

Peatland & Uplands Biodiversity Delivery Group Meeting
Wednesday 22nd June 2011 - 10.00am
Peatlands Park

Attendees

Melanie Flexen	(AFBI)
Jim McAdam	(AFBI)
Julie Corry	(Omagh LBAP)
Willy McNamara	(UWT)
Billy McCabe	(DOE Planning)
Andrew McConville	(NI Water)
Jim Bradley	(Belfast Hills Partnership)
Laverne Bell	(QPANI)
Roy Tomlinson	(Consultant)
Demot Hughes	(CNCC)
John Griffin	(Forest Service)
Martin Bradley	(NIEA)
Richard Weyl	(NIEA)
Larry Toal	(NIEA)

1. Apologies

Godfrey McRoberts	DARD
Seamus Burns	RSPB
Nicki Whitehouse	QUB
Mike Meharg	NIEA
John Hertherington	ConFor
Stephen McCartney	Forest Service
Keith Stanfield	NIEA

2. RW welcomed the following new members to the group.

Willy McNamara	UWT
Andrew McConville	NI Water
Jim Bradley	Belfast Hills Partnership

For the benefit of the new members RW invited all members to give brief introductions.

3. Minutes of previous meeting of the 3rd November 2010

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed subject to a few edits.

4. Matters arising

- a) Workshop – to be discussed at this meeting
- b) ToR – to be discussed at this meeting
- c) Irish hare study – MF reported that the Glenwherry study was completed in winter 2010/2011 and the Irish Hare group were updated on this work. With 10-15 hares per km the Glenwherry Irish hare population was higher than the national average.
- d) Peat restoration guidelines – no comments were received from the group members
- e) National Ecosystem Assessment – NI launch due September 2011

5. Members Updates

- JC** – Purchase of land at Drumduff and Drumnakilly bog by local community group with the help of a HLF and RDP grant.
Comprehensive education and awareness programme to promote new walkway.
Some enhancement work too.
- JG** - 7 current and 3 planned restoration projects,
Updating GIS mapping
- LB** – Consulting on the planning bill
'Nature after Minerals' updated including site mapping by volunteers. More information at 'afterminerals.com'
- MF** – Glenwherry monitoring of heather regeneration post burning/grazing for GHRP.
CMS monitoring of heather moorland – 9 year cycle.
Survey of farmer attitudes to agri-environment schemes.
Desktop study on heather management to be completed by March 2012
- JMcA** – Consultation for DARD publication 'Guide to Eligibility'
- DH** – Initiating a review of the 1995 CNCC policy framework for Peatlands
- BMcC** – Unit is now part of the Planning & Local Government Division
- WMcM** – UWT undergoing staffing structural changes
- AMcC** – Number of current projects with a budget of 300K over 3 years –
Silent Valley management including a Fire and Rescue Plan in conjunction with the Mourne Heritage Trust,
Dungonnell – Garron water retention scheme
Alnahinch – planting broadleaf woodland for water retention in conjunction with The Woodland Trust

Number of projects on heathland management

- LT** – Red Grouse SAP delivery group update including a site visit to look at red grouse habitat management at Aughtaine Estate on the 21st April 2011.

6. ToR

RW suggested that the best time to update the PUBDG ToR would be after revision of the NI Biodiversity Strategy.

7. Work Programme

RW said that there is a requirement that the work programme be reported on for the NIEA internal audit and the NIBG and that it should reflect more discernable outcomes with reported actions from PUBDG members.

MB said that it was generally felt that the PUBDG was not as successful as hoped for and suggested that maybe the WP should be altered.

JC suggested incorporating members updates into the WP.

DH said that the WP should be a tool to identify shortfalls and areas where work is not being done.

There was a general discussion on this matter and it was agreed that the PUBDG work programme was in need of a major restructuring/review.

A more fundamental review of the work programme to be considered at the next PUBDG

Action 1 – ALL to submit comments on the content of a restructured work programme before the next meeting.

JMcA suggested that LT remind members in advance of meetings to update their contribution to the WP.

Action 2 – Larry Toal to remind members to provide updates ahead of next meeting.

8. Impact of wildfires on peatland in the spring of 2011

JB said that the experience of the Belfast Hills Partnership suggested that the provision of maps of vulnerable areas to the Fire Service, TV advertisements, school visits and input by community groups etc have helped to reduce the extent of wildfires in the Belfast Hills. He also said that the impact of the fires on the vegetation and peat is measured as soon as possible after each event. AMcC emphasised the concern of NI Water over water quality and that initial reports would suggest that the recent incidents in the Mourne can be described as flash fires. Also the foam used in some cases may be damaging to the environment.

MF said that DARD could provide advice to farmers on habitat management including heathland.

JG said that fire breaks proved inadequate at controlling the spread of fires in Tyrone and Fermanagh.

RW said that the plan is to have a workshop in autumn 2011.

10. Workshop

Action 3 – JB, MF, AMcC, RW, JG - Workshop on Wildfires – scheduled for Autumn 2011

11. Peat Harvesting

RW referred to the NIEA document:-

['Position statement on peat cutting at designated sites'](#)

A discussion followed on relative impacts of the main methods of harvesting. JG said that Forest Service had no control over methods used by individuals with turbarry rights on Forest Service land.

It was agreed that the best approach would be to encourage landowners and peat harvesters to reduce the impact of harvesting to a minimum through:-

- a. A public campaign on responsible peat use
- b. Guidance for turbarry users and examples of good practise
- c. Recruiting local media to highlight the source of peat
- d. Providing information on the research e.g. AFBI study of utilising spent mushroom compost as an alternative
- e. NIEA web pages and pamphlets

Action 4 – RW - NIEA implement a campaign to encourage good practice for peat harvesting – leaflets, press release, International Bog Day event
To be discussed on the 24th January at Peatlands

BMcC said that there was more pressure to allow peat harvesting on Slieve Beagh however it was pointed out that as this was an SAC, no peat harvesting could be allowed in this area.

12. Signposting

MB distributed example spreadsheets highlighting the signposting exercise in relation to priority species actions. He said that one problem was that on the CEDaR priority web pages the species actions are more a reflection of targets.

He said that as a general rule if the habitat is maintained in good condition the species will be protected and he hoped to have a more complete range of species by the next PUBDG meeting.

13. Peat use in Government.

JC presented a draft peat use survey that will be forwarded to local councils to establish a crude baseline of peat use. She suggested that to get the best response the group should issue this through NILGA.

NILGA have been contacted and were happy to do this but advised to wait until after elections to proceed.

JC asked for comments and suggested amendments to the draft document.

Some suggestions included

- The use of more NI data
- Narrowing the survey to peat use within one financial year

- A stronger emphasis on carbon sinks

RT to forward a form of words to use.

14. AOB

It was requested that previous minutes of meetings of the group and relevant papers be circulated to the new members of the group.

Action 5 – LT to circulate previous minutes of meetings and relevant papers to new members

15. Date of next meeting

It was agreed that it should be held in November 2011 with choice of dates

Actions Summary	
Action 1	ALL to submit comments on the content of a restructured work programme before the next meeting.
Action 2	Larry Toal to remind members to provide updates ahead of next meeting.
Action 3	JB, MF, AMcC, RW, JG - Workshop on Wildfires – scheduled for Autumn 2011
Action 4	RW - NIEA implement a campaign to encourage good practice for peat harvesting – leaflets, press release, International Bog Day event
Action 5	LT to circulate previous minutes of meetings and relevant papers to new members