

Local Stakeholders Forum Meeting

Tayvallich Village Hall, Wednesday 13th October 2010

Present: See end.

Apologies: Kenny Brack, Sir Hugh & Lady Campbell Byatt, Jamie Farquhar, Alexander Hamilton, Jamie Mellor, Alan Mitchell, Dr John Raven.

Abbreviations: **ABC** – Argyll & Bute Council
FCS – Forestry Commission Scotland
SBT – Scottish Beaver Trial
SNH – Scottish Natural Heritage
RZSS – Royal Zoological Society of Scotland

1. Welcome and Introductions.

Councillor Donald Macmillan of ABC as Chair welcomed the participants to the Forum, who then introduced themselves.

2. Minutes and Action Points from Meeting of 15th January 2010.

The Minutes were approved.

AP1: *Ensure the total number of beavers released for the trial is specified on the website:* Completed. Can be found under 'FAQ' section.

AP2: *FCS to provide information at next Stakeholders Forum of any further felling plans in the vicinity of Loch Linne:* Completed. Maps of March 2011 felling dates and future species planting /natural regeneration available today. All plans under consultation with SNH.

AP3: *To set and promulgate a date for the next meeting of the Stakeholders Forum:* Completed.

3. Overview of Beaver Trial Actions and Progress to Date.

- Simon Jones (SBT Project Manager) recapped the overview of the aims of the Trial as outlined in the licence application to the Scottish Government;
- Replacement beavers had been released this year where original individuals had died or disappeared. SG approved a licence amendment to allow this (original licence allowed release of four families) on the grounds that four breeding pairs were required to maintain a viable population);
- Current beaver distribution:
 - Dubh Loch (originally released on Loch Coille Bharr, May 2009): 1 adult female, 1 adult male, 1 sub-adult female, 1 kit (born 2010). 1 juvenile female dispersed – currently unaccounted for;
 - Loch Linne and Fidhle (released May 2009): 1 adult female, 1 adult male, 1 sub-adult male, 1 kit (born 2010). Additional original juvenile male died soon after release;
 - Loch Creag Mhor (released June 2010): 1 adult female, 1 adult male. Replaced original family from May 2009. Original adult pair and kit disappeared. Male was recaptured, although later lost condition, returned to captivity at Edinburgh Zoo, where later died of heart condition;
 - Loch Buic (released May 2010 and September 2010): 1 adult female, 1 adult male. Adult male replaced original male in September. Original pair was released on Lily Loch.
- **12 animals currently in Trial area; 3 unaccounted for;**

- The SBT staff and volunteers had swept approximately 250km of water's edge searching for the missing animals. The team would always follow up potential beaver sightings/field signs that were reported and requested that they were informed as soon as possible.
- SJ outlined the new release procedure, which included a shortened one month quarantine time. This was agreed to by Scottish Government vets after a risk assessment had been conducted by RZSS and independent vets. Norway is rabies free;
- The Forum was updated on the changes the beavers had made to the boundary of the Dubh Loch and on the birth of the two kits. These would be sexed during the yearly trapping procedure;
- There had been a busy summer of guided walks and talks, including collaboration with the Dalriada and Crinan Festivals. Attendance to the summer events was about a 50/50 mix of tourists and locals. The Dubh Loch site was also visited by HRH Princess Anne;
- SJ advised the Forum that Jenny Holden had moved on to a new role, and he introduced the two new field staff members, Christian Robstad and Nathan Dove;
- An Education Pack would be launched in the coming months, initially for local schools, but the team hoped to extend it to a national level soon;
- A range of research was set to be conducted between RZSS and associated research bodies in the UK and Norway, looking at topics such as: Beaver Genome project, pregnancy determination from faecal samples, Leptospirosis testing, captive diets, indicators of stress in reintroduction programmes and husbandry guidelines for captive beavers.

Questions Arising – responses:

- The replacement of the flooded path by the Dubh Loch would be funded by SBT (according to licence agreement) at a cost of approx. £20k. Construction had been led by FCS;
- Beavers were nocturnal animals, although they had been seen during the day on odd occasions, probably as a result of disturbance at the lodge. They were currently active between 7pm and 7am;
- The team was not aware of beavers moving as a result of changing water levels, although the animals would ensure their lodge was not flooded by rising water. Beavers required a minimum depth of 50cm and that the entrance to their lodge is submerged;
- It was confirmed that the Dubh Loch had been included in the baseline vegetation study for macrophytes; it was currently too early to identify any main trends;
- SJ advised that according to the Trial protocols, those beavers that had been missing for more than six months were presumed dead for the purposes of the function of the Trial. The Team was no longer actively searching for them. However the Team would follow up any lead and take action to retrieve them if they were located;
- SJ confirmed that three out of the sixteen beavers released had died, two of those in the wild. All had received post-mortems by independent vets in Glasgow. One animal showed evidence of heart infection which may have led to reduced immunity, although all post-mortems had proven inconclusive. Importantly, cause of death for all three had not been found to be related to a single factor. Speculation of cause rested on possible loss of body condition associated with capture, quarantine and release leading to reduced immunity thereby allowing pre-existing conditions/opportunistic infections to manifest themselves.

4. Update on Access and Recreation Within Trial Area.

- Philippa Revill of the West Argyll District of FCS gave an overview of measures taken to redirect the path flooded by beaver activity at the Dubh Loch. New leaflets would be available shortly;
- The interpretation panels at the Barnluasgan Information Centre had been upgraded, with a touch screen display funded by the Dalriada Project. Film footage of the beavers would also be shown;
- Interpretation displays on the Loch Linne path had temporarily been removed for repairs;
- FCS was in discussion with SBT regarding the provision of a hide near the Dubh Loch subject to funding.

Questions Arising - responses:

- FCS was dealing with any flooding beyond the entrance to the Loch Linne path and would keep the path above the water level;
- FCS had been unable to indicate on signage that the path was closed due to wording requirements laid down by the Scottish Outdoor Access Code; they were in discussion with them to clarify appropriate guidance to the public.

5. Update on Beaver Trial Monitoring Programme.

- Karen Taylor of Scottish Natural Heritage updated the Forum on the various strands of monitoring work;
- Since the Stakeholder Forum of 15th January 2010, the monitoring programme had been finalised. It was available to view on the SNH website www.snh.gov.uk via the beavers or publications pages. The document provided an overview of why SNH needed to monitor as well as what and how they would coordinate the Independent Monitoring Programme;
- The Independent Monitoring Partners for both natural and non-natural heritage projects were also listed on the web pages;
- As the Trial was still at the early stages, most of the work to date had involved the collection of baseline data and the development of appropriate survey protocols - the results and findings would therefore be more evident in the years to come, although all annual reports would be published on the SNH beaver web pages as they were produced Karen was able to update the Forum on some specific projects however;
- **Beaver ecology:** The initial protocols report produced by WildCRU and SNH had now been published and was available on the website. The protocols represented the starting point and would be subject to ongoing review, any such changes to the initial protocols would therefore be published in future reports. WildCRU had also drafted a report on the first year of monitoring. This would be published in the New Year;
- **Otters:** SNH were undertaking the annual surveys with the 2010 survey almost completed. Each of the otter surveys would be reported in the annual WildCRU reports;
- **Fish:** The initial baseline pre release 2008 report by Argyll Fisheries Trust was almost ready for publishing, the 2009 report was still in process and 2010 surveys were about to commence;
- **Macrophytes:** The 2008 pre release survey report by the University of Stirling would likely be published within days. The second survey report should be published by the New Year;
- **River habitat and geomorphology:** The 2008 pre release survey report by the University of Stirling was due to be published within weeks. The second survey would start in late October;
- The delay in production of the reports would hopefully be caught up with by the New Year. Reports would be published on the SNH website after undergoing a review process;
- The next meeting of the Research & Monitoring Coordination Group would be held in November. The group was chaired by SNH and involved all the Independent Monitoring partners, members of SNH's Scientific Advisory Committee as well as the SBT partners (in observer capacity only).

6. Open Q & A Session.

In response to questions it was briefed that:

- The recent issue of the SNH magazine had described the Trial as being seven years in length; Allan Bantick advised that this accounted for the one year lead-in, the 5 years of work on the ground, and one year for assessment;
- SJ advised that the budget for the Trial remained at £2million including staff;
- The £20k cost of re-routing the flooded path by Loch Linne had been met by SBT in accordance with the licence terms, as would the costs of any other damage caused by the beavers for the duration of the Trial. If the Trial led to the wider release of beavers in Scotland, the Scottish Government would

then need to consider how the cost of reparations for beaver damage would be met (and by who) in their assessment of the viability of the re-introduction of beavers to the country.

7. AOCB.

There was no other business.

8. Date of Next Meeting.

Set for March 2011. This would allow for feedback on yearly trapping and reports.

Scottish Beaver Trial

Local Stakeholders Forum Meeting

Tayvallich Village Hall, Wednesday 13th October 2010

PRESENT

Councillor Donald MacMillan – Ward 3: Mid Argyll, ABC (Chair)

Jane Allan – Seafield Farm, Achnamara

Allan Bantick – SBT/SWT

Steve Benham – The Stables B & B

Nadia Bessos (Minutes) – SWT Administrator

Oliver Davies – SWT Marketing Officer

Nathan Dove – SBT Field Assistant

Gill Dowse – SWT Biodiversity Data Manager

Bridget Hasler – Scotnish Farm, Tayvallich

Simon Jones - SBT

Olivia Lassiere – British Waterways

Mike Macintyre – neighbour

Alasdair MacNicol – National Farmers Union of Scotland

Patrick Mackie – ABC Environmental Health Department

Robin Malcolm – National Farmers Union of Scotland

Harry Powell – SWT Lorn & Mid Argyll Members Centre

Philippa Revill – FCS

Christine Richards – neighbour

Geoff Richards – neighbour

Christian Robstad – SBT Field Officer

Peter Slann – landowner, Scotnish

Andrew Taylor – Scottish Government (Wildlife Management Branch)

Karen Taylor – SNH

P Walker - Tayvallich