

Highland Environment Forum, 18th March 2014 ~ Meeting notes

Held at SNH, Great Glen House, Inverness : 12.30 - 15.00

Attendance

Cairngorms National Park Authority	Andy Ford
Crofting Commission	Susan Walker
Crofting Commission	Marina Dennis
Easter Ross Biodiversity Group/ Natural Media	Kenny Taylor
Energy Saving Scotland Advice Centre (Changeworks)	Alison Craig
Highland Biological Recording Group	Ro Scott
Highland Council	Cllr Audrey Sinclair
Highland Council	Keith Masson
Highland Council	Nicole Wallace
Highland Council	Dorothy Low
Highland Council	Daniel Greig
Highland Council Planning & Development Service	Janet Bromham
Highland Environment Network	Caroline Vawdrey
Lochaber Biodiversity Group	Jonathan Willet
National Farmers Union (Scotland)	Ian Wilson
National Health Service Highland	Margaret Somerville
National Trust for Scotland	Barbara Macritchie
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	Kenna Chisholm
Scottish Environment Protection Agency	Alistair Duff
Scottish Environment Protection Agency	Judi McDonald
Scottish Fire & Rescue Services	Philip Green
Scottish Land and Estates	Andrew Hamilton
Scottish Land and Estates	Crispian Cook
Scottish Natural Heritage	George Hogg
Scottish Natural Heritage	Debbie Greene
Scottish Natural Heritage	Ian Ross
Scottish Natural Heritage	Ben Leyshon
Scottish Waterways Trust	Stephen Wiseman
Wester Ross Environmental Network	Tom Forrest

Apologies

Charlotte Wright, Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Chief Superintendent Julian Innes, Police Scotland

Rob Dewar, National Trust for Scotland

Scott Hay Fire Scotland

Simon McKelvey, River and Fisheries Trusts Scotland

Drew Macfarlane-Slack, Scottish Land and Estates

John Risby, Forestry Commission Scotland

Mick Drury, Trees for Life

Callum Duncan, Marine Conservation Society

Jon Hollingdale, Community Woodlands Association

Giles Brockman, Forestry Commission Scotland

Jonathan Pryce, Scottish Government, Agriculture, Food and Rural Communities

Vanessa Halhead, Highland Environmental Network

David Glass, Caithness Biodiversity Group

Fran Lockhart, John Muir Trust

Stephen Carr, Highland Council

Ashley Gould, Highland Council

Kathryn Logan, Moray Firth Partnership

1. Welcome and Introductions: Ian Ross

Ian welcomed forum members to this second meeting of the renewed Highland Environment Forum, which has an expanded remit incorporating biodiversity. Ian reminded members that through the forum there is the opportunity to influence the environmental elements of the Single Outcome Agreement and to consider how the environment might contribute to some of the wider public benefits, in addition to intrinsic environmental value.

2. The Environment in the Single Outcome Agreement: George Hogg, SNH, South Highland Manager

George reminded members that community planning is about joint working by public bodies, in association with the voluntary sector and communities, in order to meet the needs and aspirations of communities in the administrative area (Highland).

The Single Outcome Agreement is the contract between the local community planning partnership and Scottish government. The current contract runs from June 2013 - 2016. In this contract issues of inequality, under categories such as health, wealth, prospects, crime reduction should all be addresses under six key themes. Highland has added a seventh theme to the outcome agreement — the environment.

George gave some examples that highlighted the potential for the natural environment to contribute to reducing inequality:

- provision of work opportunities through environmental volunteering
- greenspace and access enabling children to be physically active
- volunteering/access - contributing to supportive programmes - eg alcohol and drug rehabilitation
- community service workers carrying out environmental projects

The community planning partnership would like to see how these cross sector projects can be developed and also to engage with communities in order to see what is missing from the plan and what more could be done. The Highland Environment Forum could be part of that engagement and delivery, engaging as a living dynamic force to identify issues and influence outcomes across sectors. The actions of the forum should be through building partnerships to deliver outcomes more effectively, and to address inequalities wherever possible.

George finished his presentation with an offer to meet with any groups that would like to know more about the Highland Environment Forum.

Questions and comments:

Margaret Somerville, NHS - echoed George's views on the value of lateral thinking across sectors. She drew the forum's attention to the appointment of four new Community Health Coordinators in Inverness, Fort William, Wick and Alness, who are keen to get involved in new projects. Community food workers will also be appointed for the same areas.

Susan Walker, Crofting Commission, highlighted the value of promoting the use of local food, and of thinking across sectors to tackle issues relating to climate change and land use.

3. Briefing reports

a. **Wildlife Crime: Debbie Green, SNH Operations Manager**

The audit to date and some suggestions for action

Debbie reported on behalf of Keith Duncan, who has undertaken an initial audit of key issues in relation to wildlife crime, looking at the UK and Scottish list of national priorities to see which are of particular relevance in Highland. These are:

National priorities:

- raptor persecution
- poaching
- illegal fishing
- pearl mussel removal

Locally significant:

- illegal fossil collecting, particularly on Skye

Initial research has found that there is already quite a lot of ongoing work to tackle wildlife crime. However, tackling wildlife crime is uncoordinated and there is no one place where guidance can be obtained.

Action:

To set up a working group with Keith Duncan to investigate more fully what can be tackled at the Highland level and to bring proposals to the next meeting.

-volunteers from the meeting:

Andrew Hamilton, Scottish Land and Estates

Nicole Wallace - to appoint a representative from the Highland Council

Ian Ross - to ask Police Scotland for a representative

Other forum members who would like to join the group should get in touch via Keith Duncan at SNH, Aviemore - T.01479 810477, email - keith.duncan@snh.gov.uk

b. **Wildfire reduction: Phil Green, Scottish Fire and Rescue Services, Group Manager, Highland** *How the forum is developing and future plans*

Phil presented a summary of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Services partnership approach to wildfire reduction. This has arisen in response to the high numbers of wildfires in 2013 (2965 wildfires across Scotland, with 3912 fire engine mobilisations of which 382 fires and 612 mobilisations were in Highland).

The partnership - the Wildfire Implementation Group is being led by Robert Scott of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Services, with a dedicated wildfire project manager - Gary Burnett based in Aberdeen. A standard procedure for dealing with wildfire has been developed, with operational guidance produced in 2013. This is available to download through the Scottish Government website - www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0043/00436138.pdf

The Wildfire Implementation Group will develop future plans:

- to ascertain what finance, resources and information partners can contribute
- to declare agency assets in relation to wildfire control

- to build relationships with other groups who have expertise
- to focus on prevention, intervention and education

Questions:

Susan Walker, Crofters Commission - how will the wildfire plans roll out to individuals? Phil responded that this will continue to be part of future planning. At present the fire service is engaging with land managers through, for example, the gamekeepers association course at Thurso College.

Action:

Phil Green to obtain figures for what percentage of wildfires are as a result of muirburn getting out of control. Information to be circulated by Caroline Vawdrey

c. Biodiversity Working Group: Janet Bromham, Highland Council Biodiversity Officer
Getting a wide input into creating the Biodiversity Action Plan

The Biodiversity Working Group is a sub-group of the forum. It was established to oversee Highland Biodiversity Action Plan review - the new plan will run from 2014 - 2020. The working group looks at strategic biodiversity issues, and guides awareness raising activity, eg events and the biodiversity website.

There has been an initial pre consultation survey, and workshops at the biodiversity conference in February. The results from these will be amalgamated into a draft report, which will inform the public consultation questionnaire. Plan revision will take place following this - with the aim of launching the new plan in the autumn.

Action:

Forum members to respond to the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan consultation once it is launched

Caroline Vawdrey to circulate summary update of the Highland non-native invasive species forum, written by Jonathan Willet, HC Biodiversity Officer

d. Climate Change Declaration Working Group: Alison Craig, Changeworks

Progress to date. How HEF members can link in with the Council's Carbon Clever initiative

Alison reported that the working group, led by Stephen Carr, Highland Council, had been working towards a refresh of the climate change declaration. Their report is circulated with the minutes.

The group makes four key proposals for :

- Rebranding the Highland Climate Change Declaration as the Carbon CLEVER Declaration;
- Setting revised objectives which encourage and enable organisations to make progress;
- Working with partners to build on their support for organisations to become Carbon CLEVER; and
- Encouraging more organisations to sign up to become Carbon CLEVER.

The forum agreed to these four key proposals

Comments and questions:

George Hogg, SNH - Stated his support for the proposals and was keen that they should also include land management practices

Jonathan Willet, THC - how much does energy efficiency figure in the declaration? Alison emphasised that energy efficiency was the key starting point for all the proposals.

Margaret Somerville, NHS - noted the importance of tackling fuel poverty, and of improving housing efficiency as a contribution to reducing inequality. Alison noted that the Carbon Clever declaration is aimed at businesses, but that includes how employers help employees address home energy issues. George Hogg suggested targeting some of the housing providers to join Carbon Clever.

It was noted that Home Energy Scotland provides an energy efficiency advisory service for homeowners.

Action:

HEF members to sign up to the new Carbon Clever declaration once it is finalised
Alison to relay views and comments to the Climate Clever declaration working group

e. Sustainable procurement: Dorothy Low, Highland Council procurement

Outline of the sustainability criteria in the tendering process, how it can be used to achieve potentially high environmental impacts, and the opportunities to use joint resources to best effect.

Sustainable procurement is outlined in the Scottish Government Reform Bill, which states that procurement should take into account the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area

Environmental conditions can be included in procurement tenders, as long as they are relevant to the service being sought. Such conditions might include the minimisation of waste to landfill, minimisation of packaging and travel, and the increase of recycling.

Dorothy stated that there could be benefits to be obtained by joint contracting by organisations.

Comments:

Margaret Somerville, NHS felt that there was further potential to share procurement, this was echoed by George Hogg, SNH, who further noted that buying into larger schemes could also be of benefit to community groups.

Alasdair Duff, SEPA, highlighted the need for long term contracts in order to enable investment.

NHS, SNH were both interested in further investigating the potential for joint procurement Resource efficient Scotland was interested to find out how they could advise other businesses on sustainable contracts.

It was also noted that it would be valuable to improve and promote the understanding of what sustainable procurement is, and how to go about undertaking the process.

Action:

THC, NHS, SNH to agree the way forward on further development of joint procurement

f. The Highland Environmental Network (HEN) ~ how it can assist the work of HEF:

Alison Craig, HEN Vice-chair *Brief introduction to the Highland Environmental Network's proposal to develop its network to provide an efficient link between organisations and a communication interface with HEF.*

Alison noted that HEN business planning and membership survey had led to the decision to further develop HENs networking role in relation to environmental and sustainability issues.

As a result HEN is applying for funding for a research project on how HEN can improve the support of the community sector work, including assisting them to engage with HEF and community planning. HEN is beginning to discuss within the sector how it can best develop its role - which will include extending beyond environmentally active groups to those that have the potential to do more environmental and sustainable work - and in particular amongst the more disadvantaged and fuel poverty groups.

Action:

Alison invited forum members to join the HEN board, to suggest funders, to become HEN Champions. For any of these contact Caroline Vawdrey (hen@highlandenvironment.org.uk)

4. Workshop to set future priorities for HEF development and action

In particular, how can HEF members contribute to the current Single Outcome Agreement plan, and what should be the priority areas for joint action.

30 minutes workshop discussion, followed by 30 minutes to agree priorities for action, including what working groups should be established.

Priority actions (ranked according to dot placement by forum members)

(nb: for those where a working group exists the result will be skewed, as members were asked to prioritise actions for which no work was as yet being undertaken by the forum)

- 1) Highland specific land use strategy - 26 (plus, Scottish land use strategy - 1)
- 2) enabling communities to adapt to extreme weather events - 16
- 3) ensuring continued understanding & awareness of the value of the natural environment - 14
- 4) deer management - 13
- 5) remote and rural collaborative working - 11
- 6) biodiversity - 10 (working group exists)
- 7) Access to the outdoors - 10
- 8) Reducing fuel poverty - 10
- 9) invasive non-native species - 4 (working group exists)
- 10) designated sites - 2

Detailed comments on priority areas from the discussion group - in no particular order

- invasive non-native species
- deer management
- Highland specific land use strategy that includes integration of:
 - community benefit (young people, productive land, cultural identity)
 - forestry (national expansion targets)
 - nature conservation
 - ecosystem services (flood alleviation, renewables)
 - equality aims - through community vitality and assessing value of natural assets
- biodiversity action
- designated sites
- Scottish land use strategy
- peat bogs
- collaborative working with land management sections - esp small scale, eg crofters. Potential includes finance, equipment sharing
- helping communities build resilience to extreme weather - e.g. local availability of snow ploughs, salt, tree surgeons and the under grounding of vulnerable power lines
- building understanding and appreciation of environmental value, including marine
- collaborative working with communities

5. AOB

none

6. Date of next meeting : September - precise date TBC ,
Venue - SNH, Great Glen House, Inverness