



**SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT NATURE RESTORATION FUND - 2025/26**

Report by Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration

**PURPOSE**

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to seek approval for the Comhairle to utilise the 2025/26 allocation of the Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) to support a range of biodiversity and nature-based projects across the Outer Hebrides, in line with the strategic aims and objectives of the NRF as set out in the Scottish Government's allocation letter.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2.1 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar received £243,000 from the Scottish Government's Nature Restoration Fund for the 2025/26 financial year. The [draft Scottish Biodiversity Strategy](#) outlines outcomes required to achieve nature-positive goals by 2030 and substantial restoration by 2045, emphasising a whole-of-society approach. The NRF supports delivery of this Strategy by targeting practical local action.
- 2.2 This year's allocation is intended to support projects across five strategic themes:
- Habitat and species restoration: Management for enhancement and connectivity
  - Freshwater restoration, including restoration of natural flows in rural catchments
  - Coastal and marine initiatives which promote restoration, recovery, enhancement or resilience
  - Control of invasive non-native species (INNS) impacting on nature
  - Urban: Enhancing and connecting nature across, and between, towns and cities
- 2.3 Officers met with NatureScot to develop a programme of deliverable projects that meet the Fund's objectives. The projects reflect local need and opportunity while contributing to national biodiversity, climate and community priorities.
- 2.4 Collectively, the proposed projects aim to deliver long-term environmental and socio-economic benefits for the Outer Hebrides. They address biodiversity loss, enhance ecological connectivity, support sustainable land management, and promote inclusive access to nature. The programme also contributes to the resilience of island habitats in the face of climate change, sustains crofting practices, and supports community engagement through environmental learning.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Comhairle approve the allocation of £243,000 from the Nature Restoration Fund 2025/26 to support the six projects detailed in the Report.

**Contact Officer:** Kareen MacRury, Economic Development Officer – Innovation

**Background Papers:**

- Scottish Government Nature Restoration Fund 2025/26 Allocation Letter
- Draft Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045
- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Corporate Strategy 2022–2027

## IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	Fully funded through Scottish Government NRF grant. Capital: £185,000 / Revenue: £58,000. No match funding required.
Legal	There are no legal implications associated with this report
Staffing	Delivered directly by partner organisations. No additional staffing resource required by the Comhairle
Assets and Property	There are no asset and property implications associated with this report
Strategic Implications	Supports delivery of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045 and the Nature Restoration Fund strategic themes.
Risk	No financial risk to the Comhairle, low level risk of project not being delivered.
Equalities	There are no identified equality issues within this Report
Corporate Strategy	Aligns with the Corporate Strategy 2022–2027: priorities around natural heritage, education, and community wellbeing.
Environmental Impact	All projects deliver positive impacts for biodiversity, habitat restoration, environmental education and climate resilience.
Consultation	NatureScot and internal officers were consulted in project proposals.

## PROPOSED PROJECTS

5.1 The following projects have been identified for the 2025/26 NRF allocation. Each is led by an experienced delivery organisation and represents a practical, locally informed response to environmental priorities. Together, they cover a range of interventions that meet the Nature Restoration Fund criteria.

- **Community Land Outer Hebrides (Gunnera Tinctoria)** Community Land Outer Hebrides will continue to deliver an expanded invasive species control programme targeting *Gunnera tinctoria* and other INNS across member estates. Funding will support the purchase of specialist treatment equipment, PPE, chemical storage, and provision of training to local land managers, while revenue support will fund on the ground control. The project helps safeguard fragile island ecosystems and supports long-term habitat resilience through coordinated community-led activity.
- **RSPB: Corncrake Land Management** - This project will support crofters across the Western Isles to continue corncrake-friendly farming practices through land management agreements. Activities include delayed mowing, centre-out mowing, and seasonal grazing to maintain and enhance key corncrake habitats in Uist, Barra, and Ness. This project sustains one of Scotland's most vulnerable bird species while also helping to keep croft land in productive use, linking environmental and cultural benefits.
- **RSBP: Bi Glic! Soundwalk** - To celebrate the 60th anniversary of Balranald Nature Reserve, this innovative bilingual soundwalk will use geolocative audio to share the ecological and cultural heritage of the site. Content will include field recordings, stories, songs, and community voices to promote environmental awareness and sustainable tourism.
- **Otter Mountain- The Wee Woodland: Nature Education Space** - Otter Mountain proposes to build an off-grid, environmentally friendly learning shelter in 'The Wee Woodland' in North Uist. The structure will provide year-round access for education and engagement activities,

supporting biodiversity through ongoing woodland restoration. It will also offer climate-resilient infrastructure to host workshops, monitor species, and promote inclusive access to nature-based learning.

- **North Harris Trust: Deer Management** – This project will enhance deer control to protect sensitive peatland and native woodland habitats. It includes DSC1 training for local deer managers and the purchase of thermal imaging equipment. These measures will support habitat recovery, improve deer management capacity, and contribute to long-term ecological restoration.
- **Bumblebee Conservation Trust: No Fence Collars** - This project will provide GPS cattle collars and one-year subscriptions to crofters participating in the Species on the Edge programme. The collars enable targeted grazing in underused areas, improving habitat diversity and supporting both pollinators and traditional crofting livelihoods.

## PROJECT COSTS AND FUNDING

- 6.1 The full £243,000 allocation will be committed to the delivery of these six projects, ensuring both Capital and Revenue components are fully utilised.
- 6.2 Project Costs Breakdown (£K)

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Project Title</b>	<b>Allocation</b>
Community Land Outer Hebrides	Gunnera Tinctoria	£83,390
RSPB	Corncrake Land Management	£22,000
RSPB	Bi Glic! Soundwalk	£16,000
Otter Mountain	Wee Woodland - Nature Education Space	£96,060
North Harris Trust	Deer Management	£14,006
Bumblebee Conservation Trust	No Fence Collars	£11,544

## CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The six projects supported through the 2025/26 Nature Restoration Fund allocation offer targeted and practical action to enhance biodiversity, support sustainable land management, and strengthen local capacity. Collectively, they represent a well-rounded programme that delivers measurable environmental outcomes while reflecting the priorities and strengths of communities across the Outer Hebrides.