

Minutes

Highland Invasive Species sub-group.

10am to 12.30pm. 19th August 2008.

Committee Room 5, Highland Council HQ.

1. Attending

David O'Brien	Highland Biological Recording Group
Kerry Riddell	BTCV - Scotland
Ian Milne	SEPA
Jonathan Saxby	Highland Council – Roads and Community services
Derek Anderson	Scotland TranServ
David Glass	Caithness Biodiversity Group - Chair
Llinos Davis	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Ian Collier	Forestry Commission Scotland
Michael Stretch	Growing Concern (rep. Bear Scotland)
John Parrott	Scottish Native Woods
Steve North	SNH
Jonathan Willet	Highland Council

2. Apologies.

Ian Ross	Councillor
Rob Dewar	NTS
Barbara Souter	NTS

3. Name of the group. Should native invasive species be included in our remit?

It was agreed that the group would prioritise action on those non-native species that are most damaging to biodiversity.

4. Brief presentation on New Zealand invasive species control, by Kerry Riddell BTCV Scotland, followed by Q&A.

NZ is a very fragile ecosystem; there are lots of invasive species that have been brought to the islands by humans. In the forests bird numbers are very low due to high predation levels. 80% of native NZ plants are endemic; they have not evolved to cope with browsing/ grazers. Gorse and Marram Grass have become big problems.

Pest control takes up two thirds of the government's conservation work. Himalayan Tahr (an ungulate related to the goat) are found in high numbers in the NZ Southern Alps, however they are rare in their native habitat. Should they be conserved in NZ because of this? Possums are a huge problem,

introduced from Australia. Control measures include aerial spraying and ground pellets. Threats to dogs from eating the pellets.

Hunting is a major form of control, actively encouraged by the government. Trapping is also used; this is on a massive scale.

Plants are controlled by Dept. of conservation teams, the Conservation Corps (*New Zealand Conservation Corps is an excellent programme run by the Ministry of Youth Development to train young people in conservation. Participants receive a training allowance while working on conservation projects, as well as other education and recreation activities. A certificate of achievement is received at the end of the project <http://www.doc.govt.nz/templates/page.aspx?id=45336>).*

and Councils and Volunteer efforts.

There is a clear delineation between agency and personal responsibilities. Animals are an agency issue but plants are a public (individual issue).

Weedbusters <http://weedbusters.co.nz> –

What is Weedbusters?

Weedbusters is a weeds awareness and education programme that aims to protect New Zealand's environment from the increasing weed problem. Pest animals and plants (weeds) are **the** greatest threat to New Zealand's biodiversity. People play a large part in spreading environmental weeds, often without knowing it, and Weedbusters aims to educate people and raise awareness to turn this problem around. Weedbusters means **action** - taking part in weed issues are essential if we are to limit the spread and establishment of weeds.

Weed recognition guides and plant-me-instead guides have been produced for the public and have been successful.

Lessons to learn from NZ.

- Coordinated inter-agency approach.
- Clear delineation between agency and personal responsibility.
- Bio security. Big public campaigns.
- Lots of media attention. It is a big issue.
- Where to go to get advice. Dept of Conservation first point of call.
- Easy read guides (on ID and removal/ control) available.
- Schools. Enviro-schools (similar to our eco-schools) need to take part in weed control to get their Green Flag.

KR's suggestions for action.

- Launch a campaign to raise awareness of invasive species.

- Produce leaflets on ID and control of species.
- Small scale support for volunteer activity on Invasive Species.
- A support/ coordinator officer for Highland.

AP1. SN to identify key contacts for invasive species in Highland.

SN. Lessons learned in NZ probably applicable to Highland due to land use, landscape and population density.

There was a discussion around these points and some recommendations were agreed to take to the next Invasive Species Forum meeting.

1. Partnership working is very important. Ideally all landowners/ stakeholders in a catchment/ defined ecological unit should be involved in a control/ eradication project.
2. Projects should be on as large a scale as is possible to ensure value for money and sustainability of the control effort (i.e minimising re-colonisation of treated area from other colonies of the same species).
3. Control should be the first objective of any project as eradication may not be possible or may be far in the future. This ensures that projects do not over-sell themselves and disappoint stakeholders with unobtainable targets.

5. Discussion on the Invasive Species leaflets being developed by Rob Dewar and Barbara Soutar (NTS).

This was thought a good idea in general but it needs to be targeted at a particular sector where a leaflet is the correct medium to do this. Locally specific leaflets on Invasive Species may be the best utilisation of this resource. There is only funding for the production of one run of leaflets as the NTS has Communities Projects for Highland Biodiversity funding for these. Any further production of leaflets would require to secure funding for the printing of them.

There was a discussion on publicity and it was pointed out that the Scottish Invasives Species Group would be undertaking a big campaign in the future.

In terms of information clear advice on the control of Invasive Species (IS) was required.

A Risk Assessment of any IS on a site should be developed and adopted by contractors and in the planning process. This is a potential project to take forward.

6. Natural Talent Apprenticeship on Invasive Species.

5 organisations volunteered to be mentors to a prospective Invasive Species apprentice under the Natural Talent Scheme BTCV are running. They were; Bear Scotland, Scotland TranServ, Scottish Native Woods and the Cairngorms National Park and SNH.

7. Update on current IS activities. Where are the gaps?

AP2. JW to circulate action table for the members to fill in.

An up to date database of invasive species is required to target control effort there was discussion on how to go about doing this. SN said that there might be funding available to HBRG to provide this service if they agreed to undertake this database management.

AP3. DOB to ask HBRG if they can provide invasive species data collation service through their website.

8. Priorities for action.

SN mentioned that SNH had published a document that looked at Invasive Species in Scotland. It was about 5 years old but a good place to start any prioritisation.

AP4. SN to circulate this document if possible.

AP5. SN to extract species identified in this document that are in Highland or are getting close.

AP6. JW to circulate a table based on Caithness's Invasive Species Summary for all members of the Invasive Species Forum to fill in. Also include species that are likely to be a future problem.

Use a traffic light system on the above to highlight the key species.

AP7. JW to contact the Scottish IS Group to see if they have information on invasive species that are likely to be a future problem in Highland.

9. Way forward.

There was mention of having a Forum/ workshop event in 2009 to launch a leaflet and raise awareness.

At the next meeting agree the priority species for action in Highland.

SN mentioned that a LIFE project on invasives in the UK was being prepared for submission next September and might be relevant to Highland. I agreed to try to find out more. There is also money to available to bid for in SNH's Species Action Framework for Signal Crayfish, Grey Squirrel, Mink, New Zealand Pygmyweed and Rhododendron.

AP8. IC to update on SRDP's Invasive Species Pages (when they become clearer).

10. AOCB

None.

11. DONM.

Wednesday 1st October, 10am, Committee Room 1 Highland Council.

Action Points.

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