

# Meeting note of Highland invasive species group, 18th October 2017

## Attending:

### 1. Welcome and apologies

Name	Organisation
Amanda Ophof	FCS
Babs MacRittchie	NTS
Brian Shaw	Spey Foundation
Caroline Vawdrey (minutes)	Highland Environment Forum
Channy Awbi	Manta Ecology
Christian Christodoulou-Davies	SNH
Darrell Stevens	RSPB
David O'Brien	HBRG
Eamonn Flood	Manta Ecology

Gareth Phillips	FCS
Jeanette Hall	SNH
John Parrott	Coille Alba
Jonathan Willet	
Lynn McKelvey	Cromarty Fisheries Trust
Malcolm Wield	FCS
Reuben Brown	HC
Rob Dewar	NTS
Simon McKelvey	Cromarty Fisheries Trust
Steve North (Chair)	SNH

Steve welcomed everyone to the meeting to review current work on invasive non-native species and consider future action.

### Apologies:

Adam Beynon-Jones	West Sutherland Fisheries Trust
Bob Laughton	Findhorn, Nairn, Lossie Fisheries Trust
Drew McFarlane-Slack	SLE
Giles Brockman	FES
Judi McDonald	SEPA
Julia Stubbs-Partridge	SNH

Katy Martin	Highland Council
Lucy Smith	Lochaber Fisheries Trust
Martin Mackinnon	FCS
Michelle Henley	Scottish Wildlife Trust
Nick Barker	Beauly and Ness Fisheries Trust
Trish Robertson	HC

### 2. Updates on:

#### Grey Squirrel

**Highland Red Squirrel Group:** Have had no confirmed records of greys over the last year or so. Any reported sightings are checked and, if confirmed, would be caught by a suitably qualified person.

The 'Red Squirrels of the Highlands' [website](#) is monitored by Iain Collier at FCS. Translocation and re-establishment of red squirrel populations on the west coast is progressing successfully.

#### Mink

**Scottish mink initiative** - There was no funding for 2017, but fisheries trusts kept the scheme going on tick over. The newly funded Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI) will provide support for mink control in much of Highland over the next four years.

**NTS** continues mink control on their estate and is working with local landowners. There have been anecdotal reports in south-west Ross, and on the in E Sutherland.

**Lewis & Harris:** control has been largely successful, and action scaled back in order to allow the team to focus work on North Uist and also on hedgehogs

## **Giant Hogweed**

**Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Fisheries Trust** continued to make good progress on GH control on the Findhorn/ Mosset and Lossie with support from EB Scotland (Landfill tax). Rope specialists tackled cliffs along the Findhorn. Proprietors on the Nairn also maintained good progress on GB control, supported by the Trust.

**Wick River:** The control of GH along the Wick river started with volunteers but the scale of the task and health and safety requirements meant that a contractor (funded by SNH) was required). Volunteers support this professional input.

**Cromarty Firth** - continued work on Balnagown estate and RSPB land.

**Ness and Beaully** - continued the work on the Munloch and Little Burn that was previously organised by Highland Council.

**Spread from the riparian zone:** For instance, through woodland, or as a result of movement of materials - eg road or rail construction works. These areas fall outwith the new SISI funding - and lack a mechanism to deal with them.

## **Japanese Knotweed**

**Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Fisheries Trust:** Less progress on Japanese Knotweed

**Lochaber Fisheries Trust:** No longer receiving any funding for knotweed control so work in this area is now minimal.

**River Broom** : 2017 was the third season of work on the river - tackling JK from Braemore Estate down river, and including the Corrieshalloch Gorge.

**Mallaig:** 2 years of treatment - funded by HC and Nevis estate

**Balmacara:** Some sites reducing well. Seems to need 10 + years of continued control.

It was noted that leaving treated plants to rest plants for a year or two can help the effectiveness of subsequent stem treatment. Cardiff University have done some work on Japanese Knotweed, and Chris Horrill is also knowledgeable on the subject.

## **Rhododendron**

It was noted that previous work by the group had lead to the identification of Rhododendron priority clearance sites, but that changes in grant schemes had not enabled these to go ahead.

**FCS:** Noted that the National Strategy is on their website, but there is currently very little funding available in the Forestry Grant Scheme. From 2015 - 17 sixteen rhododendron clearance schemes were given approval, covering 167 ha.

A Species Control Agreement had been reached by FCS and Scottish and Southern for rhododendron removal at Glengarry Dam. FES were contracted to clear the rhododendron.

Grant funding for rhododendron clearance can now only be given to designated sites.

**FES:** Rhododendron control within the Forest estate has largely worked well, but the problem remains of plants spreading back in from neighbouring landholdings. Achnashellach and Raasay have had primary treatment and are now subject to follow up treatment. This plant is still a considerable problem in Lochaber.

**Wester Ross:** Hoping that UNESCO Biosphere funding bid will lead to funding to continue invasive non-native species work.

**NTS:** Continued work on their estates, with Ben Lomond, Inverewe at the final clearance stage - helped by SNH funding, volunteers, contractors and staff. Clearance continues at Balmacara, with hopes to expand to neighbouring landowners. The species swap approach for gardens works well, but needs further funding to expand the scheme.

**Road and rail verges:** There remains a need for roadside and railside verges to be dealt with.

**Phytophthora ramorum** (cohabits between rhoddie and Larch - killing Larch. Other tree species are affected as well. This disease is controlled by statutory order and detected infections must be removed if a plant health notice is issued. It arrived on Raasay in 2015 and is still present. A large proportion of the larch plantation and rhododendron has now been removed from the island, but the disease is still being detected. In 2017 the disease was first detected on rhododendron on private ground at Achnashellach. It is also in the Contin area, near Kildary, and near Golspie.

Martin Mackinnon is the FCS officer responsible for site visits and liaison with land managers. Grants are available for clearance of infected plants and a small buffer zone. 20 notices to clear infected plants have been issued by FCS in the past 12 months (2 on Larch, 18 on Rhododendron ponticum).

There is a need for a coordinated response to this disease.  
<https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pramorom> gives details of the disease.

FCS is the lead agency on rhododendron control, and it is not covered by the new SISI funding.

## **Himalayan Balsam**

**Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Fisheries Trust:** Some volunteers and groups continue to tackle Himalayan Balsam on the Mosset and Nairn.

**Cromarty Firth:** continued to employ a worker to tackle Himalayan balsam.

**Balmacara :** 12 out of 15 populations have been cleared

**Findhorn:** It has been observed that Himalayan balsam occupies ground that has been cleared of giant hogweed. Some work done has been undertaken along the R. Nairn source burns

**Inverness:** mapping has been undertaken

**Urquhart bay:** still present but much reduced. And kilometres of river have been cleared.

Further control work will be carried out by fisheries trusts under the SISI funding.

## **3. Other species updates:**

### **Crayfish**

**Lochaber Fisheries Trust:** Did 5th year of post-treatment surveys this summer and found no crayfish, which means (according to the experts) it is highly likely that the eradication was a success.

**Other species** were noted - see actions below.

## 4. Opportunities across Highland

### ACTIONS arising from discussion

- a) **Future role for the working group:** To coordinate sharing of information and good practice. Now even more valuable, since the loss of the Highland Council biodiversity officers.
- b) **Scottish Invasive Species Initiative:** This £3.4 million scheme has 6 work streams, including biosecurity and covering 5 species of plants, and mink control. SISI will run for 4 years and will be focussed on riparian habitats. There will be a worker within each fisheries trust. The Highland Invasive Species Working Group will meet with the project coordinator for SISI in spring 2018.
- c) **Horizon scanning for potential new invasive species:** eg Gunnera, pink salmon, racoons, pheasant berry, gaultheria, monkey flower, butterbur. **ACTION: working group members** to offer to take responsibility for drawing together information on species of concern - including - knowledge of current spread, current knowledge plant behaviour, case for action. Bring information to next meeting for discussion and sharing.
- d) **Rhododendron:** There should be a summary of past/ current work and the need for future funding. **ACTION:** Malcolm and Rob to develop some suggestions for discussion
- e) **Highland Council:** To provide an update on coordination of tackling invasive species on Highland Council land. **ACTION:** Rueben to source information
- f) **Network Rail:** **ACTION:** CV to get contact from Christian
- g) **Psyllid beetle:** **ACTION:** Jonathan to find out current situation
- h) **Good practice guides:** It was noted that these could be useful - for future considerations

## 5. AOB

- Cromarty Fisheries Trust are working with LANTRA to devise a joint fisheries/ forestry apprenticeship
- The group gave their thanks to Steve for all his work to help tackle invasive species in the Highlands, since the group first met in 2006. All hoped that he would stay involved in the group after retiring from SNH.

## 6. Next meeting

Early spring with SISI - date and venue TBC

(Julia and CV to liaise)