

**Tayside Beaver Study Group – 5th Meeting
Minute of Meeting
Friday 15th February
SNH, Battleby**

Present

David Bale (Chair – SNH)
James Scott (SNH)
Neil Mitchell (SNH)
Louise Ramsay (SWBG)
Ian Lorimer (SEPA)
David Gemmell (SLE)
Ian Mackintosh (NFUS)
Andrew Taylor (SG)
Roisin Campbell-Palmer (RZSS)
Danielle Casey (SNH)

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed Louise Ramsay to the meeting. Louise represented the SWBG in Alan Ross's absence.

Apologies were received from Hugh Dignon (SG), Simon Jones (SWT), Jamie Farquhar (Confor) and David Summer (TDSFB).

2. Note of Last Meeting / Action Points

Page 5, Section 8 – AOB – 1st sentence should read “The group agreed that a management strategy, that will inform Ministerial decisions, should be an output of the TBSG.” – remove the word ‘nationwide’

With this correction, the note was agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

REFERENCE	ACTION	LEAD	STATUS
Action Points from 14 June			
AP2/8	Write an article for Farming Leader by 27 th July that raises awareness of the Group and lets people know what to do. IM to provide NM with contact details and publication dates.	NM IM	CARRIED FORWARD – Neil is awaiting confirmation of a publication date.
Action Points from 16 August			
AP3/3	Provide JS with NFUS meeting dates.	IM	ONGOING – local groups will call a meeting if requested. However, it is likely that this won't take place until autumn.
AP3/4	Take forward exploration of separate tagging of captive beavers and wild beavers and possible approaches.	JS	ONGOING – awaiting legal advice on treatment of captive populations.
AP3/6	Create a map of landowners who are willing to participate in the health and genetic studies and contact them with details.	NM, IM, JF, DG. DS.	DISCHARGED – agenda item on 15/02.
AP3/7	Contact Paul Ramsay to explore the possibility of electrofishing of his streams, to	DS	ONGOING – LR confirmed that she

	gain knowledge of the effects of beaver dams upon migratory fish. Inform the Beaver-Salmonid Working Group of this work.		welcomes this idea (15/02).
Action Points from 28 November			
AP4/1	Add links to notes of all meetings and other relevant papers to website once it is up and running	JS/NM	DISCHARGED
AP4/2	Remove "Dam building apart" from statement in main findings on the population survey report.	DB	DISCHARGED
AP4/3	Provide a quote for the news release in relation to publication of the population survey report.	IM	DISCHARGED
AP4/4	Develop a pro forma of standardised questions to survey landowners. See RZSS's Europe and SBT's land use questionnaires. This will help build a picture of issues, perceived or otherwise, and public perception.	NM	DISCHARGED
AP4/5	Circulate information to the group outlining what action to take if dead beavers discovered.	JS	DISCHARGED – see new action point AP5/1.
AP4/6	Carry out a pre-Christmas trial on Dec 10-15 on SWT, RSPB and other sites to sort out logistics and procedures.	NM, RCP	DISCHARGED
AP4/7	Contact owners of private collections seeking permission to test their animals.	NM	DISCHARGED
AP4/8	Discuss and agree contact details for the website. SNH will probably be the 1 st point of contact but in a dissemination role. Call-out contract for collection of carcasses is also needed but this could be part of SNH's dissemination role.	DB, JS, NM	DISCHARGED
AP4/9	All to canvass members of their groups/organisations for examples of FAQs and send these to NM. NM to inform David Summers of this action.	All, NM	CARRIED FORWARD
AP4/10	Draft an FAQ page and circulate round the group for comment. The language used should be accessible by the general public. It should include FAQs on a number of issues including damming and legislation.	DB, JS, NM	CARRIED FORWARD
AP4/11	All to send any beaver related photos for use on the website to DC.	All, DC	CARRIED FORWARD – we need images of beavers out of the water. LR and DG will provide some photos. Lorne Gill (SNH photographer) is hoping to get some photos of beavers.
AP4/12	Discuss job descriptions for 1 or 2 POs. If there are to be 2 POs (SWBG and TBSG), their roles would need to be distinct from one another.	AR, JS, SJ	DISCHARGED
AP4/13	Send images of beaver deceiver installation to DC for the website.	SJ	DISCHARGED
AP4/14	Send a copy of the practical mitigation DVD to IL.	DC	DISCHARGED

AP4/15	Speak to George Fleming about burrows in floodbank – whose land is it on; is the burrow still active? This offers an opportunity to gain experience on practical mitigation.	NM	CARRIED FORWARD – NM will attend a meeting of landowners on 20/02 and will speak to GF then.
AP4/16	Discuss methodology of socioeconomic study with Martin Gaywood, SNH, and Dominic Moran, SAC. UPDATE – this action lies with Claudia Rowse, SNH.	JS	CARRIED FORWARD – Claudia Rowse (SNH) will discuss methodology with a contractor with the view to potentially including this in advice the Ministers.
AP4/17	Provide methodology for studying the productivity of lodges.	RCP	CARRIED FORWARD – RCP to produce a protocol for productivity surveying to ensure consistency of approach (including contacting landowners) and viable data collection.
AP4/18	Discuss and draft an MOA in relation to sharing spare samples derived from the health/genetic testing with universities (which will belong to SNH/RZSS).	JS, RCP	CARRIED FORWARD

3. Update on Genetics and Health Study

NM updated the group. A decline in beaver activity meant there was no trapping session before Christmas. The limited activity did not warrant having a vet on standby and the weather conditions were not conducive to successful trapping. Currently, there are 7 open traps at Kinnordy, Lowes and 2 sites at Deanwater. Activity increased in the 2 weeks leading up to the meeting and bait was taken from 1 trap. There are 5 traps remaining but NM needs names and contact details of landowners who may be amenable to taking part in the study and completing the questionnaire.

DG suggested there may be a 2-3 week window of opportunity at Delvine as carrots will be harvested soon and it is easier to trap beavers as they are feeding on the crops. He also informed the group that he saw signs of beaver activity on his land on 14 February.

DB stated that that RPID may be able to help by providing a list of landowners, along the Tay system and the Earn. JS stated that Ruairidh Campbell will look at maps for potentially suitable sites, to focus effort.

A good site is flat but with little flooding, has signs of recent beaver activity and with limited public usage. It is SNH and RZSS's responsibility to ensure traps are placed in suitable locations, not the landowners, and we agreed that we could not ask neighbours to take on any responsibility for them.

4. Land Owner / Manager Questionnaire

The group discussed the draft questionnaire, the purpose of which is to provide the Minister with some information on issues that may need to be addressed in the future. The following changes were agreed:

- addition of a question regarding the broad land category;

- addition of a question about land owners' willingness to participate in the genetics and health study;
- addition of a final question asking if, overall, the presence of beavers is viewed as beneficial or problematic;
- addition of statement that personal details are 'preferred but not essential', as opposed to 'not essential' as per the tabled draft;
- Q3 to read 'Have you experienced the following activities...
 - o Lodges yes/no
 - o Burrows/digging yes/no
 - o Dams yes/no
 - o Tree impacts yes/no
 - o Vegetation impacts yes/no
 - o Beaver sightings yes/no
- Q4 to measure the impacts – positive, negative or neutral – on forestry, tourism, gardens, infrastructure, agriculture, fish farming, recreational fishing, recreation, gardens, ornamental trees and biodiversity;
- Q5 to read "What, if any, concerns might you have about having beavers on your land?";
- Q6 to read "What, if any, benefits might you anticipate from having beavers on your land?";
- Q7 to read "Are there any current financial costs or benefits to having beavers on your land? Please explain and quantify.";
- Q8 – removal of 'successful or otherwise'; addition of '...with indication of success' to "Please provide details...";
- Q9 – removal of "Do you require a visit from the Tayside Beaver Project Officer?"; addition of 'other' to the list;
- addition of Data Protection Statement.

The group agreed that, if RPID does provide a list of landowners, the questionnaire should be mass mailed to them all.

The group discussed the possibility of adding the questionnaire to the website. IL raised his concern that this would allow interested parties to complete more than one form, especially as personal details are not mandatory. This would skew the final results. The group therefore agreed that the questionnaire will not be placed on the website and that targeted invitation would be the best approach.

5. Website

Demonstration on screen

JS provided a presentation on screen.

The address will be <http://TaysideBeaverStudyGroup.org.uk> .

Discussion on content

Mitigation

Footage of the installation of the beaver deceiver at Delvine will be added once it has been approved by DG. It will be edited to remove any identifiable signs of the location.

FAQs

The group agreed that the FAQ page would have a number of Tayside specific questions plus links to FAQ pages on other relevant websites, such as SBT's and that of the Beaver Advisory Committee for England (BACE), for questions on beavers in general.

About Us

It was agreed that links to papers and minutes of the TBSG meetings will be added to the 'About Us' page.

Contact Us

It was agreed that the Tayside Beaver Project Officer will be the principal contact. The contact email address will be Tayside_Beavers@snh.gov.uk and this will be monitored by the PO, JS and DC. The contact number will be the Battleby switchboard – 01738 444177. A note will be added to the website that new sightings, outwith the areas already identified, should be reported using these contact details.

Gallery

The group discussed whether images should have a separate page or whether they should be added to the relevant pages, eg. images of mitigation installation on the mitigation page. No firm decision was made, but photos illustrating specific topics on specific pages would be helpful, with a more general “gallery” supplementing them.

JS stated that the site is ready to go live.

6. Practical Mitigation – update on work to date

NM informed the group that no-one has approached him directly requesting practical mitigation on their land. One farmer, however, undertook his own successful mitigation by wrapping chicken wire round chestnut trees. The farmer initially had concerns about dams but these concerns have waned.

NM also informed the group that he is in contact with Angus Corby of Transport Scotland regarding trialling tree protection along the A90.

NM plans to speak to George Fleming on 20/02 about the possibility of trialling mitigation on the floodbanks adjacent to his land. This work, should it take place, must be carried out in consultation with SEPA.

LR informed the group that Duncan Halley suggested that Scotland should consider inviting Skip Lisle from America to provide courses on mitigation.

7. Building Capacity for Advice – job description for project officer April 2013 – March 2015

JS informed the group that as SNH is unable to increase its headcount, SWT agreed to host the PO post. The post will be managed by SNH and costs will be paid from the TBSG budget.

The group agreed that the interview panel will consist of SJ (SWT), a Scottish Government representative, Donald Fraser (SNH), DB (Chair – TBSG) and possibly IM (depending on timing as interview may clash with lambing season).

AT stated that the work of the PO should focus on monitoring and mitigation.

There is a desire within RZSS to keep the Scottish Beaver Trial separate from work in Tayside.

Thanks were given to SJ for composing the job description and to SWT for agreeing to host the post.

Information was also passed on about a new half time project officer being taken on by the Scottish Beaver/Salmonid working group. This post's main purpose is to assess any implications that beavers could have for salmonid species, especially salmon. Their work will apply to Scotland as a whole, and means that we do not need to address this issue

specifically for Tayside, as their findings will be provided to the Minister directly. LR informed the group that Duncan Halley is aware of a river in Norway that is similar to Scottish rivers in surrounding land use, topography and beaver activity. It seemed to him to be a good object lesson in assessing actual and long established beaver /salmonid interactions

8. Opportunities for further research

Productivity study

JS stated that there are 2 reasons for doing this work – 1) because we are not getting significantly robust information on productivity from the Knapdale Trial owing to the small population and its recent introduction ; and 2) this information will help determine the number of occupied territories in Tayside (as opposed to the exact number of animals). He continued by suggesting that it would be too expensive to rely only on contractors so a combination of volunteers and contractors is needed, with everyone using the same standardised method. He also informed the group that the SNH Wildlife Operations Unit has thermal imaging equipment that could be used but it would need to be SNH staff that do so.

RCP reiterated that there needs to be a standardised method of surveying and monitoring to ensure reliable results, and offered to produce one.

The group agreed that there is sufficient work ongoing in relation to beavers in Tayside, including the work of the Beaver-Salmonid Working Group Project Officer; a proposed socioeconomic study; the ongoing genetic and health studies; questionnaire and mitigation advice and trials. We therefore did not need any new projects unless a very good reason was identified to fill a gap in the information to be provided to the Minister.

There was discussion about the timing of the publication of results from our studies. The TBSG remit is to report to the Minister, so it was questioned whether the results from our various studies should be released before that. The Knapdale peer reviewed studies will not be published before 2015.

9. AOB

The group discussed microchipping. It is envisaged that beavers outwith private collections will be chipped whilst there is no obligation on owners of private collection to have their animals done. However, the group awaits legal advice on the correct approach.

It was stated that it would be an efficient use of time and money if a number of beavers could be tested in one session. LR offered the use of her holding pen at Bamff for this purpose.

10. DONM

A doodle poll will be circulated.

Action Points from 15 February 2013 – 5th meeting			
REF.	ACTION	LEAD	STATUS
AP5/1	Produce a note for SWBG members' websites explaining the work of the TBSG. The note should <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - clarify the purpose of the trapping and testing; and - explain the process for handling dead beavers and provide RCP's contact details. 	JS	

AP5/2	URGENT - Provide NM with names and contact details of landowners who may be amenable to trapping and re-releasing beavers on their land.	All	
AP5/3	Contact gamekeepers to reiterate the message regarding lethal management of beavers and the provision of a carcass for health/genetic testing. Care is needed to avoid giving the impression that a cull is being encouraged.	JS	
AP5/4	Redraft the landowner questionnaire and circulate by e-mail for comment, giving a deadline.	NM	
AP5/6	Send Gerhard Schwab's report on beaver burrows to NM.	LR	
AP5/7	Approve Beaver Deceiver footage before it goes live on the TBSG website.	DG, JS	
AP5/8	Add 'Eurasian' to the title page of the website.	JS	
AP5/9	Seek guidance on Scottish Government's requirements on the publication of results from our various studies – if they can be published (eg. on our website) as they are ready, or if they should await the formal presentation of all beaver related research material to the Minister in 2015..	AT	
AP5/10	Remove statement from job description that indicates that the TBSG PO will report to the SBT project manager.	JS	