

Peatlands & Uplands Biodiversity Delivery Group Meeting
Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Oxford Island
10.00am Thursday 29th October 2009

Attendees

Laverne Bell	(QPA)
Seamus Burns	(RSPB)
Billy McCabe	(Planning)
Roy Tomlinson	(QUB)
Jim McAdams	(AFBI)
Dermott Hughes	(CNCC)
Melanie Flexen	(AFBI)
Andrew Upton	(UWT)
Julie Corry	(LBAP, Derry)
Stephen Mc Cartney	(Forest Service)
Godfrey McRoberts	(DARD CMB)
Richard Weyl	(NIEA – NH - Chair)
Martin Bradley	(NIEA – NH)
Larry Toal	(NIEA – NH)

1. Introduction

Richard welcomed everyone to the meet and members made round-table introductions.

2. Apologies

John Hertherington	(Forest & Timber Association)
Richard Schaible	(Forest Service)
Ken Bradley	(PEPG)
Mike Meharg	(NIEA-NH)

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

3. Action Points:-

1. LB provided new contact details for the NIAF
2. BMcC furnished information on mineral development which was circulated to the group
3. BMcC provided a document on ROMPS which was circulated to the group
4. To be done (Richard to speak to Godfrey re Agri-environment scheme monitoring programme)
5. RW said that a date for the 'peat use in government workshop' hasn't been fixed yet. Depends on developments in the UK. RW to keep the group informed on this
6. DH will provide comments in relation to the current work programme
7. ToR to be dealt with later in agenda
8. It was agreed that a new membership list, which reflects the action plans lead agencies, should be drawn up

9. RW to send update on Defra Peat soils project to Roy & Dermott
10. RT to send link to his recent survey on peat cutting in NI
11. Red Grouse Workshop summaries will be on the BASC web site in the near future. JMcA requested that the minutes of the Red Grouse SA P Delivery Group be circulated to the PUBDG

4. Matters Arising

Tellus Project

RT reported that all peat data will be placed on one system.
A research student assigned to this project.

5. Work Programme

MB said that when updating the BARS database it is important to report against tasks.

The group was informed that there would be two declarations of peatland sites this year and seven declarations in 2010/2011.

DH said that for us to monitor progress there needs to be specific comments.

If its not an NIEA site the PUBDG should take the lead in progressing reporting.

MB said that the NIBG will help with this process.

DH said that the comments column should have more detail.

MB said that it should be possible to link the Work Programme with BARS reporting.

AU said that baseline data would be useful for measuring target achievement.

DH asked about time tabling for signposting for species action?

RW Said this would be in March 2010.

DH It could be prioritised by flagging up species with action plans first.

RW said this would be a major overhaul.

LB said that an update on work was completed

JC asked how we are to avoid double reporting on BARS?

MB said that the BARS reporting process avoids multiple reporting.

GMcR said it would be use to bring updates to meetings

MB agreed that this would be very useful.

LB said that this could include budgeting and key tasks.

RW said that the budgeting would impact.

DH said that the work programme is a good platform for showing what is not being done because of budgeting.

GMcR stated that the NI Countryside Management Scheme was not opened in 2009.

A table was distributed details areas of moorland habitats under agri-environment scheme agreement.

In 2008 NICMS applications within designated sites were given priority and a referral system was set up with NIEA to advise on management of designated sites.

PSA target is that 50% of farmland in NI will be under agri-environment scheme agreements by 2013.

RW said there would be reports on further work with the Countryside survey.

GMcR said that there is currently 6000ha of degraded heath under agri-environment scheme management, which over time will increase heather cover. The voluntary nature of NICMS means that it must be attractive to farmers to encourage uptake.

DH said that while CMS can help improve degraded heath this is not a habitat targeted by NIEA designation.

MF said that work at the Glenwherry Regeneration and Restoration projects included Red Grouse radio tracking.

JMcA said this would be reported on.

MB reported on blanket bog restoration such as blocking drains.

LB referred to the recent NIBG report which details a decline in the area of peatland.

6. ToR

RW said that there would be two new additions and if the group was agreeable he would reword.

BMcC asked if PEPG will be represented at the meetings.

Action: RW to update the list of representatives.

7. New draft UK habitat action plans.

RW said that the review in 2005 led to new priority species and habitat lists to include:

- a. Montane Heath and Willow scrub
- b. Upland Flushes, Fens and Swamps.
- c. Upland rock and Scree

While existing NI plan Montane Heath covers (a.) it was agreed that it would be difficult to measure the extent of (b.) and (c.) in NI.

GMcR thought that monitoring and managing the habitats concerned would not be possible unless they were surveyed.

RT said that most of them are in blanket bog areas.

RW said that there were issues of grazing to maintain these habitats.

RT said there is a rough guide to the area of these in original Peatland Survey and GIS information could be extracted.

A discussion followed on the need to have EIA reports produced by consultants available on CEDaR.

DH said the data is owned by the contracting company but there was a time lag in obtaining this information.

BMcC said it should be requested in a suitable form.

8. DEFRA Peat Soils Project Update

RW said there will be a Project Workshop meeting on the 11th November 2009

Action: RW to report back before the 31st December 2009.

9. Peatland Restoration

LB reported that Allen & Mellon were contracted to produce this guide for the LBAP group. It had been initiated by the fact that restoration plans were not

happening or work was incomplete. The guidelines have been sent to BDU for comment and will be published with PUBDG endorsement. They will be available to planning service when finalised.

RW said that's comment from the group would be welcome and these are to be directed to C&C through Sandra Close.

RW said that the group could support the workshop and that completed examples of projects in Ireland with assessment of success should be documented.

10. Rebuilding the Countryside

SB gave a summary of the aims of this project. This involves of Blanket Bog and Flood Plain grazing marsh. Work in 2009 was located in the Slieve Beagh and Lough Beg areas.

There will be a seminar on the 8th December 2009 titled 'Work of RSPB on Landscape Scale Restoration'.

The purpose of the project is to ensure coordination of programmes/groups. Initial this will target delivery of two key action plans for Blanket Bog and Flood Plain Grazing marsh with a total of 33 sites.

SB gave an example of a site at Lough beg where there has been a decline in the wader population because of inappropriate grazing regime.

The broad network includes designated and non-designated sites which require different approaches.

The process involves:-

- Identifying hurdles to restoration
- Developing appropriate actions
- Measuring success

SB will keep the group updated on progress of the project.

11. PPS 18

RW said that the guidance in this document was that no wind farms were to be constructed on active peat bog.

RW wondered what advice we should give regarding new developments.

BMcC said that any new policy such as this was just the start of the battle.

He said that ministers may set it to one side if there is a conflict of interests or there could be a judicial review resulting in removal of the relevant section and the minister will want a quick decision on wind farm applications.

Action: MB to circulate web link on wind farm development.

12. Red Grouse SAP Steering Group

LT reported on the inaugural meeting of the Red Grouse SAP Steering Group which was held on the 21st September 2009 at the Greenmount CAFRE Campus and chaired by Roger Pollen of BASC NI.

The group included representatives from red grouse conservation, UFU, NIRSG, AFBI, Forest Service, LBAPs and NIEA.

A draft ToR was agreed on and a work programme is to be drawn up. Discussion included the SAP, funding and habitat management.

Action: LT to circulate copies of the Re Grouse SAP meeting minutes as appropriate.

13. peatlands.ni review

LT pointed out the main features of the new page design for peatlands.ni.

He said that pending the renewal of the BT contract re-editing of the existing site should be complete by mid 2010.

14. AOB

Next meeting will be held at the Loughry CAFRE Campus in April 2010