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| SF_col_landscape_logo | Senior Operations Group Minutes |

**23rd May 2024,**

**Birnam Arts Centre and Microsoft Teams**

***Draft for approval***

**Present:**

Brendan Callaghan, Head of Operational Delivery (BC)

Alan Hampson, Head of Policy and Practice (AH)

Doug Howieson, Conservator, South Scotland (DH)

Steven Hutcheon, Conservator, Grampian (SH)

Cameron Maxwell Conservator Perth and Argyll (CM)

Helen McKay (HM) Chief Forester

Neil Murray, Conservator, (NM)

Jonathon Risby, Conservator, Highland (JR)

Keith Wishart, Conservator, Central Scotland (KW)

Matt Young, Conservator (MY)

**In Attendance:**

Pat Snowdon (For agenda item 5)

Kyle Usher (KU)

Jenny Greaves (taking minutes)

**Apologies:**

Zahid Deen, Head of Operational Services and Transformation (ZD)

1. **Welcome and declarations of interest**

BC welcomed everyone to the meeting. He welcomed John back after his year working on the Atlantic Rainforest project and Kyle who was present on behalf of Zahid.

Previous minutes were agreed, and the following actions can be closed:

| **Ref** | **Action** | **Lead / Staff Member** | **Status** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1.1 | Feb and March 24 | JG to invite Pat and / or Andy (WCC) to next SOG to give update. | Closed |
| 3.2 | April | Contact Kyle and ask that his team leads on implementing drone policy and using it in conservancies. | Closed |

1. **Woodland Creation progress update**

* Claims deadline passed.
* For 2023/24 6,000ha claimed with around 2,500 due to be processed.
* Around 4,000ha maybes
* Should be at least at 10 – 11k in total.
* South, PANDA and Highland all around 3,500 to 4,000ha.
* Possibly a record year for native woodland with around 7,000ha
* Claim capture deadline 28th May. CSOs working hard to meet this.
* Discussion on targets in future years and highlighting that the 18,000h planting target is not a statutory target.
* Discussion about regional differences, land classes, land uses and carbon sequestration.
* £3 million can be recycled from uptake of conifer option reduced grant.
* Discussion on legal challenges to SF decisions with increasing focus on WC and EIAs. SH noted that if more transparance in the future then sF should expect more feedback.
* Discussion on Agriculture Bill requests for amendments.

**Action point – AH to organise presentation on carbon modelling of different land classes (not at June SOG, but following meeting)**

1. **First Aid at Work and Fire Warden Training NM**

* Two forms that need checking. Please get back to NM within two weeks. If there are no comments then NM will post online.
* Fire Warden training to be outsourced to third party. It will cost under £5 a head so **all agreed** to proceed and have this set up.

**Action point – all to get back to NM with any comments on the SOP**

* **Once the SOP is launched, team leads will need to complete the needs analysis for their team and ensure that LS&D are aware of the training needs**
* **Cost centre managers with building responsibilities to ensure that they have adequate cover for fire wardens. On completion of needs analysis, inform LS&D of your specific requirements for training.**

1. **SLA Arrangements for L&SD and HR - MD**

* Almost there with agreeing the SLA technical learning and have got a definitive list. Just need to agree dates and locations.
* Things are moving forward with HR but not quite there yet. Hopefully it will be signed off in the next few weeks. SF have additional resources and have a new HR business partner (starting in July), a new HR advisor and a new Administrator starting. Also confirmed that Marelle will stay at SF. Everyone **agreed** that it was good that Marelle was staying at SF.
* Reduction in the working week implemented by 31st March 2025. This will mean a reduction of 5.4% (from 37 to 35 hours). To ease the transition the well being hour will increase from one hour to two hours from October 2024.
* A working group will need to be set up to deal with this and the group will need to move at pace for it to be done by the end of the year. DH asked who would be on the working group and MD replied that it will mostly be people with systems roles but with others from delivery roles
* CM asked how do we manage doing the same amount of work in less time.
* It also need to be worked though with part-timers.
* BC: a lot needs to be discussed. MD, yes implementation needs to be a smooth as possible.
* A new itrent module called Review will go out in the Autumn.

1. **Woodland Carbon Code update – PS**

* PS went through his presentation on WCC figures and the future direction of the WCC.
* A more systematic approach to blending FGS and WCC and standardisation is under development to make things more transparent.
* A lighter touch, and less costly process exists for small schemes. There is also group scheme approach which enables sharing of validation and verification costs.
* Community benefit; WCC operate in line with wider Scottish Forestry processes for community involvement. A bespoke community involvement approach for WCC projects is unlikely to be required although the WCC is aware of the importance of WCC projects generating benefits for communities. Further discussions will be held, including with the FGS team.
* The WCC will apply to join the Integrity Council for Voluntary Carbon Markets (ICVCM). Successful accreditation with ICVCM will help to boost the WCC’s credentials in the carbon market.
* JR asked if a layer could be added to GIS that shows where verification has taken place. Be useful for conservancies to know.

**Action point – Include Bob McIntosh in discussions with Pat about community involvement in carbon funding.**

1. **Illegal felling – BC**.

* There is a loophole in the Forestry Act that needs to be closed.
* As it is in primary legislation, then this can only be changed by piggy backing on another relevant bill, such as the Natural Environment Bill.
* To do this we would need to submit a business case.
* If this isn’t done now, then it could be over five years before changes are made to Forestry Act.
* Does SOG agree to this course of action?. **All agreed.**

1. **UKFS v5 implementation.**

* Proposing that schemes have to be off public register by 1st October in order to be assessed against version 4. If after 1st October, then they will be assessed against version 5.
* Customer Reps Group were content with this approach.
* Futher discussion required on Forest Management Units. Andy Leech is working on this. Definition required by 1st October
* Discussion on IT changes in casebook.

1. **Specialist teams update – KW**

* Neil, Kyle, Matt and Keith discussed the proposed projects and agreed that the following should go forward as the priority:

1) Unauthorised felling/ regulation

2) Business Risk Assessments

3) Successions

- The next step is to analyse and explore how they are currently done, decide if these tasks undertaken in the most efficient way and look at how to improve the process.

1. **AOB**

* DH raised the issue of Regional Land Use Partnerships (RLUP) and the need to keep an oversight of what they are doing and proposing. DH proposed that Keith McWhinny is invited to a future SOG, but only after Sog have had an opportunity to discuss further the aspirations of RLUPs

**Action point – Discuss further and invite Keith McWhinny to future meeting.**

* SH raised the issue of communities sharing information and tactics with one another and raising the profile of complaints and campaigns. BC said that SF are addressing a lot of these issues (e.g EIA transparency, UKFS consultation).

1. **Date of Next Meeting**

Wednesday 3rd July 2024.

**SOG Action List**

| **Ref** | **Meeting** | **Action** | **Lead / Staff Member** | **Target Date** | **Status** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1.7 | Feb 24 | AH to arrange for Helen Sellers to bring paper to the next SOG meeting. | AH | 21/03/24 | Hopefully coming to next meeting |
| 3.1 | April 24 | Add an agenda item discuss media and woodland creation and working with communities. | BC | 22/08/24 | Open |
| 4.1 | May 24 | AH to organise presentation on carbon modelling of different land classes (not at June SOG, but following meeting) | AH | 22/08/24 | Open |
| 4.2 | May 24 | Get back to NM with comments on First Aid at Work and Fire Warden Training | NM | 25/06/24 | Open |
| 4.3 | May 24 | Include Bob McIntosh in discussions with Pat about community involvement in carbon funding. | PS | 31/12/24 | Open |
| 4.4 | May 24 | Discuss RLUP further and invite Keith McWhinny to future meeting. | DH/ BC | 31/12/24 | Open |