**Protected Area Working Group**

Note of Teleconference – 4th November 2019

Attendees: Brian Eardley (SNH), Andy Dorin (SNH), Sally T (SNH – Chair), Steven Dora (Sgov), Colin Edwards (FS), Karen Ramoo (SLE), Martin (UHI), Scott Matheson (SEPA), Stuart Brooks (LINK), Isobel Mercer (LINK)

1. **SBS Governance and structures (Sally Thomas)**

* Route Map 2020 delivery: Working with government to get a version of the latest Aichi report. Mindful that we didn’t publish previous report, rolling two of these together. Hoping will be published soon but no date yet. Clear message from SNH and Government that these remain in place until the final hurdle. Not winding these down until reach the end of 2020. Working with government to determine what the transition phase at the end of 2020 – beginning of 2021 will look like. Inevitable going to be a gap as new targets won’t be agreed in China until Oct 2020.
* New Structure for 2020-2030: new biodiversity programme board being established, to be jointly chaired by Bridget Campbell and Francesca O to streamline all work on biodiversity. SBS work has come into that programme as a discrete project. Other discrete projects also sit under this e.g. evidence base, first part of which was SoN.
* Developing what a new biodiversity strategy might look like and what framework is needed to support this, before thinking about what the content should be and the process for agreeing this. Groups involve senior government staff, SNH, marine Scotland, cc division of scotgov and critical friend from other part of government. The intention is to set up two additional groups to work with programme board – advisory group (public sector leads) and a stakeholder reference group (still to be established – this will look beyond some of the ‘usual suspects’ e.g. environment sector to engage more broadly with stakeholders). Programme Manager = Liz Warburn(?). All still underway but the programme board is up and running.
* The 7 projects are:
  + SBS to 2020
  + Preparations for COP next year
  + Biodiversity evidence base and state of nature
  + Comms and public engagement
  + Mainstreaming biodiversity
  + Future funding

Vision statement for protected areas has been to the SBS coordination group which has been agreed and adopted for new vision for protected areas moving forward. Will be forwarding it to the protected areas committee for consideration, so sits within policy work for SBS, sets a marker for future work. It has not been published, but we could do.

Isobel – thanks for the clarification, just wondering where the vision statement sits? Sally T – good question, need to figure that out.

2.            Monitoring & Surveillance                                                       Brian

- Monitoring & Surveillance Strategy Development - SNH getting its head straight in terms of what evidence needs are going forward and how going to collect data to help fulfil remit. Being taken forward by SAC – Andy Nisbett (sites monitoring lead from NE) on group. Beth Scott – marine protected area issues, Aberdeen university. Group met for 2 days in September. Looked across existing evidence gathering and purposes it is used for – e.g. Art 12/17 reporting. Programme going forward. For too long site condition monitoring has been treated largely in isolation from wider surveillance. Has agreed to focus on how to better integrate protected sites and wider countryside into an affordable package for SNH to take forward. This will then come out of the SBS evidence project and speak to stakeholders about how can better deliver

The group will meet again in Early march and produce report as advice to SNH staff. Next financial year May onwards we can expect SNH to start coming out to partners to discuss the wider strategy.

Colin – national forest inventory indicators on condition will be published in February (official statistics)

It will cover marine and terrestrial – on marine, Scott Matheson mentioned monitoring that marine Scotland and SEPA do, this will all be integrated.

- Interim Tiered Approach to Resourcing Protected Areas Monitoring

 Strands running alongside each other but not independent of each other.

Pause on SCM to check that investment going in is producing what we need and if we can do stuff better and for subgroup to start thinking about wider countryside monitoring.

Recognises that can’t hold off indefinitely. Will look to roll out a different model. A) how choose features to be monitored in particular year, B) choose amount of resource

Until now all features have been treated equally in terms of resource put in. E.g. stuff that is robust over the long term, vulnerable things in management.

Next year, proposing to trial a tiered approach to resourcing of monitoring. Still trying to keep within the SCM framework – e.g. to fulfil CSM, still have obligations at UK level. Will put resources required based on risk to individual features on individual site.

Tier 1 – Site check and check if any obvious changes. Management for unfav features – site check is used to see if response has been as predicted. If not then feature goes back to unfav categorisation until remedial management in place. If seems ok then URDTM confirmed.

Tier 2 – Need more evidence on what’s happening from an ecological perspective for features. Look to collect some data on the attributes but rather than collecting 12 attributes for feature, more likely to focus in on attribute features that we know are drivers for unfav condition e.g. for upland features if there is overgrazing

Tier 3 – is really for 2 instances. 1) we know what pressures are but perhaps don’t know where on a feature this is occurring. Because of the random sample approach taken to data collection to SCM don’t always know. So after SCM do a herbivore impact assessment and discuss change in grazing regime and discuss with owner/managser.

2) targets failed not clear e.g. grazing appears ok so might be wider pressure e.g. nitrogen deposition. So, more targeted monitoring to get the information that is needed.

Have bid for resources within SNH to push forward use of new technologies in this.

Stuart – as we transition to a new method is there going to be an ability to link in data terms, what happens to all the data in the NPF indicator. Brian – will have to make a coherent time series, don’t want to get rid of existing 20 yrs of data. National indicator – if we continue along same sort of lines will have to demonstrate comparability.

Andy – resource challenge to do it. End point in itself isn’t perfect data but outcome we get for the sites themselves. Wanted to explore using management agreements to expand pas into wider countryside and change behaviours on sites that are poorly managed

3.           Future SNH Resourcing for Protected Areas work               Brian/Andy

Deep dive work on a number of areas within SNH. Protected areas committee has received commission from board looking to improve upon the value we’re obtaining from the protected area network. Looking at budgetary constraints and statutory powers. Committee are embarking on this piece of work. Three workshops 1) behaviours and stewardship and how we might change attitudes to ensure protected sites are more effective, 2) whole challenge of condition, what can practically do to improve? 3) ecological network approach and how that relates to protected areas. Next week are meeting to discuss a way forward. This is an internally focused exercise that SNH is undertaking.

4.            SNH GovTech Project/RSPB LIFE Project                               Brian/Isobel

Gave quick update on the RSPB LIFE project – ‘towards 100% favourable condition’. Got first round of money from EU. Project manager recruited starts after Christmas.

Govtech – masses of data on SCM and casework data. Need to use this is a better way. Sits on corporate systems and is largely inaccessible to land managers, landowners. Trying to mobilise the data in an accessible platform. Learn from particular responses that SNH has given to particular responses in the past to particular scenarios. Better help people to understand when an application is a non starter. Give an indication about what mitigation might be needed. Get more information out there in a more helpful way for people to use and interact with. Knocks out some of the time that SNH staff spend discussing proposals which are never going to go anywhere to spend more time on applications that merit the time. SNH secured the tender for this. Funding runs in two phases 1) 5 suppliers are taken on to work on the set challenge, and end of the 12 week period as how they think digital innovation can meet the challenge. Currently in this phase. 2) two are chosen to work with SNH over that year.

Looking for volunteers to speak to suppliers about how they would use this.

5.            Any other Business Raised by Group Members

* Update on Implementation of 3rd SPA Review

SPA review is a process at an EU level. Coverage of SPAs and adequacy within individual member states. Third review was completed in 2016. Come to SNH and Scottish Government. Ongoing discussions to look at recommendations.

Still looking at the recommendations and come up with a plan about this, envisage will implement recommendations on basis of highest priorities. Not advice to ministers yet. Not too far away. Meeting of the executive steering group Defra trying to schedule in January. The phase 2 report which is a key part of the document has not been finalised yet so plan is to finalise it at the meeting in January. Won’t be able to give firm advice yet. No plans to integrate this into protected area targets work.