

Paths to be improved thanks to £590k grant

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EFFORTS to make it easier for people to enjoy the stunning surroundings of Badenoch and Strathspey are set to continue - despite cuts in funding.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) agreed at its board meeting on Friday (May 11) to continue to provide funding to the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT).

The charitable trust was set up in 2008 to improve paths in, around and between the national park's villages and towns and the mountains.

A total of £590,000 will be made available over the next three years.

The money will be spent on

meeting objectives in the new National Park Partnership Plan such as providing high quality access and recreation opportunities.

Another main aim is to encourage local people to become more active outdoors.

CNPA recreation and access programme manager Bob Grant said: "We want to continue to see paths in and around communities improved so more people feel they can walk or cycle in the park, either for pure enjoyment or to get about more safely or without the need to take a car journey.

"Ultimately, people will have more freedom, more fun and be fitter."

COAT chief executive Dougie Baird told the *Strath*: "We welcome the national park authority's commitment to our innovative

programme scheduled for the next three years. It does represent a cut in the level of funding from that provided by CNPA in previous years, and we understand in the current times why this is necessary."

He added: "We may have to prioritise some areas of work but we

are determined to use this invaluable support to help lever in funds from an ever-widening range of partners to achieve all of our objectives in the coming years.

"In a difficult economic climate, this is a great level of commitment to offer and we do appreciate it."

Roll of honour

COAT's successes to date include:

- Large-scale improvements to community path networks;
- Maintaining and improving sections of the Speyside Way;
- The national park-wide health walks scheme which provides opportunities to meet people, explore the national park and exercise;
- A four-year £2.1m Mountain Heritage Project to repair mountain paths;
- Running a training skills project where trainees gainskills in path maintenance and recognised qualifications leading to employment in the local area.