

Tayside Beaver Study Group – 9th Meeting
Minute of Meeting
Wednesday 2nd July 2014
SNH, Battleby

Present

David Bale (DB, Chair – SNH)
James Scott (JS, SNH)
Helen Dickinson (HeD, TBSG Project Officer)
Alan Ross (AR, SWBG)
Ian Lorimer (IL, SEPA)
Scott Petrie (SP, SLE)
Kate Maitland (KM, NFUS)
Andrew Taylor (AT, SG)
Roisin Campbell-Palmer (RCP, RZSS)
Danielle Casey (DC, SNH)

Apologies

Simon Jones (SWT)
David Summers (TDSFB)
Sean Dugan (BSWG, SFCC)
Ian Mackintosh (NFUS)

In attendance

Calum (a work experience student with RZSS)

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Update on genetics and health studies

The final draft of the health study report has been submitted to SNH; the final genetics report is due to be submitted on Tuesday 8 July. All beaver reports will go through SNH's high level QA process; JS has asked for assistance from Andrew Voas, Veterinary Advisor to Scottish Government (SG). There is a 'period of sensitivity prior to the Referendum' so if not done by 15 August the reports will not be published until the end of the year.

RCP provided a brief reminder of the results obtained from both studies.

The group discussed animal welfare in relation to shooting. Whilst the group does not want to, nor appear to be advocating shooting of beavers, they decided it would be negligent on welfare grounds not to provide guidelines on best practice in relation to lethal mitigation practices. Whilst recommendations are to be included in the RZSS health report, HeD stated it would be useful to have an official line for the interim period as this issue has already been raised during her discussions with landowners.

- **AP9/1** – RCP to draft neutrally worded guidelines on best practice in relation to lethal mitigation practices and circulate to TBSG for approval. Once agreed, guidelines to be uploaded to the TBSG website, but making it clear that we advocate non-lethal options as the preferred approach.

Live trapping is now complete. As before, the challenges of this exercise were acknowledged, as were the benefits of engaging with the public. The group agreed that RZSS should continue to carry out post mortem examinations on cadavers should they receive any.

Update on land owner questionnaire

KM informed the group of NFUS's East Central region member survey - the survey went out to >1000 members; >100 responses were received; 30 members stated they have beavers on their land. NFUS members also received HeD's details but to date she has not been contacted. KM is happy to share the results of the survey with HeD. NFUS have still to carry out a proper analysis of the survey results. KM will contact HeD with information on any examples that could be considered appropriate as possible case studies (names of land owners will be withheld; KM will approach land owners). The final report will be shared with the group.

- **AP9/2** – KM to arrange a site visit to David Colville's land at Islabank for 22 July if possible, and look at NFUS survey results for any other possible sites that could be visited and worked into a case study.
- **AP9/3** – KM to circulate to TBSG a copy of the final NFUS questionnaire and the final survey report when available.
- **AP9/4** – SP to circulate youtube link to Tayside Beaver piece.

HeD gave a brief presentation on land owner questionnaire responses. Twenty seven responses have been received so far; the final deadline is end August this year; results will be fully analysed after that date. HeD will attend the Scottish Game Fair on 4-6 July where she hopes to engage further with land owners and circulate more questionnaires. SP suggested also using the SLE stand at the Game Fair to disseminate questionnaires. SLE has encouraged its members to submit case studies (to inform advice to the Minister) to either SLE themselves or HeD. AR emphasised the need to validate any case studies received by the group or member organisations.

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The group discussed the format and benefits of the successful SLE members walk and talk event.

- **AP9/5** – KM to consider an event similar to the SLE walk and talk for NFUS members, bearing in mind the harvest period when farmers will be extremely busy.

Beaver training for partner organisations and NGOs

The group discussed the possibility of providing training to partner organisations and NGOs to cover the period between the end of HeD's assignment and the Minister's decision. Training would focus on field signs and mitigation techniques. The group agreed this would be useful and should be aimed at SNH, SEPA, SLE, other partner organisations and NGOs.

- **AP9/6** – HeD to organise beaver training for partner organisations and NGOs for later in the year.

Arrangements for productivity surveys

An Edinburgh Napier University student has been in place for 4 weeks and a Glasgow University student will continue through to August. Twelve sites are being surveyed so far. AR offered volunteer time if surveys start to fall behind schedule.

Socio-economic study

James provided an update on the Tayside Socio-economic study. The study was carried out by Dominic Moran and Alistair Hamilton. Dominic carried out the socio-economic study at Knapdale so the same methodology has been used in both cases. The final draft is being quality assured by SG's economist. Publication date is likely to be October.

- **AP9/7** – JS to circulate the approved socio-economic report to TBSG, prior to publication.
- **AP9/8** – AR to circulate the River Otter (in Devon) socio-economic study to TBSG for information.

Update on impact advice

HeD provided an update on ongoing and upcoming examples of mitigation:-

- Another tree wrapped at Forfar
 - Both methods – chicken wire and stock fencing – working well
- Delvine flow device still in operation but beavers have moved away from the area
- Beaver repellent tree painting will be carried out later this year at appropriate sites
- Crop protection is still an option – 2 sites are being monitored for damage with a view to putting mitigation in place (eg. electric fencing) if it is merited.

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Follow up survey of beaver distribution in Tayside

JS raised the question of a repeat beaver distribution survey in the Tayside catchment. A second survey would be expensive and there is a question over the value of the information that would be obtained with such a short time difference. JS consulted Ruairidh Campbell and was advised that there would be no significant changes in density since the previous survey. There is some anecdotal evidence of range expansion beyond the Tayside catchment but as this is beyond the TBSG's remit it is not for this group to investigate in detail. Any new maps created at this stage will be out-of-date come the time for the Minister's decision.

The group agreed that there is no value in a repeat distribution survey. It was agreed that the 2012 survey will be supplemented using information gathered from other sources on field signs and activities, and impacts on other interests.

TBSG's Report

DB informed the group of SNH's requirements for reporting to the Minister. There will be 2 main parts to the Ministerial report. Firstly a "supporting package" made up of the individual reports arising from the various beaver related projects. This will include the report from the official Scottish Beaver Trial at Knapdale and TBSG. Secondly a "synthesis report" which will summarise the information within the supporting package and identify and examine the key issues. Martin Gaywood, SNH Policy & Advice Manager, will lead on pulling together the different strands of SNH's final report for the Minister.

- **AP9/9** – For the TBSG part of SNH’s report to the Minister
 - RCP, HeD, with the help of Frank Rosell, to write up the results of the productivity study – 1st draft by October; final draft by December
 - HeD to draft a report structure outlining how she proposes to write up the other parts of her work (results of the land owner questionnaire, mitigation work, public engagement, etc.) and circulate round the group for approval.

The genetics and health study reports, and the socio-economics report are all well advanced and already going through the relevant QA processes.

- **AP9/10** –HeD to draft a contents page for the overall TBSG report for approval by the group.

Sign-off of the TBSG report will be some time shortly after the Christmas period. It is important that it is agreed by all parties represented on the group as an objective account of our findings.

Update from the Beaver-Salmonid Working Group (BSWG) Project Officer

SD provided his update in advance of the meeting. HeD informed the group of a proposed piece of collaborative work with BSWG looking at fish passage around a flow device to be set up in the Cromarty Firth. BSWG are looking for assistance from TBSG. The group needs to see the project proposal before it can commit to anything.

- **AP9/11** – HeD to get a copy of the Cromarty Firth flow device project proposal and circulate round the group. The group will then consider whether it is in a position to provide assistance for the project.

New and Outstanding Action points

REF	ACTION	LEAD	STATUS
<u>Previous Action Points</u>			
AP3/4	Take forward exploration of separate tagging of captive beavers and wild beavers and possible approaches.	JS	DISCHARGED – James is pursuing this matter outwith TBSG’s remit. (ONGOING – All beavers caught as part of health screening process are PIT tagged. Possible tagging associated with licence conditions being explored for collections – JS)
AP3/7	Contact Paul Ramsay to explore the possibility of electrofishing of his streams, to gain knowledge of the effects of beaver dams upon migratory fish. Inform the Beaver-Salmonid Working Group of this work.	SD / DS	DISCHARGED – no update; BSWG action being taken forward by Sean Dugan. (ONGOING – Paul Ramsay is keen for this to take place; DS will make initial investigations after June to identify what fish

			are present at Banff.)
22 November 2013 Action Points			
AP7/4	Update website - with information on clearing dams for drainage purposes at this time of year, explaining the risk of removing food caches and exposing lodges; - with enhanced mitigation advice, including what cannot be done; - with mention of the questionnaire and details on how to obtain a copy; - with list of press articles.	HeD / JS	ONGOING – the future of the website will be discussed once TBSG has completed its work. Decision needed on whether it should be kept live and, if so, what information should be available through it. JS to ensure links to various SNH commissioned reports are added to the website when available. (ONGOING – all members of the group are asked to visit the website and feedback thoughts and suggestions to HeD.)
AP7/5	Consider separate and joint stakeholder engagement events and confer with Helen and James to produce a programme of events for 2014. Events should be spread throughout the geographical area of beaver presence. They could be linked to other events already in place and should aim to engage all audiences. Draft programme to be circulated for comment shortly after the festive holidays.	SP / IM	DISCHARGED (ONGOING – SLE event on 18 March and NFUS event later in the year.)
AP7/6	Keep an audit trail of where the questionnaire has been advertised and promoted.	HeD	ONGOING
6 March 2014 Action Points			
AP8/1	To collaborate on investigating known possible examples of burrowing in floodbanks, exploring exact cause, the impacts and any possibility of mitigation.	HeD / IM / IL	ONGOING – HeD and SEPA Hydromorphologist visited sites. Advice is being sought from within SEPA on the status of the resultant report – expert opinion only or an official SEPA position statement.
AP8/3	To produce a short paper outlining the options for and feasibility of a second population survey, including likely cost, value for money, and what questions could and could not be answered. Group members' thoughts to be sought by email.	JS	DISCHARGED – the group agreed that there is no value in a repeat distribution survey so soon after the first one.
AP8/4	To clarify with Martin Gaywood (SNH, NSRF) the structure of the report and timescales for submitting the TBSG contribution	DB	DISCHARGED

2 July 2014 Action Points			
AP9/1	Draft neutrally worded guidelines on best practice in relation to lethal mitigation practices and circulate to TBSG for approval. Once agreed, guidelines to be uploaded to the TBSG website.	RCP	
AP9/2	a site visit to David Colville's land at Islabank for 22 July if possible, and look at NFUS survey results for any other possible sites that could be visited and worked into a case study.	KM	
AP9/3	Circulate to TBSG a copy of the final NFUS questionnaire and the final survey report when available.	KM	
AP9/4	Circulate youtube link to Tayside Beaver piece.	SP	
AP9/5	Consider an event similar to the SLE walk and talk for NFUS members, bearing in mind the current harvest period when farmers will be extremely busy.	KM	
AP9/6	Organise beaver training for partner organisations and NGOs for later in the year.	HeD	
AP9/7	Circulate the approved socio-economic report to TBSG, prior to publication.	JS	
AP9/8	Circulate the River Otter socio-economic study to TBSG.	AR	
AP9/9	For the TBSG part of SNH's report to the Minister <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RCP, HeD, with the help of Frank Rosell, to write up the results of the productivity study – 1st draft by October; final draft by December - HeD to draft a report structure outlining how she proposes to write up the various parts of her work (results of the land owner questionnaire, mitigation work, public engagement, etc.) and circulate round the group for approval. 	RCP, HeD	
AP9/10	Draft a contents page for the TBSG report for approval by the group.	HeD	
AP9/11	Get a copy of the Cromarty Firth flow device project proposal and circulate round the group. The group will then consider whether it is in a position to provide assistance for the project.	HeD	