

WILDILFE MANAGEMENT – SNH’S ROLE AND FUTURE PRIORITIES

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on SNH’s developing thinking on our role in wildlife management based on our work following the merger with the Deer Commission for Scotland, and views received from external stakeholders. It sets out the policy development areas and issues that are considered important priorities for SNH’s forward programme of wildlife management work.

Action

2. **The Board is invited to:**
 - **note the feedback from the wildlife consultation response (Paragraphs 13-18);**
 - **confirm that the most appropriate priorities for SNH’s future wildlife management work have been identified (Paragraphs 19-20).**

Preparation of Paper

3. The paper was prepared by Eileen Stuart with input from Robbie Kernahan and Roger Burton and the transitional Deer Panel. The sponsor Director is Susan Davies.

Rationale for developing SNH’s role in wildlife management

4. The merger with DCS was seen as an opportunity for SNH to develop a wider role in wildlife management with the aim of: *securing the sustainable management of Scotland’s wildlife, so that this rich natural resource remains for future generations while making the most of the benefits it brings to people and communities today.* This was seen as consistent with our growing understanding of the need to take an ecosystem approach, and to address issues in a more rounded way.
5. It was recognised that this area of work presented new challenges for SNH given the limited resources available and the need to develop expertise and stakeholder confidence in our ability to engage effectively in these areas. To ensure that our work added value to the work already being undertaken by private parties and other public bodies we sought the views of stakeholders on where our engagement would deliver most public benefit. In July 2010 (SNH/10/3/3), the Board approved a targeted consultation exercise with key stakeholders. A copy of the consultation letter is attached at **Annex 1**.
6. We are continuing to refine our thinking on future priorities with internal and external discussions. We envisage that an iterative process of dialogue and review will underpin our work in this area, to ensure it continues to meet the needs of stakeholders and practitioners. The Deer Panel considered a draft of this paper and their views have been incorporated into this paper.

What do we mean by ‘wildlife management’?

7. Historically and culturally there are a number of wild animals in Scotland which people have actively managed for food and sport as well as to reduce damage to crops or other activities.

8. In previous papers Management Team and Board have accepted that wildlife management within SNH should encompass anything done in relation to **wild animals** to achieve:
 - Sustainable use, e.g. for food, sport, or wildlife watching.
 - Managing conflicts of interest between wild animals and people, e.g. damage to crops, human health, livestock health, road safety.
 - Control of invasive non-native species.
 - Re-introductions of rare or vulnerable species.
9. While this work is all considered to fit within a broad wildlife management definition it is recognised that many elements of this work have wider biodiversity or economic components that will continue to be taken forward through existing programmes of work.
10. We recognise that much of current wildlife management is undertaken by private individuals. Our aim is to determine where our input can enhance this existing activity through effective guidance and direction of existing activity or by stimulating and supporting new approaches.
11. Animal welfare is a cross-cutting issue and needs to be taken into account in all wildlife management. The fact that wildlife management often involves handling and killing wild animals makes it a sensitive issue for the public. This requires a careful, well-considered and consistent approach to our activities.
12. It will be important to communicate to staff and external stakeholders that wildlife management is seen as complementary to our existing natural heritage focus and does not represent a relaxation of our commitments to biodiversity and protected sites. SNH takes the approach that management of wild animals should fall along a spectrum of management - from strict conservation to active exploitation. The appropriate type of management will depend on the status of the species and its welfare needs. This approach will maximise the public benefit from wildlife management by protecting vulnerable species but supporting economic gain from animal populations, where this can be responsibly carried out.

Feedback from consultation

13. We sent the consultation letter to around 70 consultees and received 18 responses. The consultee list was developed in discussion with our SG Sponsor Team and reflects a wide cross section of interest groups. The responses represented 3 main interest groups: countryside sports; conservation and welfare. The majority of respondents welcomed SNH's developing role in this field and recognised the need to take a holistic approach to countryside management, with conservation activity and sustainable utilisation of wildlife resources being better integrated. Some consultees expressed a strong concern that this might lead SNH to dilute its conservation focus with possible negative impacts on the natural environment. The summary below takes account of discussions with stakeholders and staff that have occurred alongside the written consultation. There were a number of common themes that emerged in the responses, and associated discussions, and these are outlined below:
 - It was important that SNH was transparent in its approach to wildlife management with clear decision making frameworks that guided its advice to others.
 - The importance of working collaboratively with stakeholders and practitioners; especially the private sector who are key players.

- The importance of having a good evidence base was emphasised, and the value of engaging practitioners' in data collection was noted.
 - The significance of the WANE bill, and the need to be flexible in order to take onboard new areas of work emerging from the Bill.
 - There are a range of other organisations currently actively engaged in positive wildlife management activity and these could be used in a cost effective way to progress work such as management of invasive non-native species.
14. There was less of a consensus on some other areas of work notably the need or not for additional regulation. This view was expressed particularly in relation to licensed control of species, with some parties arguing for a more flexible approach, particularly where good species data existed, or could be gathered, and off take could be accurately measured and recorded. A more precautionary approach was advocated by other parties who expressed concern that relaxing controls could lead to unacceptable or uncontrolled impacts on vulnerable species.
15. The need to ensure that the welfare of animals was fundamental to our approach was expressed strongly. Some respondees felt strongly that the welfare of individual animals should not be compromised when whole population management objectives were being pursued. There was also views expressed that a more consistent approach to the welfare of different animals should be taken, based on science, and this should be used to inform a wider public debate on these issues.
16. We received a range of views on the value and effectiveness of different forums that exist to consider related countryside management issues. There was a general view that forums were important to allow the exchange of views, to build up common understanding and develop collaborative approaches. It was noted by many respondents that there were a large number of forums, many of which had overlapping memberships and there was scope for rationalisation. It was noted that the time was right to create a structure that supported a more holistic approach to wildlife management issues. The view was also expressed that some groups were not fully representative of the range of appropriate stakeholders and that some suffered from a lack of clarity in their purpose. It was recommended by a number of respondees that while changes should be made, any changes to current structures should be done sensitively to avoid undermining the positive work they have done to date.
17. There were also views expressed during discussion with stakeholders about the problems arising from a lack of informed debate and public understanding of the reasons for wildlife management activities. This was considered to hamper activities such as invasive non-native species programmes as well as wider uptake and increased economic benefits of countryside sports activities.
18. A number of more detailed points were raised and these are being followed up or considered further by staff to ensure that where feasible we take these on board in our current and developing strands of work. These included specific topic areas, such as: hares populations and tic infestations, that it was considered important for further investigation.

Recommendations

19. In light of the feedback received to date and likely work that we will have to embrace when the WANE Bill is enacted, we recommend that SNH focuses particular attention on

developing its thinking on a small number of key wildlife management priorities. Many of these priorities involve early development work to ensure that we have established frameworks and clear principles on which to base our wildlife management decisions. This will also allow us to ensure that we have a good overview of existing work and can build on or support this rather than duplicating any activities already underway. By involving practitioners in this further development work we hope to ensure our decision making process is transparent and consistent. This discussion will also help us to structure our outputs so they are straightforward and practical to use.

20. This development will complement important ongoing work SNH is already committed to such as our work on to tackle invasive non-native species, species conflict resolution; the Sustainable Deer Management Code; collaborative deer management planning; and the development of the Wildlife Estates Initiative. The broad priorities recommended for development work over the next two years are outlined below, along with examples of specific actions we proposes to take forward:

1. **Developing a decision making framework to guide public sector intervention in wildlife management.** It is recognised that given the limited resources available to SNH (and other public agencies) we need a clear and transparent framework to help prioritise our intervention in wildlife management on issues which will deliver the greatest public benefit.
 - We will prepare clear guidance on how SNH will prioritise action for invasive non-native species; and take action on these priorities as resources allow.
2. **Identifying effective collaborative approaches to wildlife management issues.** This will build on the approach taken to Managing Scotland's Deer - our New Role) and particularly in delivering Scotland's Wild Deer – A National Approach;
 - We will review, with partners, the current forums that exist with a view to establishing a more coherent structure that can provide a holistic view of wildlife management issues, but is flexible enough to tackle specific wildlife issues through smaller, connected working groups.
3. **Developing guidelines to address welfare issues in species management programmes SNH supports.** To develop a decision making hierarchy to ensure population and individual welfare issues are taken account of in our work.
 - We will prepare a welfare impact assessment protocol to guide SNH's approach to wildlife management on land we manage and projects we support.
4. **Working with practitioner groups to consider how wider data collection schemes can be developed.** This will consider how both bag/off take and population trend data can most effectively be collected and interpreted.
 - We will work with industry groups to review existing voluntary bag data collection and determine how this can be improved to support adaptive management for a range of species. Geese will be a focus of early work and links will be made to approaches emerging from the Business Estates Wildlife Initiative.
5. **Raising awareness and promoting debate on legitimate countryside management activities and their impact on sustainable development.** There is a lack of awareness of the needs and benefits of wildlife management for environmental, social and economic purposes and opportunities to proactively

promote discussion on these issues is likely to lead to more informed debate and effective management action.

- We will raise awareness of the economic and social value of wildlife management for rural areas, and the benefits arising from supporting local food products.

21. This development work will be progressed in tandem with ongoing practical work on invasive non-native species management, deer management on NNRs etc, but will increasingly influence new and ongoing areas of work.
22. To ensure we have a solid evidence base to guide our work we are currently undertaking a research needs analysis of our wildlife management programme which is being guided by a sub-group of the Scientific Advisory Committee. We will be seeking input from external organisations in this work to ensure we build on existing evidence based research activity.
23. We will continue to contribute to existing forums while wider discussions on structures take place. This will include maintaining the Deer Management Round Table and annual Drumossie Seminar for deer practitioners.

Resource implications

24. The Board has previously stressed the importance of this area of work. However, we need to ensure that we clearly focus our efforts on a programme of work that is achievable within our available financial and staff resources. This may mean that work does not progress as rapidly as some stakeholders would wish. This is unavoidable and should be clearly articulated to partners. It will also be critical that we work creatively with other organisations that have expertise and staff resources, in order to maximise our collective efforts to improve wildlife management.

Communication

25. SNH will provide feedback to all consultees on the outcome of our consideration of our wildlife management priorities and how we will continue to seek further input on these areas of work as they develop.

Contact: Eileen Stuart, Rural Resources Management (01463 725227)



Dear

Our role in wildlife management: an opportunity to contribute to the discussion as we set our new priorities.

We are writing to ask for your views on our future work on wildlife management. Our recent merger with the Deer Commission gives us a greater focus on wildlife management and a new opportunity to develop a much more integrated approach to how we manage our countryside.

We would very much welcome your views on our developing programme of work so we can ensure that our priorities add value to ongoing countryside management activities. This will also mean we can contribute more effectively to the Scottish Government objective of promoting sustainable economic growth and is particularly critical at this time of constrained public finances.

A Wildlife Management Programme

Although most on-the-ground wildlife management^[1] is carried out by private parties, SNH and DCS have already been involved in wildlife management in a variety of ways. DCS was the lead public agency for the conservation and sustainable management of wild deer. At SNH we have advised government on wildlife legislation and its enforcement, taken practical action to resolve wildlife conflicts and promoted sustainable use of our countryside.

We have now brought together this work in a new **Wildlife Management Programme** which aims to secure the sustainable management of Scotland's wildlife. We want to conserve this rich natural resource for future generations while making the most of the benefits it brings to people and communities today.

We are already working on a number of important areas:

- to deliver deer management as part of SNH's corporate strategy in line with the actions set out in the Governments' Scotland's Wild Deer - A National Approach.
- to continue to improve our existing licensing services, and to prepare for any new functions approved by Parliament as part of the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill, such as licensing or control of invasive non-native species

[1] By wildlife management we mean deliberate and targeted intervention by people to change the population, structure or distribution of wild species, particularly animals (including birds). This may be to support sustainable use and harvesting, managing conflicts of interest between wild animals and people, controlling invasive non-native species.

- to learn from existing initiatives such as the Langholm Project, mink and hedgehog control projects, and other areas where we have been involved in practical wildlife management and facilitating conflict resolution
- to integrate wildlife management into our advice on land management policy, e.g. on Scotland's Rural Development Programme and the Land Use Strategy for Scotland.

Looking to the future

While these areas of work will remain important, we are also looking at future priorities where the newly merged organisation can use its combined strengths to bring further benefits and efficiencies.

Your comments on our plans can help us identify the priorities. Possibilities include:

- **Identifying areas to simplify wildlife management responsibilities across public bodies and improve the services provided.**
- **Developing transparent principles to underpin licensing decisions. This could build on our recent guidance for applicants seeking licences to control predators for the purpose of conserving wild birds.**
- **Working with key groups to support a collaborative approach to the management of wild animals which are sustainably harvested. This could involve applying the approach developed in *Scotland's Wild Deer: a National Approach* and in the Freshwater Fisheries Framework to wild game or other quarry species.**
- **Working with other public bodies involved in the control of diseases that affect both wildlife and human or livestock health to clarify roles in advice, communications, planning, monitoring and control.**
- **Working with others in the control of invasive non-native animal species that have social or economic as well as environmental impacts, for example to trial and demonstrate new control methods.**

In all of these areas our aim will continue to be to secure the best management of Scotland's wildlife, so that this rich heritage supports rural economies now and in the future.

Please tell us what you think

As your organisation has an interest in wildlife management we would like to hear your views on the future priorities for our involvement in wildlife management.

We would also welcome your views on the effectiveness of current forums and mechanisms for developing collective working on countryside management and particularly if you think there are ways for improving current approaches. **Please send us your comments by 15th December to: wildlifeops@snh.gov.uk .**

We will analyse the views we receive and use them to develop a paper to allow our Board to consider future priorities for the Wildlife Management Programme in early 2011. In the meantime if you have any queries about SNH's wildlife management work, please contact one of us: eileen.stuart@snh.gov.uk, tel. 01463 725227, roger.burton@snh.gov.uk, tel. 01738 458636, or robbie.kernahan@snh.gov.uk, tel. 01463 725353.

Yours sincerely