

Skye & Lochalsh Environment Forum

Minutes of the Seventh General Meeting

held at 2.30 pm on Tuesday, 31st October 2006
in Broadford Village Hall, Isle of Skye.

Those present:

Chairman - Iain Turnbull (NTS), Secretary - David Ashford (Independent), Roger Cottis (Scottish Wildlife Trust Skye Members' Centre), Alison Hutchins (SEPA), Sarah Kay (THC Rangers), James Merryweather (SWRFC), Bob McMillan (BTO), Margaret McVicar (Eilean Bàn), Pat Mucklow (SWRFC), Brian Neath (SWRFC), John Phillips (THC Rangers), Uilleam Smith (Crofters Commission), Janette Sutherland (Scottish Agricultural College), Bruce Taylor (FCS), Jonathan Willet (THC Biodiversity Officer).

Apologies for Absence:

Stephen Bungard (BSBI Recorder), Douglas Halliday (John Muir Trust), Claire Hannah (Leader + Field Officer), Catriona MacLean (THC), Alison MacLennan (RSPB), David Macvicar (SEERAD), Chris Marsh (FCS, Fort Augustus District Project Officer, Kinloch Hills), Alan Sillence (RSPB), Barbara Soutar (NTS), Alex Turner (SNH).

Minutes of the Last Meeting:

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 25th July 2006 were approved subject to the insertion of the word "the" between "not" and "only" in clause 10. Proposer: Pat Mucklow - Seconder: Jonathan Willet.

Matters arising from those Minutes:

None.

Further Items:

1. **Review of the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan and the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.**
 - 1.1 Iain Turnbull reported on the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan meeting that he attended on 3rd October 2006 and agreed to circulate copies of the Partnership Agreement: AP1 - IT.
 - 1.2 The Heritage Lottery Fund may be prepared to provide a total of £100,000.00 over a three year period. However Highland wide BAPs are for the Partners themselves to fund.
 - 1.3 A sub-group is to be set up with Ro Scott as Chairperson and Jonathan Willet as Secretary: AP1 - JW.
 - 1.4 The Envirocentre Consultants advised that support was required for local groups and that this is an issue which needs to be addressed as soon as possible.
 - 1.5 Iain Turnbull explained the three initial tasks being (i) habitat species list, (ii) projects, and (iii) setting up a recording centre.
 - 1.6 Iain Turnbull said the funding application need to be lodged in January 2007 and that if approved funds may be in place by April 2007: AP2 - IT
 - 1.7 Iain Turnbull raised the question of who is going to lead on the projects. Jonathan Willet reminded Members that the project leaders have already been agreed and submitted as part of the HLF project descriptions to the HLF. He added that the

completed Highland Biodiversity Action Plan Review could be seen on <http://www.highlandbiodiversity.com/htm/lbap-review> and asked Iain Turnbull if he would go through the Skye & Lochalsh Implementation Plan so that the current position could be discussed.

1.8 Japanese Knotweed Control

- 1.8.1 Iain Turnbull began with reference to this project. Although Barbara Soutar would not have sufficient time to become further involved, he believed it would run successfully.
- 1.8.2 Bob McMillan asked if there was any record of the areas treated. John Phillips explained that the Broadford Environment Group have a record of the sites treated for knotweed in the Broadford area about two years ago. Iain Turnbull acknowledged much still remains to be done and in answer to Roger Cottis advised that records should be sent to Barbara Soutar for the time being.
- 1.8.3 Janette Sutherland pointed out that there is a budget available for training applicable to land based businesses.
- 1.8.4 Bob McMillan expressed concern about the issue not being addressed locally and the awful dumping practice for which they are legally culpable. Bruce Taylor said that TranServ attended the National Trust for Scotland Japanese Knotweed Awareness Day and felt they do realize the additional costs involved with any eradication works.
- 1.8.5 James Merryweather described the negative dealings he and Barbara Soutar had with TranServ and Iain Turnbull cited an example of a request to stop flailing which was ignored.
- 1.8.6 Iain Turnbull added that SEPA or SEERAD should be urged to tackle the problem and to pressurise The Highland Council. Jonathan Willet explained the latter's Roads Department do have monthly meetings at which non-native invasive species may be discussed.
- 1.8.7 Roger Cottis warned that Scottish Water Solutions operations may also result in the spread of knotweed. It is believed that regrettably they did not attend NTS Japanese Knotweed Awareness Day.
- 1.8.8 James Merryweather took the view that it would be unwise to focus solely on Japanese Knotweed. Iain Turnbull felt that to undertake the huge task of tackling rhododendron ponticum would be "too scary". At least there is nowadays an increasing awareness of the problem.
- 1.8.9 Jonathan Willet said that a Report on non-native invasive species is due for release next year.

1.9 Skye & Lochalsh Butterfly Survey

- 1.9.1 With regard to this project, Jonathan Willet reminded Members of the concern minuted at the last meeting regarding restricting the survey to South Skye. Brian Neath explained that without the services of Tom Prescott of Butterfly Conservation it is a difficult issue to deal with effectively. However Brian Neath believed that if Skye were to have a leaflet similar to the Cairngorms group, that would at least be a good start.
- 1.9.2 Iain Turnbull expressed concern about whether the project will ever be done given the vagueness of it and emphasised the need to establish who is going to volunteer. John Phillips advised that a training course would reveal that soon enough. It was agreed that there needs to be a steering group and Roger Cottis recommended the targeting of woodlands when preparing the Highland Council's Ranger Guided Walks programme.
- 1.10 It was felt progress with the **Bats and Bird Boxes Associated with Buildings** was satisfactory.
- 1.11 Roger Cottis said that as regards the **Reducing Mammal Casualties on Roads** project, a core concern will be the establishment of Environmental Clerks of Works. Unless this

happens, inordinate levels of wasted resources will continue unabated. He will bring forwards detailed examples as the project progresses. In any event the reporting of all road casualties sighted is urged upon Members.

- 1.12 Other potential projects were discussed. These included tackling rhododendron issues, the protection of species rich road verges and the destruction of habitats by muirburn. Bob McMillan felt that it was unwise to include "Combating Wildlife crime..." in the list of **Other Project Suggestions** given that there are law enforcement agencies better resourced and established to deal with such matters. This was agreed.
- 1.13 Bob McMillan described his fruitless correspondence with SEERAD over the damage of habitat on Raasay caused by a few crofters determined to implement uncontrolled muirburn. Roger Cottis reminded Members of the terrible destruction suffered by otters. Uilleam Smith said that he was aware of a Woodland group meeting to discuss muirburn issues.
- 1.14 Janette Sutherland warned that there was a limit to which pressure of yet more restrictions should be placed on crofters and farmers. What is needed is something positive in order to encourage them to work for, rather than against, conservation controversies.
- 1.15 Bob McMillan pointed out that the Muirburn Code has been in existence for a long time. Iain Turnbull suggested that the conditions of subsidy need to be checked closely by Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions.
- 1.16 Iain Turnbull agreed indicating that pre-occupation with projects has weighed heavily upon the Forum to date. He expressed the hope that contact with the Scottish Crofters Foundation might help to bridge the gap in due course.

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Projects update.

- 2.1 It was agreed that the Wildlife Watching in Skye & Lochalsh leaflet project was close to conclusion. The presentation with posters, photographs and text provided by Sarah Kay and John Phillips for Members to view was much appreciated.
- 2.2 Iain Turnbull regretted that no marine project was undertaken but this was largely because Angus McHattie was unable to assist.
- 2.3 The need for steering groups to see the projects through was emphasised by Iain Turnbull again.

3 Reconsideration of constitutional issues.

- 3.1 David Ashford gave his view on the ever increasing wisdom of becoming properly constituted if the Forum is to be able to function effectively. Not only are Banks unprepared to co-operate with unincorporated bodies nowadays but he felt that Members owe it to themselves to gain wider recognition and a dignified status through the formation of a company limited by guarantee.
- 3.2 Roger Cottis gave the problems faced with financing the Fungus Foray event at the beginning of October 2006 as an example of the extent to which lost opportunities to take control of one's own management of such occasions were all too painfully apparent.
- 3.3 Iain Turnbull had "cloudy" feelings about the need for top level incorporation preferring instead the formation of a Voluntary Association.
- 3.4 After much discussion it was decided by all Members that this form of constitution should be the first in a staged approach. David Ashford agreed to work on the draft documentation previously considered by the Form with a view to having a draft ready for Member's approval as soon as possible: **AP2 - DA**.
- 3.5 He will also expedite the application for membership of the Skye & Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations: **AP3 - DA**.

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Annual Conference.

- 4.1 Iain Turnbull suggested this should be towards the end of winter and incorporate an AGM. A suitable speaker should be sought and Jonathan Willet recommended the inclusion of out doors activities.
- 4.2 Any ideas from Members will be welcome. They should please be e-mailed to David Ashford at the earliest opportunity.
- 4.3 Janette Sutherland offered to assist.

5 Local Development issues

- 5.1 Iain Turnbull recommended that this be a standing item on all future agendas.
- 5.2 Roger Cottis mentioned the big implications for everyone arising from the National Marine Park proposals. He stressed the importance of ensuring that arguments for or against are supported by hard scientific facts and that a pure emotional approach would be counterproductive. The Marine Conservation Society are to be invited to meet the Sleat Community Trust and advise as necessary in the near future.
- 5.3 Iain Turnbull welcomed that news and reminded Members of the Three Lochs Management Forum that would also be interested.

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Any Other Competent Business

- 6.1 Bob McMillan spoke about the rapid reduction in sheep stock levels - 25% since 1999. This would inevitably impact on the welfare of golden eagles and therefore the need to monitor this development is paramount. Iain Turnbull agreed and warned of severe landscape implications. Janette Sutherland referred to the importance of finding the right "tipping point" as well as studying cause and effect more closely.
- 6.2 James Merryweather expressed concern about the divide in the community between locals who resent SNH in particular and environmentalists in general which he had encountered personally.
- 6.3 That led to a discussion about the influence of the West Highland Free Press and its perennial campaign against all things to do with conservation politics. David Ashford reported that, by coincidence, he had a conversation with Alex Turner just before coming to the General Meeting during which he proposed a meeting with the Editor, Brian Wilson and Ian Mackinnon on the one hand and conservationists on the other in the hope of achieving a constructive dialogue that might result in future editions of the WHFP producing less prejudiced outpourings. Bob McMillan and Iain Turnbull in particular were dismissive of any such communication being of the opinion that the paper will never change under present management and that it has always failed to reflect the views of the many crofters who are against its flawed policy most of the time. Uilleam Smith made the point that the WHFP's comment on the Crofting Reform Bill was undeniably praiseworthy.
- 6.4 Roger Cottis informed Members that the endeavours of Sleat Energy Limited to set up a wind farm on the peninsular have been abandoned.

Date of Next Meeting: To be arranged

Having no further business the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 5.05 pm.