



Scottish Beaver Trial

Local Stakeholder Forum Meeting

Achnamara Village Hall, Friday 21 August 2009, 13:00-15:00

Present: See end.

Apologies: Marina Curran-Colthart (ABC), Councillor Dougie Philand (ABC),
Iain Jackson (ABC), Doug McAdam (SRPBA), Marian Thompson, (Dunadd
Community Council).

Abbreviations: Argyll and Bute Council - ABC
British Waterways - BW
Forestry Commission Scotland - FCS
Scottish Beaver Trial - SBT
Scottish Environmental Protection Agency - SEPA
Scottish Natural Heritage - SNH
Scottish Rural Property and Business Association - SRPBA
Scottish Wildlife Trust - SWT
Royal Zoological Society of Scotland - RZSS.

1. Welcome and introductions.

Councillor Donald Macmillan as Chair welcomed the participants to the Forum and introduced SBT staff.

2. Minute and Action Points from Meeting of 21 August 2009.

The Minute was approved.

AP1: Those wishing to attend the training day and/or site visit should provide Jenny Holden with their contact details (jholden@swt.org.uk/077390 428 215): Actioned.

AP2: Forward any comments on draft compensation procedure to Simon Jones (sjones@swt.org.uk/07920 468 556): Actioned.

AP3: Take proposal of placing links to local accommodation on trial website to relevant Working Group (SM): Actioned.

3. Overview of Beaver Trial actions and progress to date.

- Simon Jones, SBT Project Manager, thanked the residents of Achnamara for the use of their village hall and attendees for their participation in the Forum;
- A brief update was given on the first few months of the trial, covering the release and post-release events;
- Three families consisting of 11 beavers had been released on 28 - 29 May 2009;
- Distribution of families:
 - Loch Coille Bharr - two adults and two juveniles (aged 1-2yrs) (one juvenile later dispersed towards Fairy Isles)
 - Loch Linne - two adults and two juveniles (one juvenile later died)

- Loch Creag Mhor - two adults and one female juvenile; (all dispersed, adult male recaptured and returned);
- The Linne and Creag Mhor families were deliberately placed in adjacent lochs, with the hope that the juveniles may make contact and establish a population;
 - All the beavers settled in well, apart from the Creag Mhor family, who dispersed within a month; this may have been due to a disturbance event;
 - There were five deaths during the six month quarantine period; which was not unexpected, particularly for wild animals. Independent post mortems were carried out and vets attributed the deaths to stresses relating from quarantine and in some cases pre-existing physical abnormalities. Two animals died in holding, due to stress from travel and quarantine. A male juvenile in Loch Linne died within 24 hours - an independent post-mortem proved inconclusive;
 - Seven beavers were still in holding in RZSS premises;
 - At the time of release all beavers were fitted with ID tags and all except one with radio transmitters. The Coille Bharr adult female was not fitted with one due to welfare reasons following a vet examination;
 - There was considerable media interest in the release and Minister for Environment Roseanna Cunningham personally took part in the release of one of the animals;
 - The animals were transported from their holding facilities overnight in RZSS vehicles to a facility in the release area. They were examined by a vet, fitted with the transmitters and transferred to the release crates. The beavers were then individually released at the site into pre-constructed artificial lodges. Almost all the animals left the lodges immediately and started exploring the lochs;
 - Following the release the Minister for Environment officially opened the updated visitor information centre at Barnlusgan. FCS and funder money had allowed for facilities to be upgraded and visitor interpretation provided. A beaver detective trail was marked out around Coille Bharr;
 - The trial officially began immediately following the release, including tracking, observation and monitoring work. Research protocol with techniques and frequency of recording had been designed by WildCRU and provided by SNH. Requirements included the capture of each animal once a year to allow measurements to be taken, night and day observations, radio and satellite tracking, recording of field signs, burrows, footprints etc. This would build up a picture of the beavers' behaviour, including their movements, impact on their environment etc;
 - As well as its radio transmitter tag, one animal had now been fitted with a satellite tag (it was not possible to do this at the time of release). Due to welfare and technical reasons, tags could not remain on the animals for the entirety of trial and must be replaced. Animals occasionally shed their tags, which the two juveniles on Loch Linne had already done. The satellite tags, which transmit data to a computer via signals to a satellite, were very expensive. During the trial at least some members of every family would get these tags enabling researchers to build up a picture of their behaviour;
 - There were a number of reasons the Creag Mhor beavers could have dispersed. However, about a week after release, the adult female disappeared which happened to coincide with gunshots being heard very close to this release site. This may or may not be related to the dispersal however the disappearance of the adult female appeared to unsettle the adult male, who moved into the Crinan canal. The juvenile female followed her father's scent down to the canal. The male appears to have then swam up the coast, and was later found on the land adjacent to a local fish farm, living in a woodland burn. He was recaptured, fitted with a satellite tag and returned to Creag Mhor. A week and a half or so later he was still back in the loch. The adult and juvenile females were still missing and the search for them continues;

Action Point 1: SBT staff would welcome stakeholders' comments on the draft protocols. If anyone would like to see them could they please let staff know (see contact details at top of Minute). The final documents would be made available on the website.

- Three beaver training days were held for local people in May prior to the release. These would continue to be held for the duration of the trial, for those interested in beaver behaviour;
- FCS was implementing a Visitor Management Plan to develop facilities. An education plan was also in place, with SBT already engaged with several local school groups. SBT would also like to widen the reach of the education programme;
- SBT were producing a general information leaflet for visitors, local businesses and local residents. This would be available in the next few months;
- Film of the capture, quarantine and release had been commissioned and shot by local film maker Mary Lou Aitchison A DVD would be produced;

A research project was being conducted into the socio-economic impact of species re-introductions, and the researcher, Rose Hanley-Nicholls was keen to talk to stakeholders. They could contact her at Rose.hanley-nickolls@sac.ac.uk

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- A proposal had also been submitted for a project examining genetic influences upon body condition and life expectancy;
- SBT was considering releasing a fourth pair, sourced from the animals in RZSS premises. Loch Losgunn was the favoured site for such a release at present. This was still a proposal and required further discussion with the Scottish Government and SNH. If it were to go ahead, spring 2010 would be the likely date.

Questions Arising.

- It was confirmed that SBT's entire pool of 25 animals were all wild-caught Norwegian beavers. Some of these animals had been kept in RZSS premises; they were forming pair bonds and could be used as buffer family groups for the trial. This followed good practice, and the information had been issued in a press release. Stakeholders had not been informed directly as it did not affect the conditions of the trial.
- As confirmed in the previous Minute, the beavers had been comprehensively checked for all diseases listed by DEFRA, and were given full clearance. There had been independent veterinary monitoring of animals throughout their quarantine and release. ABC considered there to be no risk to public health. Patrick Mackie of ABC explained the Council's position to those present.

Action Point 2: List DEFRA checks and findings on website (SJ).

- SBT staff agreed the rate of mortality in quarantine was disappointing, although not unexpected. Quarantine was a stressful experience for wild animals. There had been no cause for concern raised by any agencies or bodies regarding the handling and housing of the beavers.

4. Beaver activity update.

- Jenny Holden, SBT Field Officer, gave an update on the activity of the beavers following their release, and reminded stakeholders that she could be found around the site and would do her best to answer any questions they may have;

- **Tree Felling:** This had occurred around Coille Bharr and Linne. Trees felled were mostly small as expected (beavers usually take down saplings); in this case 4-15cm in diameter. There were some mature trees felled – mostly rowan;
- **Regeneration:** The beavers had been coppicing; new shoots were forming from cut stumps with the growth taking less time than expected. It would be interesting to see whether the new generation was simply browsed off by deer, and what the interaction with other species would be;
- **Tracking:** The beavers were regularly located by radio tracking. Jenny was also undertaking field signs surveys. This included recording details of tree felling, scent marks, burrows etc. Location of these was logged and would help to get a good picture of beaver behaviour;
- **Feeding:** the beavers had been feeding on species including: rowan, willow, birch, alder, hazel, oak (mostly overhanging leaves), bog myrtle, bracken and reeds. Feeding stations could be found around the lochs;
- **Burrowing:** beaver burrows were about the size of badger holes. Several were used around each site; there were no lodges as yet. During the winter months they would be expected to use lodges for warmth;
- **Dam Building:** a dam had already been built. Beavers do not dam big water bodies like lochs or large rivers. The Coille Bharr beavers had created a dam on a drainage ditch between Coille Bharr and the adjacent, smaller Dubh Loch; this would allow them to swim via a stream between the two. The beavers were also thinning out the trees which would hopefully be of benefit to other wildlife including dragonflies. Dams do not completely prevent water passing through, but they slow it down moving through the system. The path around Coille Bharr does flood every year; however the beaver dam was causing this to be deeper. Along with FCS, Jenny had placed an outflow pipe through the dam to allow the water level to drop and the situation would continue to be monitored and managed if necessary;
- **Movements:** It was a surprise to find the Creag Mhor adult male had appeared to follow the coast when he moved from his loch. Beavers are not known to swim in salt water elsewhere;
- **Beaver watching:** Groups of people from near and far were visiting the lochs to watch the beavers every evening. The species is crepuscular (active at dawn and dusk) and the Coille Bharr animals could be reliably seen almost every evening from the jetty. A huge variety of people had been sending emails and writing in the visitor book at Barnlusgan. Visitors seemed very enthusiastic and numbers had been manageable without crowding.
- **Bloggng:** Jenny was posting regular updates on her Field Officer's Blog. Stakeholders were welcome to feedback on this with any suggestions of things they would like to see on it. The situation regarding animals' movements can change day to day; therefore staff would wait to get a clear picture before issuing press releases on any significant dispersal.

Questions Arising.

- The beavers had been eating bracken; although they did not consume the entire plant. They also bashed the plants down to some extent through their movements. It could be that over time, around areas of beaver activity, the amount of bracken around the water edge would be decreased. This would benefit butterflies and other species. However, this area required further research.
- The radio tags emitted individual frequencies of up to 2.5km range. Knapdale was not particularly conducive to radio tracking as the rocky terrain could block signals. However, signals could be detected from underwater, albeit with a reduced strength, and also from inside burrows. The trial animals were located once a week, in addition to night radio tracking and observation sessions. Far more intensive tracking was undertaken when

locating the missing beavers, with likely corridors of dispersal identified. A variety of techniques helped build up a picture over time. If periodic tracking revealed no signs of a missing beaver after 12 months then it would be presumed that the animal was dead.

Stakeholders were encouraged to assist SBT staff in reporting any potential signs of missing beavers in the wider area. In the recent case, Jenny had informed British Waterways staff and a number of local people. Staff had to be cautious about releasing details in cases where there may have been deliberate targeting of the animals.

5. Update on Beaver Trial Monitoring Programme.

- The following survey work had been completed pre release: burn habitats and their features; hydrology, regarding variation in water level of lochs; aquatic plants; fish in burns; dragonflies; public health implications; water chemistry sampling (samples analysed by SEPA); archaeology (monument at end of Coille Bharr surveyed by Historic Scotland);
- Current and future survey work: beaver monitoring (data would be analysed by WildCRU, and was being collected by SBT according to WildCRU-approved protocol); woodland surveys would take place this October following the identification, post-release of sites where beavers have been foraging on tree species. otter surveys would take place in September (baseline otter surveys existed for the trial area); Marsh Fritillary butterflies; gill netting in September/October (this was decided in discussion and agreement with the angling club); PhD study of socio-economic impact of beaver trial on local area;
- SNH held the first meeting of a National Species Reintroduction Forum. Most of the participants were very interested in the socio economic outcomes of the Scottish Beaver Trial. SNH would therefore look at increasing the monitoring of these effects. The direct impact on the community and the wider benefit would be subjected to a cost/benefit analysis at the end of the trial;
- A group representing all interests was to be set up under the chairmanship of Professor Roger Wheeler looking at interactions of beaver and salmonids This group would report back to the National Species Reintroduction Forum. The Scottish Government recognised that salmon were not present in the current trial area and as such investigation needed to be carried out to determine the potential effects of beaver reintroduction on a salmon river system, in case of any future reintroductions if the current trial was a success. The group's Terms of Reference were still to be agreed, but its remit would be to look at information that existed elsewhere in Europe and America relating to beaver and salmon species interactions, and consider how this might relate to Scotland;
- The SNH website would show the results of monitoring work and provide an email address for queries regarding SNH's role in the monitoring work.

Questions Arising.

- Dave Batty confirmed that audits of species of high conservation priority in the trial area had been carried out. The reports would appear on SNH's website.
- Computer ecological modelling had confirmed that the trial area would provide sufficient space for 20 family territories. This model used parameters for the local area which were based on extensive research. The trial would provide real life figures to see how it compared with what had been modelled, and would allow experts to revise and fine-tune the model's parameters.

6. Open Q & A Session.

- Protocols for locating missing animals had been intended to be tested in the field, and based on an expanding search. The method was built onto existing expertise and developed

over the first few months of monitoring, as staff needed to see what would work practically in Knapdale. There now existed a protocol based on experience of the area.

- Some stakeholders felt that SBT had far to go in matters of trust with the local community. Simon Jones was happy to talk to as many people from the local community as possible in order to dispel some of the myths and rumours and explain the facts. SBT staff were very happy to provide more information and also to hold the Forum more often it was felt that was required. Simon emphasised that SBT were running an open scientific trial. Press releases were fed out regularly, including to the Squeak, the local paper. They had been asked whether they would be interested in publishing a regular update but declined as they may have been considered to be a biased view of the trial. Simon reiterated that animals could move around quickly, and information could change rapidly. Staff needed to build up an accurate picture of what was happening before being able to reliably inform the public.
- Requests were made for more transparency on the budget of the trial and breakdown of expenditure. Simon Milne, Chief Executive of SWT, agreed that SBT could provide an update on this area, with an overview of the 5 year budget and specific expenditure. The current budget stood at £1.7 million. He pointed out that the vast majority of income to the trial had come from private funding, including membership appeals, grant giving bodies etc. A relatively small amount was public money. He agreed SBT could clarify this, and the details of local spend. The trial looked to source items locally whenever possible and this had included boats, motors, life jackets, equipment from local shops, hall hire, catering, petrol, erection of fencing, office space, hotel bookings etc. in addition to the increase in visitors who had come specifically to see the beavers. It should be possible to provide yearly figures on this; at the end of the trial the 5 year cost benefit analysis would be carried out.

Action Point 3: Arrange for production of project income and expenditure breakdown, and publish on SBT website (SM)

- All stakeholders were encouraged to look for beavers and their signs.

7. AOCB.

Allan Bantick, SBT Chairman, emphasised that communication around the project needed cooperation from all parties. The partners would ensure they kept the stakeholders fully informed, and would be very grateful if stakeholders also fed back information. The trial staff would also advertise events such as walks as early as possible to allow the greatest number of people to take part.

Project staff were hoping to present a showing of film footage by Mary Lou Aitchison in Tayvallich Hall at some point in the future. The DVDs were being produced the following week and the film showing would take place following this.

Action Point: Arrange showing of beaver film footage (JH)

8. Date of next meeting.

The next meeting would take place in November. The venue would be Achnamara, Cairnbaan, or Tayvallich.

The Chair closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

Scottish Beaver Trial

Local Stakeholder Forum Meeting

Achnamara Village Hall, Friday 21st August 2009, 13:00-15:00

In Attendance

Councillor Donnie Macmillan, Ward 3: Mid Argyll, Argyll and Bute Council (Chair)

James Allan, Landowner

Jane Allan, Landowner

Allan Bantick, SBT Chair

Dave Batty, Scottish Natural Heritage

Steve Benham, Neighbour

Andrew Byatt, Landowner

Lady Fiona Campbell-Byatt, Landowner

Sir Hugh Campbell-Byatt, Landowner

Joe Connelly, Strathclyde Police

Jared Foster, Landowner

Martin Foster, Landowner

Alex Hamilton, Neighbour

Jenny Holden, SBT Field Officer

Simon Jones, SBT Project Manager

Alan Kettle-White, Argyll Fisheries Trust

Kate Macdonald, Neighbour

Drew McFarlane-Slack, Scottish Rural Property and Business Association

Ian McKee, Forestry Commission Scotland

Mike Macintyre, Neighbour

Patrick Mackie, Argyll and Bute Council

Robin Malcolm, Mid-Argyll NFU

Philippa Revill, Forestry Commission Scotland

Christine Richards, Neighbour

Geoff Richards, Neighbour

Mark Robinson, British Waterways

Peter Slann, Neighbour

Rob Thomas, Royal Zoological Society of Scotland

Helen Watt, Forestry Commission Scotland