- This fellowship was about building relationships as well as identifying research and knowledge exchange (KE) interests with land users, including land owners, managers, gamekeepers and farmers.
- The fellowship focussed on upland moorland management which is an area where land management and best practice conflicts have arisen in the past; where management practice varies considerably throughout the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) area and is also a topic in which the Scottish Government’s Strategic Research Programme (SRP) is very active.
- During the fellowship, which ran for 3 months from January to April 2017, more than 80 individuals were consulted from Estates, Groups and Organisations comprising land owners, managers, gamekeepers and farmers.
- After initial reservations were overcome, it was evident that the land users consulted really appreciated being asked for their opinions and requirements in terms of research and knowledge and welcomed the opportunity to comment.
- It became clear early on in the fellowship consultations that there was a low awareness of the SRP and confusion over who was involved in the programme, suggesting there is a communication gap between the SRP and some land use stakeholders.
- It also became evident that there are research as well as communication gaps between land users and the SRP, but there was a clear and strong interest from both sides to build relationships and collaborations.
- To move forward, continuity of relationship and trust building with a two way flow of information between researchers and land users is essential. The CNPA, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) and Scottish Land and Estates (SLE) would provide excellent conduits for achieving this.
- Many general and specific research and KE requirements and comments were collated and used to structure a KE framework, aimed at providing guidance for targeting priority areas going forward.
- This framework suggests how we move forward to improve communication and build partnerships between researchers and land users.

## 1. Introduction

In November 2016 the newly formed \*SEFARI Gateway, along with the CNPA, invited researchers from seven key areas of shared interest between the SRP and the CNPA to a workshop (Plate 1) to explore building research connections. These key areas included peatland restoration; flood management; transmission of diseases from animals to humans; tree health; woodland expansion; the role of the environment for wellbeing and place based policy.

**The aims of this meeting were:**

1. To provide an overview of key areas of SRP (and SRP linked) research of relevance to the CNPA and the agencies with which it works.
2. To provide the Main Research Providers (MRPs) within the SRP and SEFARI with an overview of the CNP and discuss opportunities for future research partnership and KE engagement.
3. To discuss how a KE strategy could be best developed between SEFARI and the CNPA.

The full meeting report, presentations and outcomes are available at: <http://cairngorms.co.uk/park-authority/training-support/land-management/>

The closing summary detailed:

- Several good research-land management connections were evident from the presentations and subsequent discussions, which relevant researchers/Park contacts should follow up directly.
- The National Park brings together a place-based approach across sectors at a meaningful scale of geography – so providing good opportunities for integration and using outputs in practice.
- Several practical opportunities for KE events and connections were suggested and it was concluded that a potential secondment from the SRP to the CNPA would significantly help put these into practice.

The potential secondment mentioned above was developed into a short term (20 day) fellowship funded by SEFARI and hosted by the CNPA, which ran from January to April 2017, with a steering committee of Hamish Trench (CNPA); Lorna Dawson and Charles Bestwick (SRP).



Plate 1. Invitation to the SRP/CNPA workshop.

*\*Scottish Environment, Food & Agriculture Research Institutes (SEFARI) is a collective group working across six of Scotland’s Research Institutes with the aim of improving the availability of information on, and connections between, areas such as the environment, land, food, agriculture and rural communities.*



## 2. Fellowship Aims and Methods

At the initial meeting it was decided that, due to time constraints, the fellowship would focus on upland moorland management which is a topic area where land management and best practice conflicts have arisen; where management practice varies considerably throughout the CNP area and is also an area in which the SRP is very active. The following outline for the fellowship was then developed:

1. Establish key contacts such as Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust; Scottish Natural Heritage; Forestry Commission; Scottish Land and Estates as well as the CNP Land Owners Group; Estates within the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership and other key Estate owners, land managers, agents and gamekeepers.
2. Establish contact with as many of the above as possible and attend meetings/ forums for already established groups wherever possible.
3. In particular, focus on contact and relationship building with gamekeepers, many of whom do not currently interact regularly with the CNPA.
4. Collate information from key contacts by email, telephone or preferably meeting, focussing on relevant areas of research to land owners/ managers and gamekeepers.
5. Use the collated information to map areas of overlap with the SRP and identification of research or KE gaps.
6. Feedback results (in report / event format) to land managers and researchers forming networks of communication from the MRPs to all CNP end users.
7. Identify from discussions throughout the fellowship, the desire for a land users/ research showcase event (or meeting) to disseminate the results of the fellowship as well as further engaging land users with the SRP and CNPA.
8. Build a KE framework for improving connections between the CNPA, land users within the CNP area and researchers involved in the relevant research areas defined.



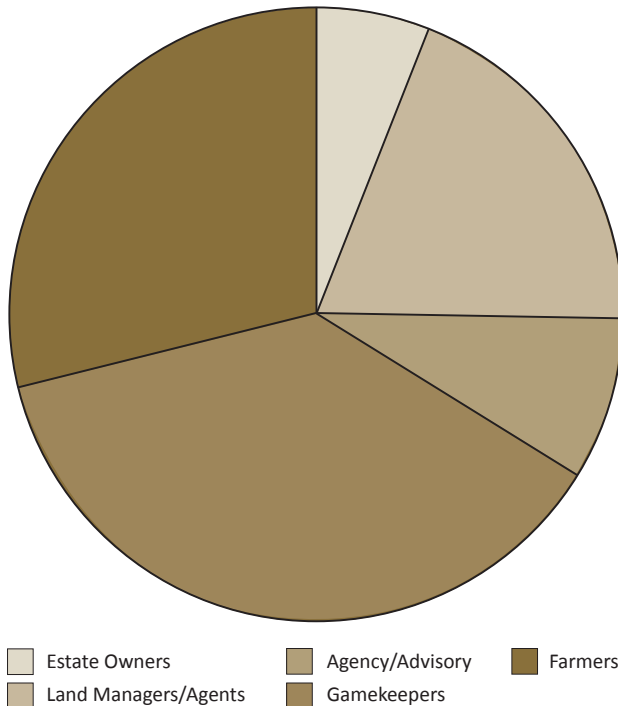
## 3. Results

More than 80 individuals were consulted during the fellowship from the Estates, Groups and Organisations listed below:

1. Scottish Land and Estates (SLE)
2. Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT)
3. Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
4. Rothiemurchus Estate
5. Mar Lodge Estate (National Trust for Scotland)
6. Invercauld Estate
7. Glenavon Estates
8. Glenlivet Estate (The Crown Estate Scotland)
9. Speyside Moorland Group
10. Grampian Moorland Group
11. Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA)
12. CNP Land Owners Group
13. Glen Tanar Estate
14. Tulchan Estate

The relative proportion of land user categories consulted during the fellowship (Figure 1) indicates that the gamekeeper sector was targeted, with also a high proportion of farmers and land managers participating.

Figure 1: Relative proportions of land user categories consulted during the fellowship



### Main general issues and comments collated from consultations

These have been reported as comments and views as conveyed by the land users consulted and grouped into three themes – Research, Communication and Topics.

#### 1. Research

- Research relating to land management, and moorland management in particular, is often not practical in terms of management outputs or relevant to the land user.
- The SRP research themes are generally too academic, therefore research ideas should be discussed with land managers and industry before research deliverables are set.
- A longer term research vision is required by land owners from Scottish Government with clear objectives. The current five year research commissioning is a barrier to any long term thinking and silo thinking is a huge problem affecting progress. Changing the vision constantly leads to poor impact and lack of directional progress.
- Projects are often predetermined with no flexibility on the side of the researcher, therefore frequently are not what the land manager wants or needs.
- Within the sporting estate community, there is a perceived issue that research relating to game has an agenda and is therefore skewed because the bulk of upland research is now carried out by conservation organisations with large research budgets.
- Land management decisions frequently involve trade-offs and establishing a balance between different outcomes, which are subject to a wide range of different perceptions and perspectives. Research that helps land managers better understand how to optimise public benefits alongside private interests should be a priority, thereby supporting managers when balancing these trade-offs.



## 2. Communication

- Land-based research provides evidence that is often used to support opposing views in relation to land management activities. A better means of interpreting and communicating research is required, both to inform land managers about best practice and inform wider stakeholders and the public about the positive public benefits of land management.
- Land managers need evidence for changing to best practice and work is required to find a compromise between good management advice for the range of different land uses on Estates in the CNP.
- A high number of requests for research locations are received by Estates from researchers, which requires a significant amount of input in terms of time and manpower from the Estate team, often with no return i.e. the results are not communicated at all or are not useful to practical land management.
- Land managers found that research is often not communicated in a straightforward, easily digestible format and is frequently difficult to locate.
- A frequent comment was the requirement for an advisory network to help refine and apply ideas generated from research, to gel ideas into workable projects and help deliver the package to the land managers, including regulatory and funding advice.
- It was suggested that these advisors could also establish practical, focussed workshops and training sessions to land user groups with the assistance of relevant researchers.
- An increase in KE and communication between researchers and land users is required. It was frequently commented on that the link between the two is broken.
- Researchers can forget that the people on the ground are themselves experts and their knowledge tends to be side-lined, hence the difficulty in getting uptake of new ideas.
- Although the narrative has changed from ‘knowledge transfer’ to ‘knowledge exchange’ it was felt that the latter frequently retains the same one way approach – “it is something that research institutes do to others.”
- True knowledge exchange levels the playing field and power relations and starts by treating land managers as equal partners and includes them in setting the agenda.
- Translation of research outputs was seen as a problem for all land users, but particularly for gamekeepers.
- Amongst the gamekeepers consulted, there was no knowledge of the SRP whatsoever, but there was interest in accessing research outputs which had been well translated to practical advice, such as what Moredun provide for their key stakeholders.
- Currently, land managers use organisations such as the GWCT and SLE for information and advice relating to land management decisions and practice. Both organisations would be open for discussions to communicate relevant research from the SRP, through their well developed communication channels, to land owners and managers. This could involve research updates on websites, E news sheets, magazines, blogs etc.
- As KE and stakeholder engagement is becoming increasingly important in all areas of research, it was felt that the research and organisation/ agency community could do more to help land users mount wide-scale public education campaigns, such as the effect of poorly controlled dogs on farmland, woodlands and moorland.
- Public relations exercises are required demonstrating win/win projects in the CNP such as those seen in peatland restoration. For example, blocking grits can be good for grouse, as well as peat, as this provides wetland areas with increased invertebrates (also good for salmon stocks – Spey Fisheries Board are now proposing to work with the Moorland Groups on this, illustrating the benefits of collaborative working).

## 3. Topics

- Research advice is required to implement good practice in land management and it was perceived that there was a dearth of background research in areas such as biodiversity and agricultural production.
- Biodiversity and livestock production: Research is required on rewetting / wader scrapes and livestock health such as liver fluke (a potential project is now being discussed between Moredun and GWCT).
- Research needs to be more economically based and driven by land economy, such as cost benefit analysis of grouse moors or livestock production benefits of sustainable worm control.
- Landscape scale research and habitat restoration is needed instead of focussing on single species where there will be losers – “iconic species is a dangerous label.”
- Research is required on the effect of good catchment head management, such as peatland restoration, on downstream flooding. The basic evidence that peatland restoration improves water storage capacity and reduces downstream flooding is not available
- Peatland restoration in the CNP is held back by a lack of research on the effects of this on grouse and wader populations.
- Social, economic, cultural and political balance is required. What do the Scottish public want from the landscape and what is in the public interest? This is not a well explored question.
- Specific information is required on Red Deer management, populations and habitat impact assessments at the local (Estate) level.
- More information is required on basic ecology of deer movements from lower ground to plateau and deer densities on montane habitat.
- Research on the disturbance effects of new developments, such as housing, on Capercaillie is required.
- More research within the area of fire management is required, such as fuel moisture modelling especially in heather and semi-natural grassland systems; fire behaviour models and fire danger rating systems.
- Moorland Groups: Gamekeepers in these groups expressed an interest in receiving more information on medicated grit for grouse; muirburn; ticks and tick borne diseases and mountain hare densities. The gamekeepers consulted felt that there was very little well translated, practical advice arising from research outputs available to them in these important subject areas.

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## 4. Discussion of the main issues and comments

After initial reservations were overcome, it was evident that the land users consulted really appreciated being asked for their opinions and requirements in terms of research and knowledge exchange and welcomed the opportunity to comment.

It became clear early on in the fellowship consultations, that there was a low general awareness of the SRP and confusion over who was involved in the programme, therefore there is clearly a communication gap between the SRP and stakeholders. This illustrates an obvious role for SEFARI and the importance of direct contact with stakeholder groups. The exception to this was the farmers group, as all of those participating knew where to source required information and quoted Moredun for livestock health, Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) for production and the National Farmers Union for Scotland (NFUS) for policy. They also commented that the information was generally well communicated in both written literature and events held. Moredun have close contact with farmers in the CNP area through their partnership with the Crown Estate Scotland at Glenlivet, which has resulted in practical farm events, meetings and livestock health projects. Moredun have also worked in partnership with the CNPA holding a joint livestock event in 2016 on a local Estate. Like other land users, the farmers consulted had never heard of the SRP, highlighting an opportunity for SEFARI, working with the Research Institutes, to instigate a programme of KE directed at the land based industries.

Due to a general lack of awareness of the SRP, one of the fellowship aims was changed as it was deemed pointless to broker contact between researchers and land users and instead communication was re-established between the participating land users and the SRP through the fellowship, information was exchanged and trust built. Obvious points of difficulty for land managers, such as those relating to over exposure to research projects with no return, are extremely worrying and should be a point of discussion between SEFARI and the Research Institutes as a priority.

The issues with lack of practicality and short-termism in the SRP programmes are difficult to tackle as these research programmes are set by the Scottish Government. However, there is some flexibility within research deliverables and as part of the KE framework it would be useful to address this issue. This would rely on further development of relationships between land managers and relevant researchers within the SRP, where land managers were contributing to research programme direction, thereby addressing many of the research comments received. This point illustrates the need for a focussed workshop event to develop this idea further.

The major issue discussed with all land users and groups referred to problems with effective communication. A lack of translated, easily available research was a major concern, alongside the perception that there is already a huge amount of research that can be used to inform land management but which has not resulted in changes in behaviour to best practice. It is evident that there needs to be a focus on situations where current practice has been demonstrated by research to be unsustainable or contrary to best practice and to better communicate existing research outcomes to help influence practical land management activities. This would suggest there clearly is a role for the newly formed SEFARI, although this would be challenging to implement in a holistic way due to the wide range of opinions and requirement of land owners and managers in the CNP, depending on land use and priorities within their Estate, which is reflected in their interests and attitudes to upland moorland management.

Other outlets for KE, such as SLE and GWCT, were flagged up frequently as the preferred contacts for practical land management knowledge and as these are clearly key organisations, they should be involved in all future discussions. SLE have already indicated that they are happy in principle to look at including relevant research bites, deemed to be useful to their members, in their E news letters or magazines and this is something that should be followed up as a matter of priority and achieved by targeting partnerships with these organisations.





An interesting point which was introduced on several occasions by land managers was the requirement for an advisory network to help refine and apply ideas generated from research, to gel ideas into workable projects and help deliver the complete package to land managers, including regulatory and funding advice. It was considered that such an advisory level body would be particularly useful if it focussed on one critical area of land management such as upland moorland management, so that it could become highly specialist. This would then allow the potential for

this advisory network to establish practical, focussed workshops and training sessions to land user groups with the assistance of relevant researchers. The formation of an advisory network was deemed to be very desirable to land managers and would assist in dissemination of current knowledge and good practice, illustrating a role for relevant research arising from the SRP. This is a critical point which could be used to stimulate further discussion between interested parties, potentially at the next planned event.

Interaction with the Moorland Groups was an extremely useful way to get the chance to meet many gamekeepers at the same time. My initial point of contact was Mike Cottam, CNPA, who has done a huge amount of work in building relationships and trust with the Moorland Groups. There are three Moorland Groups operating in the CNP area: Speyside, Grampian and Angus Glens, of which I managed to get to two of the group meetings (Angus Glens was called off due to snow). Since speaking at their meetings, I have had further contact with the coordinator of the Speyside Moorland Group, who is interested in developing this relationship further. Translation of required knowledge and literature was a particular problem within this sector. I took samples of the livestock disease research literature (which is part of my role at Moredun to translate and produce for our stakeholders) to the meeting to show the Moorland Groups. These were received with great interest by the gamekeepers, who were keen to have access to information giving current advice on aspects of upland moorland management relevant to their work and aimed at game and wildlife. This could be used as a platform to engage this group through printed fact sheets and website updates and a format to consider using for other topics. The local Moorland Groups come under the collective umbrella of the Scottish Moorland Group which is managed by SLE, so it would be useful to have further discussions with SLE about the dissemination of translated research through SLE's existing, well developed communication networks.

In terms of assisting with public education, there is certainly an opportunity here for all concerned – SEFARI, CNPA, SLE and GWCT, potentially along with policy and industry bodies, such as the NFUS and the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA). The problems caused by poorly controlled dogs were a point of major concern for the Moorland Groups, so there is an opportunity to work with them to develop and promote a “Control your dog in the countryside” campaign. This could be based on research from all parties involved to inform dog walkers of the reasons why their dog is potentially a real danger on farmland, woodlands and moorlands. The critical difference here would be to focus on “why” so promoting a culture of understanding which is lacking at present. Given the increasing problems reported by both farmers and gamekeepers, this would be a constructive way to engage these groups within the CNP and produce useful outputs which could then be utilised on a national scale public education exercise.

The specific research comments included in this report under the theme “topics” are interesting discussion points and could be exploited as a platform to initiate researcher and land manager contact in the future. I would suggest that they could be used as a framework to develop the next CNPA/Researchers meeting, which may encourage land owners and managers to the meeting and initiate networking with relevant researchers. This would be a progressive step forward from the previous meeting which was an excellent stepping stone for brokering contact between the CNPA and relevant researchers from the SRP. What is required now going forward is direct contact between researchers and land managers so that their issues and requirements can be explored further. For this to succeed, we have to provide a level playing field between researchers and land managers, with the latter having the opportunity to help set research aims and goals.





A particular topic which was frequently referred to by both gamekeepers and land managers was that of feeding medicated grit to grouse. Medicated grit generally refers to the addition of anthelmintics, which are currently the treatment of choice against parasitic gastro-intestinal nematodes (worms) to grouse grit. Veterinary prescription is required when ordering medicated grit and occasionally this may be in the form of antibiotics if bacterial disease has been diagnosed. Amidst worldwide problems of antimicrobial and anthelmintic resistance, this is a risky practice which can increase the development of resistance to treatment in parasite and bacterial populations. Evidence from the Animal and Plant Health Agency (personal communication) suggests that in some areas of the UK, the concentrations of anthelmintics and antimicrobials are increasing in prescribed grits to enable them to remain effective, which is indicative of resistance developing in pathogen populations. KE is therefore required to disseminate the issues of using medicated grit and focus on promoting the uptake of best practice guidelines for pathogen control on grouse moors. This topic, which is being highly prioritised in the livestock sector in the UK, should be a priority for further discussion within the land management/ research partnerships.

## 5. Conclusions

To move forward, continuity of relationship and trust building with a two way flow of information between researchers and land users is essential. The CNPA have the opportunity to lead the way for the rest of Scotland in this respect and along with SLE and GWCT, could provide excellent conduits for achieving this. There are certainly many areas discussed in this report that could be developed in terms of linking research and KE between the CNPA, SEFARI Gateway and land users in the CNP area, but this needs further time and communication with the stakeholder groups involved to build on this initial work. It is acknowledged that it will be a challenge to resource and manage any future projects acting on the outputs of the fellowship, not least how to structure the role of potential intermediaries and how to best form a strategy

Finally an idea that could benefit young gamekeepers has evolved from my knowledge of the National Sheep Association's (NSA) Young Ambassador Scheme, which selects young shepherds on their attitude, ability and willingness to learn best practice and management of their sheep flocks and encourages them to further develop skills by seeing best practice. This involves further training and experiences through expert sources in a variety of topics all relating to best practice and sustainable sheep management. This scheme in the sheep world has accelerated the promotion of best practice through the application of recent research and advice, along with the use of emerging technologies to improve sheep health, welfare and production. In terms of continuing professional development within the game and wildlife sector, this may be of interest to encourage and develop personal development and best practice in young gamekeepers and again an idea that could be developed by relevant organisations such as the SGA, CNPA, GWCT and SLE.

for SEFARI Gateway engagement with this sector. This may be best achieved by setting up a steering group comprising all the organisations involved. A summary of potential next stages have been included in a research based KE framework, taking into account the main requirements and points raised by all those who participated in this fellowship. Initially, however, the next steps should include:

1. SEFARI agreement to a SRP level approach.
2. Agreement for SRP Principal Investigator level involvement.
3. Focussed meetings (steering group) to implement projects based on the KE framework outlined in this fellowship report.

## 6. KE Framework

How we move forward to improve communication and stimulate partnerships between researchers and land users

### 6.1. Translation and Communication of Research

One of the main findings of the fellowship was the requirement to improve communication between researchers and land users, including improved translation of relevant information.

We can divide this into two separate groups with different requirements:

1. Gamekeepers;
2. Land owners and managers.

**Recommendations:** Personal contact between research and land users is crucial. This point was communicated strongly from all concerned during the fellowship meetings (see point 6.2 below). In addition, there was strong interest in developing further communication channels between land users and researchers. This could be initiated through the development of dedicated webpages potentially on CNPA, SLE or SEFARI websites. These could focus on specifically translated research 'bites' relevant to the two groups identified above. It will be important to aim this at the correct levels for what is required 'on the job' and to engage fully with the target groups at all stages of development. Moorland Groups would welcome more input from the CNPA in areas such as increasing positive PR for good practice. The Moorland Groups realise that robust and well translated research is essential and could help achieve positive outcomes. This is a platform that could be used to build partnerships and relationships in win/win situations, thereby helping all involved: i.e. gamekeepers, Estates, CNPA and the impact of the SRP (through SEFARI Gateway). As such, this should be a priority topic for the planned CNPA/SEFARI meeting (see point 6.3).

### 6.2. Continuity in connections between research and land users in the CNP

This is on a similar theme to point 6.1, but worth reiterating that almost everyone consulted felt that the connection between research and practical land management had been lost and that people working 'on the ground' were not consulted or made to feel their opinion was worthwhile. Some felt this had been the case since the merger of the Hill Farming Research Organisation in 1987!

**Recommendations:** A start has been made to rectify this and there is potentially a role here for SEFARI Gateway, in partnership with the CNPA, SLE and GWCT. The fellowship has been instrumental in identifying this issue but it will require on-going work to re-establish what should be considered as essential links to our stakeholders. There is potential here to use the CNP, as a distinct area with many effective working groups already in place, to develop coalitions between land managers and researchers in such a way that land managers felt it was a two-way process and they were equal partners helping to set the research agenda.

To consolidate links established during the fellowship, there should be continuity of SRP presence at the focus CNPA or SLE land owners/ managers and Moorland Group meetings as well as at the main Partnership group meetings. In addition, it would be highly beneficial if the CNPA/SEFARI meeting held in November 2016 at Boat of Garten could be an annual event and developed to attract land owners and managers to participate (see point 6.3).

As a first step, a research/land management 'gap' mapping exercise could be developed, which involved a focus on areas where research has provided information that can be used to significantly modify current land management behaviour/actions in ways that provide more positive public benefit outcomes, while also satisfying private interests and where current practice falls below best practice. This could also help identify future priority areas for research, where more information is required to manage trade-offs and/or to balance private and public interests.

### 6.3. Specific research comments: To attract land managers to the next CNPA/SEFARI meeting (November 2017)

Many of the specific research comments came directly from land managers; therefore it would be a positive move from the CNPA and SEFARI to use this as a basis for inviting them to a workshop with relevant researchers and communicators from the SRP.

**Recommendations:** It would be ideal to hold this event in autumn 2017 to keep forward momentum going and as there is some flexibility in the Scottish Government work packages, this may prove invaluable for brokering contact between the two groups and help provide answers for both points 6.1 and 6.2.

### 6.4. Advisory Network for Upland Moorland Management

A frequent comment was that there is a level missing in project management which is acting as a brake for getting best practice projects off the ground.

**Recommendations:** This would require Upland Moorland Management Project Officers with expertise in turning ideas into successful projects to work with Estates within the CNP, promoting confidence within Estate teams to embark on improvement projects. Is this capacity within the CNPA? Discussions with the GWCT, who are interested in this concept, would help shape this idea further and potentially allow discussion to be included in the next CNPA/SEFARI meeting.

### 6.5. Public education project

Aimed at dog walkers and focussing on the reasons why dogs which are not under close control are potentially having a devastating effect across the countryside. This could help strengthen the farming based campaign which has been launched recently, but this time focussing on all land uses.

**Recommendations:** Setting up a working group comprising representatives from all interested bodies, including NFUS, SGA, SLE, GWCT, CNPA, SEFARI and other industry bodies such as the National Sheep Association, to develop an effective public awareness and education campaign. This would assist land users not only in the CNP but nationally and provide another platform for ongoing relationship building between the SRP, CNPA and land users in the CNP.

### 6.6. Alumni of fellows

As the fellowship community through SEFARI builds up with a variety of different projects, there will be an opportunity for forming a hub to coordinate and disseminate information, providing more impact and ideas. The Alumni could be set up by the first year's fellows and coordinated by SEFARI and used by them to help provide steering for future fellows and projects.



### Acknowledgements

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