

## Highland Environment Forum 18th September - meeting notes

These are not intended as a full record of the meeting - but to highlight some points of relevance to forum members.

### Attendees

Alastair Duff	SEPA
Alison Craig	Home Energy Scotland
Alison Matheson	SNH
Audrey Sinclair	The Highland Council
Ben Leyshon	SNH
Carol Masheter	Soirbheas
Caroline Vawdrey	HEN
Daniel Greig	The Highland Council
David Glass	Caithness Biodiversity Group (and SWT)
Don O'Driscoll	John Muir Trust
Drew McFarlane Slack	SLE
George Hogg	SNH
Ian Wilson	NFUS
Janet Bromham	The Highland Council
Jonathan Willet	The Highland Council
Judi McDonald	SEPA
Keith Duncan	SNH
Kenna Chisholm	RSPB
Kenneth Knott	FCS
Kenny Taylor	Easter Ross Biodiversity Group
Laura Traynor	Pure Power for Lochbroom Project
Mhairi Wylie	Highland Third Sector Interface
Mick Drury	Trees for Life
Nicole Wallace	The Highland Council
Phil Green	Scottish Fire & Rescue Service
Ro Scott	Highland Biological Recording Group
Robbie Kernahan	SNH
Stephen Carr	The Highland Council
Stewart Blair	RSPB
Stewart Sandison	SNH
Su Engstrand	UHI

## Apologies

Ian Mitchell : SNH

John Risby : FCS

Keir Smith : FCS

Anne Rae : Scottish Government: Rural Payments & Inspections Division

Daniel Johns : Home Energy Scotland

Patric Baird : SWT

Tom Forrest

Marina Dennis : Crofting Commission

Sue Carstairs

### 1) Highland Biodiversity Strategy Plan

This will be going out to consultation shortly, and forum members will be sent a copy, with an invitation to respond.

### 2) Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI)

This organisation represents the voluntary sector at a regional level and encompasses the voluntary action network. HTSI provides a strategic overview and is the representative of the voluntary sector at the regional community planning level. The organisation does not have such strong connections with environmental groups/organisations, but would like to develop these. HTSI is currently carrying out a mapping exercise to try to assess the contribution of the voluntary sector.

Eleven community development workers are employed through HTSI.

Find out more at <http://www.htspinterface.org.uk>

On Wednesday 1st October HTSI will holding a health and environment seminar.

## Cafe discussions

### 3) Sustainable Land Use - the potential for a Highland strategy

Leader: Nicole Wallace, The Highland Council

**Note: Forum members supported the recommendations of the Highland Land Use Discussion Meeting.** Anyone who would like to be involved in the further work of this group should contact Nicole Wallace ([nicole.wallace@highland.gov.uk](mailto:nicole.wallace@highland.gov.uk)) or George Hogg ([george.hogg@snh.gov.uk](mailto:george.hogg@snh.gov.uk))

#### *Discussion*

#### List of current plans/information/strategies

Cairngorm National Park – Park Plan, Land use strategy/ Woodland Enhancement strategy

Agricultural Land – No obvious Highland strategy but could get info down to field level from department and find out where current support is directed.

Strategic Environmental Assessment for Highland Wide Development plan – list relevant key strategies

Ben Nevis and Glen Coe NSA Management Strategy

RSPB State of Nature – UK wide publication

Strathspey initiative/IBAs ( Important Bird Areas.)

Highland BAP

SNH – Natural Heritage Zones

SEEPA – ICMP

CALL– landscape project (issue that wider community see this as a conservation project rather than a land use project).

SG – soil strategy

Caithness Peat land strategy - Flow to the Future

Forest Indicative Strategy – to be reviewed

FCS – Forest District Plans

Emerging Flood Risk Management plans

Deer management plans e.g Monaliadh Deer Management Plan

Renewables – sustainable zones (HC Map)

Wild land maps

Current designations - SSI's/NSA/SAC/Local Nature Reserves

Forest zones/maps

Sporting Estates – Wildlife Estate Scotland (Scottish Land and Estates)

Habitat map of Scotland – to be produced by SNH

Land capability maps – agriculture/Forestry

Gairloch and Slattadale Pine woodlands

Geographic differences and climatic zones

Cappecaillie core areas,

Plantlife – identify important species/habitats

Community land owning groups - have own local strategies

LIFE projects – Pearls in Peril,

Peat land, Futurescapes

### Conflicts/Issues

Soil fertility vs. agricultural production

SG minimum stocking densities – affect habitat management

Maximising productivity (food demand) vs. environmental sustainability

Government policies for renewables/forest expansion/agricultural production

Constraints of data protection – can't get details of Agricultural Land Use.

Legislative constraints on Community owned land – tenants unable to be paid for land improvement

Careful to avoid focus on existing maps/zones etc as loose opportunity for land use integration

CAP/SRDP and agricultural policy dictating current land use patterns

Climate change

### General Comments

Opportunities on the West to increase population and land use -enhancing biodiversity

Local access to local food – carbon savings

Need for slaughterhouses

Need to agree what activity provides the optimum output

Integrated Land use Conference – UHI - student link.

Links to Marine environment – Marine plans/Moray Firth Partnership

## **4) Tackling wildfires**

At both this and the wildlife crime discussion it was noted that attendance by a Police Scotland representative would be useful. Tackling wildfires and wildlife crime are both linked to legislative powers that can be enforced by the Police and their contribution to the discussion would have been helpful.

## **5) Fuel poverty in Highland**

- In Highland, 39,000 (39%)<sup>1</sup> of households are estimated to be in fuel poverty spending at least 10% of their income on heat and energy costs; and of these, 11,000 (11%)<sup>1</sup> are in extreme fuel poverty spending over 20% of their income on energy.
- Fuel poverty is particularly acute in Highland because much of Highland is off-gas; oil and electricity cost more than gas per kWh and also cost more than the equivalent paid in the central belt; Highland has a colder climate; with lower incomes; seasonal employment; more elderly on low incomes; plus a higher percentage of detached, 'hard-to-treat' dwellings; and with large areas being remote so very difficult for installers to reach.
- Households in fuel poverty suffer cold, damp houses often fighting condensation and mould growth. The cold and damp causes physical ill-health, specifically impaired immune, cardiovascular and hormonal functions; and the elderly and young are especially vulnerable. The struggle can cause mental ill-health, including stress, anxiety and depression.
- Insulating homes and improving heating systems helps householders warm their homes properly. In many cases, this saves householders money and saves carbon emissions unless householders have been under-heating their homes; or they do not understand how to use their new heating system properly; or the new heating system is not appropriate for their property; or in certain circumstances, installed measures cost more through rent increases or capital costs compared to savings made.

- As well as improving insulation and heating, households can be helped out of fuel poverty by lowering their cost of fuel and improving their incomes.
- Households should call Home Energy Scotland on 0808 808 2282 for advice.

If you wish to discuss fuel poverty further please contact Alan Grant on 01463 259707 or 07818 567841.

Note 1: Scottish House Condition Survey: combined data of 2010; 2011 and 2012 surveys

## Afternoon Workshops

### 6) Deer Management

Leader: Robbie Kernahan, SNH

- How best to engage with DMGs – what is the most appropriate mechanism?
- Issues about the scale of engagement - National Interests vs Local
- Issues around accountability and openness
- The importance of ensuring deer management decisions are based on sound evidence and science
- In response there seemed to be agreement from members of HEF that DMGs should be constituted and provide clarity on membership and meetings
- HEF members were also keen on the need for Deer Management Plans to be consulted upon and accessible

### 7) Invasive Species

Leader: Jonathan Willet, Highland Council Biodiversity Officer

Session 1.

- Rum. Issues with Rhododendron and Cotoneaster. But most of the Rhoddy is on the community owned ground.
- Sunart. A big issue with Rhododendron in gardens spreading.
- Himalayan Balsam. People like it. Still available to buy.
- Strontian. There is a Rhododendron exchange taking place there. Replacing *R.ponticum* with non-fertile varieties.
- Gunnera. Spreading along the A87.
- Fort William. INNS Survey underway. Due for completion in October.
- Glencoe Village. Issues dealing with some householders who have INNS in their gardens and are unwilling to remove them, thus continuing the spread of these plants.
- Community Volunteers. Useful for certain species, mainly Himalayan Balsam.

- Highland Invasive Species Forum. An important non-departmental voice to communities?
- RAFTS. Developing a web based recording system.
- Publicity about the good news from projects and also the message of being aware about INNS hasn't been pushed as hard as it could. How can HEF facilitate that? Possible INNS Coordinator post (part-time) funded through HEF?

#### Session 2.

- Communication. Send these round HEF members via Caroline.
- Lupins on the A9 near Dalraddy. Seemingly planted by a Lupin-fancier in the 1980's.
- Himalayan Balsam. Kirkhill & Bunchrew community-led eradication of this species, self funded. Info from George Hogg.
- Specific awareness raising work with Schools, Scouts, Guides etc. National action required? JW to speak to Katy Martin, Senior Ranger of Inverness-shire.
- GBINNS resources at JW's Office to be distributed round to local Schools.
- Biosecurity, is a key issue.
- Marine Issues. Hopefully some of these will be dealt with through the MPA and local fishery group development through the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010.

### 8) Tackling Wildlife Crime

Leader: Keith Duncan, SNH

#### **Discussion themes:**

- A desire for more community policing (to combat poaching).
- Concern that police wildlife crime officers were not accessible enough.
- Concern that there are limited updates to the public on long standing issues such as the raptor deaths on the Black Isle this spring.

The key suggestion linking these discussions was a call to set up a Highland Partnership Against Wildlife Crime (PAW) group. The proposal for a PAW group was made at the second workshop and there was support for this proposal and I do not recall anyone who disagreed with this proposal. The six attendees at the first workshop did not discuss this proposal. If the police are supportive perhaps HEF can discuss their role in such a group at the next meeting.

## 9) Remote and Rural Collaborative Working

Leader: Alison Craig, HEN

### Context

Remote and rural collaborative working was identified as a potential priority theme at HEF in March 2014 and the purpose of the workshop is to explore the scope of the theme, its relevance to HEF and recommend next steps.

### What does the term mean?

Work that takes place:

- within a community and cross theme
- between communities on either a single theme or across themes
- across themes on a community planning approach

### What can collaborative working provide?

- sharing of information
- sharing of approaches and ideas
- sharing of assets
- local power and responsibility

A mix of these approaches - e.g. tackling wildfires - where the Fire Service is building up a database of who has what equipment and manpower available in the case of an emergency)

### What is required to make it work?

- that collaborative working seems relevant
- a diversity of approaches
- making local relevance apparent
- shared agendas
- creative and lateral thinking

### What else might help?

- seed corn funding support
- local project support workers
- good practice case studies
- fast broadband throughout the region

### Good examples

- Scottish Islands Federation
- Black Isle village hall and community buildings heating and insulation project
- others?

### Relevance to HEF

Remote and rural collaborative working should be relevant to other HEF working groups to help them connect with all areas in Highland.

### What needs to be done?

- Involve others in developing good working practice - eg HEN, HTSI, Highland Council policy team (Alison Clark, working on rural proofing) others who are interested
- a database of what equipment - eg for video conferencing - is where, and how to access it.
- try to co-ordinate more than one meeting for the day - to make the journey more worthwhile
- move meetings around and where relevant/possible combine them with case study visits (eg invasive species forum, Reforesting Scotland annual meetings)
- create a calendar of events shared by a number (not defined) of organisations - so that they can see the potential for coordination and cooperation)
- fast broadband throughout the region

### *Recommendation*

- That a small working group convenes to see what practical measures can be encouraged to assist with remote and rural practical working.

## **10) Future event**

### **Carbon CLEVER conference**

17th November

## **11) Highland land use strategy**

George Hogg drew forum members to the recommendations of the meeting to discuss the potential for a Highland land use strategy:

- that an approach that develops a cross- strategy, cross-sectoral approach would be useful to Highland land use planning.
- there should be an initial exercise to see what individual strategies (eg forestry, water, landscape, wind farm) already exist, how these complement one another or conflict and what gaps there are.
- that there is potential to look at key issues across Highland and to reach a consensus on these across land use sectors.
- to look at existing cross-sectoral land use planning in order to learn from their experience (eg Cairngorms National Park Authority, Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape, River Spey catchment management, Nevis Partnership, Sunart Initiative, Peatland Management Plan, Monaliadh deer management plan)
- to aim to reach a position (in a year-ish) where there is a clear view on what information and strategies already exist and what needs to be done to improve Highland land use planning.
- that the timescale for taking forward the proposed work within Highland would seem to fit well with the formal assessment of the Aberdeenshire and Borders pilots in March 2015 and the refresh of the Scottish Land Use Strategy.

**Forum members agreed** to these recommendations and to the establishment of a working group to take the recommendations forward.

## **12) Suggestions for discussion at future Forum Meetings**

A marine litter strategy for Scotland was proposed

Members are invited to suggest additional future topics for forum meetings.