

Sleat Community Trust Environment Advisory Group

17th August 2020, 7.30 pm, Zoom meeting

Present: Peter Roberts (chair), Alan Drever, Ade Stokes, Roger Cottis, Dorothy Jackson (minutes).

Apologies: Chris Pendlebury, Catherine De Vries

1. Minutes of the last meeting

Approved.

2. Matters arising

Change of post holders following Peter's retiral: Ade to confirm arrangements with Catherine. Ade to chair the next EAG meeting. Peter to inform SCT.

3. Tormore Activities

These are now under Chris P's management.

4. Beach Clean

Great British Beach Clean week organised by Marine Conservation Society 18th to 25th September. To maintain COVID-19 precautions, family groups are encouraged to clean their local stretch of beach. Ade to discuss availability of skips and community communications with Catherine. Sleat activities to be publicised in WHFP and SCT social media (Dorothy). Roger and Pat will clean their local beach during the week. Roger will ask David Ashford to inform his contacts in Camuscross, and on the SWT list. Peter is able to take a trailer load to Portree dump.

5. Hydro project.

Alan, Roger, Peter, Tim & Polly visited the site last year, and produced a report for SRL. SRL agreed there would be further site meetings to ensure that Proterra, the developer, along with the digger driver(s) are well briefed to minimise damage to native woodland remnants, soil and sensitive habitat areas in Tormore Forest. The project is overseen by a working group with SRL and SCT representatives. Kenny Nicholson is now appointed by Hydro CBS as project manager for 1 year to promote share sales locally and nationally to raise £300k investment (start date to be confirmed). Other community hydro schemes have had high investment from outside the scheme area, and interest in ethical investment is growing. The electricity generated will feed into the grid at a local access point. Only community schemes are now eligible for FITs. Other community hydro schemes are in Applecross and Glen Morrision. Alan to keep SCTEAG updated.

Dorothy mentioned a virtual event on 25th August organised by Scottish and Southern Energy Networks in relation to Local Area Energy Plans.

6. Invasive plant species

Catherine noted that, with easing of COVID19 restrictions, the Clan might be approached about dealing with Gunnera. Duncan MacInnes has experience of eradicating it. Roger noted that efforts to eradicate invasive exotic species are most successful if the area is clearly defined and separated from other infested areas. Successful eradication requires sustained effort.

The group identified the priority species as

1. Rhododendron ponticum...can be done by lever and mulch (effective) or glyphosate injection to stems. Cutting stems just invigorates the growth.
2. Japanese knotweed
3. Himalayan balsam...currently not very widespread, but hard to get rid of due to spreading along water courses.
4. Gunnera... is along the Sleat Road and on the road to Heaste.

It was decided to have a leaflet published next spring, asking the public to report locations of different invasive plant species, and to approach the Clan over the winter to develop a strategy for dealing with invasives on Clan land. Dorothy to produce a draft leaflet by the next EAG meeting.

7. Environment Group funds

The accumulated Environment fund is the result of monies raised from sales of teas, coffees and biscuits/cakes, yard sales and donations by meeting participants towards Environment Group activities. It gives the EAG scope to undertake activities that have associated costs. It was decided that the fund would be spent as needed, depending on how the EAG programme unfolds.

Suggestions included:

Litter pickers for local beach cleans, reducing reliance on the council's supply

Inviting speakers from further afield

Invasive plants project

It was felt that funds for purchase of tools for Tormore Forest volunteer work could more easily be raised from charitable trusts which are often keen to fund tangible assets, but less willing to pay for speaker expenses.

Talks may not be possible this winter due to COVID-19.

Possibility of a talk and bumblebee excursion by Murdo Macdonald (Highland Biological Recording Group) next spring.

8. WTE Update

Stephen Bentall saw birds in the nesting territory in March (pre-lockdown) but during a visit two weeks ago (following lockdown easing) he found that last year's nest had been blown out (possibly by Storm Arthur in late May). The birds are around but there is no sign of a new nest. It is possible that the May storm blew this out in late May. A further visit is planned to inspect the whole nesting territory conifer block.

9. AOB

The fish farm expansion at Rum has been abandoned. In Loch Duich, closed containers may be trialled following sustained pressure from SARNS on SEPA and the Scottish government.

The status of the proposed Canna fish farm is unclear. Roger to keep the EAG updated.

SRL will apply to the next round of funding for peatland restoration to carry out Phase 2 of the project to rehabilitate peatland in Tormore Forest, in collaboration with Lucy Ballentine, of Lochaber Fisheries Trust. Unusually, this is a 100% grant. Alan was thanked for his work in keeping the project going and his close liaison with the restoration team.

Peter thanked the group for the surprise presentation held for him at the recent Tormore Forest volunteer work day. The group thanked Peter most warmly once more for his excellent work as chair of SCTEAG and as Tormore Forest volunteer coordinator over the last 6 years.

Date of next meeting: Monday 5th October, 7.30 pm