

Sleat Community Trust Environment Advisory Group

Minutes of 10th May 2021, 7.30 pm via Zoom

1. Attendance

Ade Stokes (chair), Roger Cottis, Tim Godfrey, Peter Roberts, Alan Drever, Veronica Barrington, Sandy Masson, Dorothy Jackson (minutes)

Apologies: Catherine de Vries, Roddy Murray

The EAG welcomed Sandy Masson to the group.

2. Minutes of previous meeting – Approved

3. Matters Arising

- Dorothy is still awaiting information re collection point and dimensions of the beach clean station.
- Cycle Network: Mike Hyatt will hold a Zoom meeting in the next 2-3 weeks to discuss options for improving the cycle network in Sleat. Catherine hopes to attend.
- Frog, toad and newt records: sent to Highland Biological Recording Group and gratefully received.
- Roadside flailing (Catherine /Ryan): update carried forward to next meeting
- Waste Food Recycling: Mike Shucksmith has agreed to link SCT's food waste/anaerobic digester project to the community food growing project when the time comes.
- Shop planting: great progress with weeding thanks to Veronica with help from Meg. The area will be sown with "Flowering Lawn Mix" and donated wildflower seeds. Tim and another community member have adopted planters. Lusan Landscapes will quote for planting the remaining four; the aim is to ask community members to adopt them in future years. The site designated for the tree has compacted soil with poor drainage. A subgroup will visit the site tomorrow to assess options and suitable species.

4. Community Growing

We have one garden share up and running. Dorothy sent leaflets and posters after the last meeting to Eleanor, but printing was delayed due to technical problems. Dorothy to follow up again.

5. Invasive Non-Native Plant Species

- Input from EAG members is needed to develop the distribution maps for Gunnera, Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed later in the year. Highland Environment Forum and Highland Council responded positively about volunteers clearing Rhododendron from roadsides along two stretches of the A851: from Toravaig to Camuscross turnoff and from north side of Duisdale to the black lochs, including the old road. CDLT is supportive, FEI has not objected. The aim is to remove seedlings from discrete areas where Rhododendron is expanding, and keep it contained. Uprooted plants to be left as a mulch.
- Limited volunteer resources mean that high concentrations of Rhododendron, large trees, steep slopes etc are not included for now. Roger noted that Roundup is now available without glyphosate, and breaks down in soil after 3-4 days (contains pelargonic acid). Ade to organise a work party to start removing plants in the next couple of weeks.

- Tim reported that he has successfully tackled Gunnera by slicing up the rhizome into thin slices with a sharp spade and leaving the slices on the ground where they die during the winter.

6. Beach cleans / Skye litter pick

- The group discussed the merits of using boats to access beaches that cannot be easily reached by road. Dorothy has relayed questions about the use of a beachclean RIB and raft to the boat owner. Currently the council trucks beach waste to landfill in Caithness, raising the question of whether it is better to leave it, if the beach is inaccessible and rarely visited. The meeting agreed that uplift of beach waste was preferable, as this reduces dispersal back into the ocean and hazards for marine and terrestrial wildlife. If collected waste is left on the beach, an attempt should be made to secure it from wind and waves, and a note made of the location for future collection when possible. Clearing inaccessible beaches involves several logistical challenges. It was decided to sound out community interest via a brief note in the Trust news inviting volunteers interested in challenging beach cleans to get in touch. If beach litter includes fish farm waste, the farms will remove it. The majority of beach waste consists of general fishing waste, raising the question of how fishermen could be involved in helping to clear it up.
- Catherine is proposing an Ostaig beach clean with the school, as this beach is used frequently by families.
- Publicity of the Skye Community Litter Project in the Trust news and social media has generated significant support in South Skye including Sleat. Peter is planning to put small notices in all lay-bys between Mill Bay and Armadale to discourage littering by informing people that volunteers are keeping these areas clear. Dorothy has made a poster, which has gone out on social media and to the Trust, and will be sent to EAG members to print off and put up in their area.

7. Tormore Hydro

The EAG thanked Roger for completing the site visit on 1st April and producing a report. The SCT chair has asked the EAG to consider a proposal to turn the pipeline route into a downhill mountain bike trail connecting the forest track and the road. The route may deviate to zig-zag along the steeper, lower section. The EAG will conduct a site visit to look at progress of pipeline works and the proposed bike trail, accompanied by someone from the mountain bike community. Ade to coordinate.

8. Staycation impacts / mitigations

- A draft notice has been prepared for the SCT Board to review later this month. The primary aim is to signpost visitors to local waste and toileting facilities to discourage irresponsible behaviours. Roddy recommended adding “Please do not disturb livestock” and “Keep dogs under control”; “Don’t light fires” was also suggested. EAG members are invited to send further feedback to Ade. Aside from SCT Board approval, permissions will be sought from landowners, Grazing Committees, Camping Skye and An Crùbh when notice board location proposals are agreed. It was suggested that the Council should be informed that Sleat volunteers are taking on some of the council’s waste management responsibilities.
- Veronica suggested production and sale of a catchy car sticker along the lines of the Shetland sticker “Dunna chuck bruck” (in Gaelic and English), would help spread awareness.

9. Species on the edge

A coalition of nature conservation organisations, including NatureScot, Bumblebee Trust, Bat Conservation Trust and RSPB Scotland, has selected Skye as a focus area and is seeking inputs from a wide range of sectors on rare species found on Skye. The first concrete action to emerge is a Skye Bat Group, coordinated by Cathryn Baillie of JMT. Roger is liaising with Species on the Edge, and has information on leeches (Tim reported horse leeches at Point); Phil Knott is liaising re moths (a focus species being the Talisker Burnett Moth). The project’s activities are currently evolving; Roger will keep EAG updated. The EAG has already discussed raising local awareness of the Great Yellow Bumblebee

through posters and a talk by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. Roger will propose to Species on the Edge that the project could fund creation of suitable species-rich grassland habitat for this species at the west end of Tormore.

10. Events

Outdoor events are now possible but probably unwise to plan indoor events just yet. Roger will liaise with the Skye Bat Group to hold a Bat evening on Sleat, with bat detectors, children welcome. Roger offered to repeat his SSSI talk by zoom or in person when feasible.

11. AOB

- SLEF members can have access to Roger's badger, otter and pine marten training.
- Following deer fencing, Brae Ord wood ant nest is at risk of grass growing and shading the nest. A new stile has been put in to facilitate cutting of grass around the nest. Tim and Dorothy will keep an eye and do occasional trimming.

12. Date of next meeting: Monday 14th June, 7.30 pm