

Highland Invasive species Forum

Key points from the 6th annual meeting held in the Macphail Centre, Ullapool on 26th September 2014

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Attendees

Jonathan Willet, Highland Council Biodiversity Officer, meeting chair
Chris Horrill, RAFTS
Peter Cunningham, Wester Ross Fisheries Trust
Julie Bhatti, SEPA
Rob Dewar, NTS
David O'Brien - Highland Biological Recording Group
Jeanette Hall - SNH, Woodland Advisor
Nicola Tallach - SNH, Operations Officer, South Highland
Ian Collier - FCS, Woodland Officer, Highland and Islands Conservancy
Reuben Brown - THC Wester Ross Countryside Ranger
John Parrott - Coille Alba
Alison MacLennan - RSPB
Duncan Ferguson- Operations Manager, Spey District Fishery Board
Liz Henderson - Spey's Catchment officer
Robin Payne BSc MCIEEM CEnv
Judi Macdonald - SEPA Dingwall Ecology
Shimi Arnold
Meryl Carr - SNH
Katarina Lindroth - FCS
Victoria Mardon
Barbara Macritchie - NTS
John Phillips - THC ranger
Nigel Carr
Ellie MacLennan - THC Ranger
Kenneth Knott - FCS
Caroline Vawdrey

1) The Wester Ross Fishery Trust's Invasive Species Control Programme - Peter Cunningham, Biologist

- The aim of the fisheries trust is to get salmon, sea trout and trout back in rivers in the area from River Kanaird north of Ullapool south to the catchment area of the River Barrisdale in Knoydart
- The Trust is a member of RAFTS and, with the assistance of the RAFTS director, Chris Horrill, have produced a biosecurity plan, which includes the control of invasive species. This is available online at <http://www.wrft.org.uk/downloads/home.cfm>
- Escaped farm salmon, minnows, mink, New Zealand flatworm and rhododendron ponticum are some of the main invasive species of concern in the area

Rhododendron control

Both lever and mulch and stem injection have been found to be effective (Balmacara NTS estate)
The control methods used should relate to individual site conditions.

Areas of concern:

- isolated bushes scattered across open countryside
- garden specimen and hedge plantings
- eradication is too dependent on views of the land manager

- lady's mantle spreading out of gardens on to crofting land
- the spread of other species - not widespread as yet - e.g. *cotoneasta siamensis*, *acaena*, *gaultheria*, *crocoshmia*, conifers, skunk cabbage

Recommendations:

- to empower members of public to be able to pull out seedlings
- to find ways to attract volunteers for a continued effort over a longer period - e.g. use online mapping to show current situation, use a multi-species approach, maintain good communication, have some admin support
- encourage a coordinated approach across landowners to tackling invasive species
- accentuate the positive - creating better habitats

2) National INNS legislation update – Julie Bhatti, SEPA

- *The first Species Control Agreement* is now in place for prairie dogs in a wildlife park, but it is expected that more will be in place in the future.
- *EU IAS regulation* - will come into force 1 Jan 2015. It is similar to that in place at present. Implementing legislation must be in place by the end of 2015. The species to be included have not yet been announced, but in addition to the European-wide list it will be possible to create a national list and regional priority lists. The latter will be consulted on. There will be an SNH workshop during November 2014 to discuss priorities, with the final list to be published in Spring 2015.
- *National Invasive Species Strategies* are being produced
- *Rapid response* - Julie's update included: mink are down to fewer than 20 in the Outer Hebrides, eradication of the last colony of black rats in Britain is planned for the Shiantis. Early attempts at eradication of stoats on Orkney have failed, so SNH is considering the case for an increase in resources.
- *Chinese mitten crab* - one has been found dead found on the River Clyde. There will be surveys carried out to see if there are more. There has been a public awareness-raising campaign run by Tweed Foundation, which has been on the BBC Scotland news. SEPA is also asking the public to report any crab they think might be this species. See <http://www.clydeforum.com>
- *River basin management plans* for managing invasive species - SEPA is looking at where there are area-based gaps in these plans and how best to cover these.
- *Awareness raising apps* - can also be used to input records - and will eventually be able to generate alerts to organisations
- *Himalayan balsam psyllid* has been released in England to control the plant, and SEPA would like to know when it arrives in Scotland. It is the intention that the awareness-raising apps will have a new function to detect the presence of this – not currently in Scotland but it is only a matter of time before it arrives.
- *SAMS is running a course on biosecurity planning* this autumn - it is envisaged that this will also be held in future years (NB the course is not free to attend.)
- *Biosecurity for event planners* www.scrt.co.uk/cfinns has been developed by South Cumbrian rivers
- There is an *e-learning package* about non native species at www.nonnativespecies.org

3) National Riparian INNS Control Project – Chris Horrill, RAFTS

- Chris is the RAFTs Director, which is the umbrella body for 26 local river and fisheries trusts.
- Biosecurity is an important aspect of RAFTS' work — and includes invasive plants, mink (50,00 square km covered by volunteer surveyors), crayfish and aquatic plants
- All RAFTS volunteer programmes adopt a process of adaptive learning - changing over time to meet the needs of the project and people involved
- RAFTS has a flexible approach to tackling invasive species, in order to ensure that they are using the best approach for each species - for example finding mink hotspots and concentrating long term eradication programmes on these areas

Keeping volunteers

RAFTS spends time thinking about volunteer roles and how to sustain them for the long term - as a result they:

- explain the long term purpose of the programme
- and provide
 - training
 - support
 - insurance cover
 - encouragement to enter data
 - opportunities to gain qualifications
 - feedback on their work and the difference it is making to improving biodiversity.

The RAFTS data input system is able to provide an automatic reply to a contributor to their database - thanking them and explaining how their information has helped. RAFTS is interested to see how this approach could be integrated with other initiatives.

RAFTS will be putting in a bid in to HLF for a 4-year volunteer based project

4) INNS Plants Survey in Fort William – Jonathan Willet. THC

Lochaber Fisheries Trust and the Highland Council put together funding for a survey of invasive non-native plant species. This focussed primarily on the 40mph zone, with some extensions beyond.

The mapping exercise included: mapping species, terrain, ownership and cost of removal over a three to five year period. The report contains a number of figures - including the fact that only 8% of the area surveyed is not under threat from invasive plants, and that 81% of Japanese knotweed is found growing by a river.

As a result of the mapping even quite small areas of invasive plant species have been identified - and some issues have already appeared - Japanese knotweed is growing on a site earmarked for Highland Council office development - so a decision now has to be reached whether to remove and sieve the soil, or to undertake a longer term programme of removal - as part of a wider removal of invasive plants around Fort William.

The next stage is to seek funding to tackle the removal of invasive plants.

5) NTS work on INNS on Their Estate – Rob Dewar, NTS

The NTS have survey and management plans for each of their sites that include tackling invasive species, some properties are still at the stage of quantifying the issue prior to action. These plans sit within an overall NTS invasive species strategy.

Rhododendron

- Rob reiterated the view that both lever and mulch and stem injections can be effective ways of managing rhododendron. The NTS has lever and mulch demonstration sites at Balmacara and Brodie.
- *Awareness raising*
 - information boards and posters have been used at visitor sites (eg Inverewe) to explain work being undertaken, and to highlight the problems associated with invasive species
 - staff leaflets have also been produced
- *Challenges*
 - getting neighbouring estates involved in tackling invasive species
 - persuading communities to remove invasive species. This has been successful at Inveralligin where Rhododendron ponticum hedges are being replaced by species rhododendron hedges. Much of this success resulted from the enthusiastic advocacy of one person.

Gunnera tinctoria

This plant is becoming more of an issue - particularly on Harris - and can spread by seed (100,00 per year per plant) and rhizome. Early action is required before the spread rate increases.

Alchemilla mollis

As referred to in Peter Cunningham's talk this plant is beginning into croft land

6) SRDP 2015-21 and the Highland Rhododendron Project - Jonathan Willet, THC

The Highland Rhododendron Project has mapped areas of rhododendron and four priority areas identified. There was the agreement with a number of land owners to develop clearance projects, however funding was removed from the SRDP and no further action was possible.

Next SRDP

Ian Collier reported that there will be money in the next round of SRDP, and that there will be a separate forestry grant scheme. Rhododendron will be funded under both schemes, but no details are known as yet.

The new scheme will enable one participant with a BRN number to put forward a collaborative scheme with others who will not require to have a BRN number.

Kenneth Knott highlighted the high level of spending on rhododendron clearance and that it is vital to have long term follow up procedures in order to ensure that clearance is effective. He noted that commercial sites with widespread rhododendron can result in tree losses of 30% following planting.