



## Scottish Beaver Trial

### Local Stakeholders Forum Meeting

**Achnamara Village Hall Wednesday 21st September 2011, 14:00 – 15:30**

**Present & Apologies:** See end.

**Abbreviations:**

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

#### **1. Welcome and Introductions.**

Councillor Donald Macmillan of ABC as Chair welcomed the participants to the Forum, who then introduced themselves. He congratulated the SBT Partnership on the recent award of the Lonely Planet Award of the trial and the successful launch of the SBT Education Pack.

#### **2. Minutes and Action Points from Meeting of 26<sup>th</sup> April 2011.**

The Minutes were approved. There were no outstanding action points.

#### **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.
- The beaver distribution has changed little since the last meeting.
  - Dubh Loch: 1 adult female, 1 adult male, 1 juvenile female, 1 new kit\*
  - Loch Linne and Fidhle: 1 adult female, 1 adult male, 1 yearling male, 1 new kit.
  - Loch Creag Mhor: 1 adult female, 1 adult male.
  - Loch Buic: 1 adult female, 1 adult male.
- It was noted that two new kits had been found this year (Dubh Loch and Loch Linne), but subsequently the Dubh Loch kit\* had been found dead by the SBT Field Officer and the subsequent post mortem indicated that the likely cause of death was an attack by a predator.
- The yearling from Loch Linne (last year's kit) had been captured in July by field staff and had ear tags and a microchip tag attached. The animal was found to be a male.

- There had been a significant search effort outwith the trial area for the juvenile male beaver which had dispersed from Linne in the spring, but to date no evidence of the animal had been found (a map of the search effort was shown).
- The beavers continued to exhibit normal behaviour with tree felling at all four release lochs and dam maintenance ongoing at the Dubh Loch.
- A map was shown of the changing outline of the Dubh Loch.
- A pie chart showing the hours spent on various activities carried out by the field team during the spring and summer months was shown, with over 70% of effort going into searching for the dispersed juvenile and carrying night tracking work.
- Since April there had been 23 local events run or attended by SBT Partnership staff with over 1000 people attending.
- The SBT Education Pack had been successfully launched on 19<sup>th</sup> September by the Michael Russell, MSP, Minister for Education at Lochgilphead Joint Campus.
- Stewart Stevenson MSP, Minister for the Environment and Climate Change had visited the beaver trail site on 30<sup>th</sup> August.
- The trial continues to attract interest from the media (TV, press, radio and on-line)
- Research work lead by RZSS was focusing on the following beaver-related areas, outwith the Knapdale trial: Husbandry guidelines for captive beavers, beaver body health scoring, use of GPS as a monitoring tool, cardiology studies, investigations into haematology and biochemistry, key hole surgery techniques in beaver sterilisation & genetics project

#### **Questions Arising** - responses:

Robin Malcolm: Suggested the exit strategy can't be implemented given SBT are not able to find or recapture missing animals and as such dispersed animals are by default released into the wild.

SJ: concerted efforts are made to relocate any dispersed beavers. Where beavers have settled and are leaving field signs it is easier to relocate and trap these animals. One of the findings to date is single beavers that may continue to move after leaving the trial leave little in the way of field signs (felled trees/stumps, feeding stations, dams, canals etc) and therefore are very difficult to relocate. However the SBT position remains that attempts would be made immediately to trap and relocate any beavers found outwith the trial area.

Lucy Sumison: Required further understanding and reassurance from SBT that dispersing animals would be caught; how many animals have dispersed and what is the potential for them to pair up? Will they establish a territory as a single animal?

SJ: To date 5 beavers (1 adult female, 1 juvenile female, 1 female kit, 1 juvenile male and 1 adult male from 3 separate families) have dispersed from release sites and one of these (adult male) was subsequently recaptured (and died later in captivity). There is some potential for them to pair up outwith the trial area, but there is also more likelihood that by forming a pair and a territory the animals would begin to leave more field signs which would assist potential relocation and recapture.

Drew Macfarlane-Slack: Can SBT confirm the status of the escapees in terms of any protection afforded to them?

SJ: the beavers would have no legal protection.

Jamie Mellor: How far are they expected to travel once dispersed?

SJ: Single beavers can travel 20-30 kms during dispersal.

Mike MacIntyre: Questioned whether SBT could make greater use of GPS? Asked whether SBT intend to attach GPS tags to juveniles?

SJ: Annual trapping programme due to recommence in coming weeks and GPS tags being used on target animals.

#### **4 Update on Access and Recreation within Trial Area – Nick Purdy, Forestry Commission**

- The new Loch Coille Bharr diversion path around the Dubh loch site had had a new finger post and a people counter installed and further path upgrade work was planned for the coming months. FCS are happy with this new path and have received many positive comments about it from visitors.
- Discussions between FCS, SNH and the SBT Partners regarding the proposed viewing facility at the Dubh Loch had shown that the site was considered too sensitive for a new hide construction and therefore it was now thought that a simple platform would be built at the end of the new forest road. Currently additional plans were being considered for a larger hide structure and car parking at Loch Buic, which has good beaver viewing and is also outwith the Special Area of Conservation boundary.

#### **Questions Arising – responses:**

- None.

#### **5 Update on Beaver trial Monitoring Programme – Karen Taylor, Scottish Natural Heritage**

- Reminder of SNH role – to lead and coordinate independent monitoring and report to SG
- An outline of the various independent monitoring projects and partners was given.
- SNH had taken on board stakeholder comments regarding the accessibility of the SNH beaver trial web pages and these had been changed to make the site and the independent reports more accessible.
- Further details of the woodland and beaver ecology monitoring projects methodology and interim findings were given.

#### **Questions Arising – responses:**

- Lucy Sumsion: is there an assessment being made of the lichen and bryophyte communities? KT: Yes, as part of the ongoing SNH Site Condition Monitoring.
- LS: Is it possible to differentiate between deer and beaver browsing? KT: Not straight forward, as some regeneration appears to wither and die back. Nick Purdy: FCS monitor and control deer numbers in Knapdale and despite a relatively high population native woodland regeneration is still considered good. Jamie Mellor: are beavers felling 10% of all trees around the release lochs? KT: too early to tell at this stage, but results from monitoring indicate that 10% of broadleaved trees in selected sample plots have been felled with 44% subsequently regenerating so far. NP: FCS perspective is that beavers

are concentrating on regenerating thickets dominated by birch and that the beavers are bringing diversity to these areas. Stan Phillips: cattle grazing has been deliberately introduced at the Fairy Isles area of Knapdale by FCS and SNH to bring diversity to the woodland there. Charlie Self: beavers can clear fell areas around water bodies as seen in other countries. SJ: but not always the case and stumps can regenerate over time.

- Robin Malcolm: at the end of the trial will SNH give a clear yes or no as to whether the trial has been a success or failure? KT: SNH will make detailed recommendations to the SG.
- Jane Allen: the trial has already failed as it has not delivered what was outlined at the time of the local consultation. The active public engagement carried out by the SBT Partners should not be part of the trial. KT: although the beaver population is still small it is illustrating important techniques of how to manage and study beavers in the wild in Scotland.
- JM: The unlicensed beavers in Tayside are present illegally and should be removed ASAP. There should be a survey of their extent and numbers. SJ: this issue is being considered by SG at present and a decision is hoped for in the coming weeks. The Tayside situation is not part of the SBT and the SBT Partners do not support the way in which these beavers were released as it is against nearly all IUCN reintroduction guidelines.
- Drew Macfarlane-Slack: The Tayside beavers are not protected by law and therefore landowners could deal with them as they wished. Discussions at the recent National Species Reintroduction Forum suggests that there appear to be differences of opinion about the Tayside beavers amongst the SBT Partners and this reduces faith in them by other stakeholding bodies. The Tayside beavers should go in order to restore faith in the partners and the licensed approach. NP: the SBT Steering Group have an agreed party line and position on the Tayside beavers and this is clear.
- RM: the huge interest in the trial by the public is perhaps going to skew its results?
- JA: re: dead kit, could a 'rogue' beaver be responsible? SJ: very unlikely, post mortem results indicated a sizable predator. CS: most likely a dog?

## **6 Open Q & A session**

- Covered in Q & A sessions above.

## **7 AOCB**

There was no other business.

## **8 Date of next meeting**

Mid March 2012 – date tbc.

The Chairman closed the meeting and thanks the stakeholders

### **In Attendance**

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

Allan Mitchell, Woodland Trust

Charlie Self, AGWA

Dave Batty, NHASMA

Dino Wright, neighbour

Drew Macfarlane-Slack, Scottish Land & Estates

Elizabeth Swan, neighbour

Irene Greenwood, Biffaward

James Livingston, neighbour

Jamie Mellor, NFUS

Jane Allan, neighbour

Karen Taylor, SNH

Lucy Sumsion, NFUS

Marina Curran-Colthart, LBAP Officer, Argyll & Bute Council

Mike Macintyre, neighbour

Nick Purdy, FCS

Pat Batty, SWT

Patrick Mackie, Environmental Health Department, Argyll & Bute Council

Peter Slann, neighbour

Robin Malcolm, National Farmers Union Scotland

Roisin Campbell-Palmer, RZSS

Simon Jones, SBT (minutes)

Stan Phillips, SNH

### **Apologies:**

Allan Bantick (SWT)

Roisin Campbell Palmer (SBT)

Olivia Lassiere (BWS)

Mark Robinson (BWS)

Andrew Taylor (SG)