

Implementing Community Recommendations for a Glen Affric Beaver Translocation

FLS indicated to the community and stakeholders, in summer 2024, that it intends to apply for a licence to release beavers on Loch Beinn a Mheadhoin in Glen Affric. It was not a decision that FLS had undertaken lightly. It involved careful consideration and assessment of all the feedback that FLS received, whether from the 'Deciding Matters' consultation exercise, meetings with neighbours and several representations received outside the consultation. This process highlighted some concerns from landowners, farmers and others but FLS took the view that appropriate and adequate mitigation is possible and this note helps to map out the response to those. FLS expects to apply for a licence later in 2024 which, if successful, could see an actual release taking place in spring 2025.

Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) and Trees for Life (TfL) have been working in partnership since 2022 to engage with the local community regarding a potential proposal to return beavers to Glen Affric, above the Beinn A' Mheadhoin Dam. In 2023, TfL published the [Community Consultation Report](#) which recommended additional discussions with the Strathglass community before any possible beaver release moves ahead. FLS and TfL commissioned [Deciding Matters](#) to facilitate these discussions and design a set of recommendations for actions the community would like to see before any potential proposals are submitted.

Deciding Matters engaged with those living locally who may be affected by future beaver returning to the area, conducting one-to-one interviews and hosting a group workshop to understand the specific challenges associated with the local land, and identify priority concerns and risk mitigation measures that could be implemented. This work was built upon conversations and public events which had previously taken place as part of a different proposal for beaver reintroduction in a wider area. This process offered an opportunity for residents, landowners and land managers in a targeted postcode area to further engage on this topic in a revised area and scaled-down proposal.

The process Deciding Matters ran led to a series of recommendations from the community about actions to be taken and that a final check in with the community should be carried out prior to any licence for a beaver translocation being submitted. The full report on this engagement exercise from Deciding Matters can be read [here](#). We have now developed plans for how these recommendations can be implemented in practice. This report summarises those plans.

Community Recommendations

The Deciding Matters process developed recommendations and grouped these into seven themes:

1. Specific support and mitigation measures with clear processes
2. Transparency and trust building
3. Educational opportunities and tackling misinformation
4. Beaver monitoring
5. Communication
6. Monitoring of other species
7. Information for wildlife spotters, tourists and visitors

The full explanation of the community input on each of these themes, including the specific actions recommended and measures of success can be found in the [Deciding Matters report](#). This document summarises each theme and outlines how FLS will approach implementing each recommendation.

1. Specific support and mitigation measures with clear processes

NatureScot's Beaver Team implement the national [Beaver Management Framework](#). In addition, TfL have recruited a Beaver Management Officer who will maintain close communication with the

NatureScot team to help support people living alongside beavers in Glen Affric and Strathglass should a licence application be approved and as agreed by the Beaver Monitoring and Mitigation Group which will be set up (see point 2). In addition:

- An information pack, available online and sent to every household in Strathglass, with contact information for NatureScot clear directions on what to do about any beaver-related concerns.
- A commitment to provide quick responses to requests for site visits.
- Trees for Life will offer to prepare, on behalf of the land manager if requested, European Protected Species licence applications that may be required to carry out work to manage or mitigate beaver impacts.
- Additional budget from Trees for Life for small-scale mitigation activities not covered by the Beaver Management Framework, to be agreed between the land manager, Trees for Life and, where appropriate NatureScot, on a case-by-case basis.

Scottish Government policy means that there is no compensation scheme in place. The Beaver Management Framework is in place to deal with issues and would be supplemented in Strathglass by the arrangements outlined above and as described above.

2. Transparency and trust building

The Deciding Matters report highlights the importance of dialogue to reduce division and lower the barriers to people engaging with the mechanisms being put in place to support coexistence. Open communication channels that help people to raise concerns and be listened to, based on shared information is an important part of this.

- FLS will establish a Beaver Monitoring and Mitigation Group that represents different interests in Glen Affric and Strathglass as a means of sharing updates and for people to raise issues via a representative, confidentially if preferred. A proposal for how this could be assembled and some draft Terms of Reference is enclosed at Annex 1 below.
- A key role of the group will also be to decide responsibilities within the monitoring and mitigation plan and the role of each stakeholder.
- Early formation of this group would allow it to seek views from different interests on how best to engage with communities and stakeholders in terms of format and frequency. The Group would also determine what information should go on a beaver information webpage beyond the basic requirements of publishing NatureScot phone and email contact details and the information currently available on the Beaver Trust's website.
- The group would also advise on holding wider community events and on producing an annual newsletter to communicate monitoring results and any significant events.
- Include the NatureScot phone and email contact details on the webpage and in the beaver information pack.
- Arrangements will be reviewed after 12 months and findings shared with the community representatives on the Beaver Management and Mitigation group for wider dissemination and with the national Beaver Advisory Group.

3. Educational opportunities and tackling misinformation

The recommendations from the community included looking at steps to ensure shared understanding of beavers and inform how people can live alongside them. An early function of the Beaver Monitoring and Mitigation Group would be to advise on:

- Engaging with local schools and other community groups to offer talks and guided walks.
- How best to publicise the notes/outputs from Beaver Monitoring and Mitigation Group.

4. Beaver monitoring

Monitoring is critical to understanding how beavers are moving and behaving in the area and to anticipate, pre-empt or manage potential problems by identifying when and where impacts might arise. The key steps we'll follow are:

- Implement a monitoring plan based on the outline agreed at previous community workshops and further discussion with the Monitoring and Mitigation group. Field survey for beaver signs, such as prints or beaver-chewed sticks, is the key method and this will be undertaken by NatureScot with the assistance of FLS and the TfL Beaver Management Officer on a regular and ongoing basis.
- Volunteers from the local area will be invited to contribute to monitoring through the Mammal Society's Mammal Mapper app.
- The presence of beaver sign across the Affric and Strathglass catchment will be monitored through the Mammal Mapper app and updates shared on a regular basis.
- This data will be used in conjunction with digital models predicting beaver habitat and dam capacity to identify potential areas of concern about impacts and to discuss how these will be managed with land managers.

5. Communications

In addition to the beaver information pack, newsletter and other potential events noted above, updating the beaver webpage will be a key part of this theme under the direction of the Beaver Monitoring and Mitigation Group. The purpose of the webpage would be to act as a way of communicating monitoring updates and FAQs with straight, fact-based answers.

The Deciding Matters report suggests that this might best be managed by a neutral party and given the likely importance of the webpage as a source of information a key early decision of the Beaver Monitoring and Mitigation Group would be who does this. Fact checking the webpage with NatureScot would be a way of ensuring that the information available is reliable.

The recommendations also included the creation of local nature trails and installation of information boards on beavers. This can be discussed further via the Beaver Monitoring and Mitigation Group, but FLS is willing to take these ideas forward when funding is available.

6. Monitoring of other species

Monitoring the effects of beavers on trees and wider biodiversity came through as an important recommendation and a plan will be developed to monitor other interests (a draft is available in Annex 2).

Decisions on who will do what aspects of monitoring will be taken during the licencing process and with consultation through the Beaver Monitoring and Mitigation Group.

For wider biodiversity, eDNA samples have been taken and stored with UHI. This will provide a baseline for the species present in beaver areas so that future eDNA monitoring can then detect changes in biodiversity.

7. Information for wildlife spotters, tourists and visitors

The Beaver Monitoring and Mitigation Group can provide guidance for people on the best places and ways to visit beaver habitat without causing disturbance. If funding becomes available, FLS could also develop a trail to let people experience beaver areas while avoiding disturbance.

Annex 1

Draft Terms of Reference and Proposed Formation for a Beaver Monitoring and Mitigation Group for Beaver Issues

Terms of Reference

A **Beaver Monitoring and Mitigation Group** for Beaver Issues will be set up to provide a way for stakeholders with different concerns and views on beavers to come together to constructively share and discuss information and concerns about beaver monitoring and management in Strathglass. The intention is that the Group complements and works closely with the other communication channels set up for beaver issues such as direct contact with NatureScot, TfL or FLS staff. Members of the Group are encouraged to feed in views from other stakeholders in the Strathglass area who want raise questions or concerns for Group discussion, confidentially or otherwise. All who sit on the Group agree to work within these Terms of Reference and seek constructive solutions to issues that arise.

The **Beaver Monitoring and Mitigation Group** will focus on the following tasks:

1. Maintain focus on any Health & Safety impacts on land managers from Beaver activity and provide support how these might be managed.
2. Provide a mechanism to which impacted landowners can raise concerns around mental health including stress/anxiety and from which people can be signposted to sources of help and support.
3. Share and discuss any significant developments around beaver issues, whether local or national, that may have a bearing on stakeholders in Strathglass.
4. Receive and discuss beaver monitoring findings for both beavers released to Loch Beinn a Mheadhoin and the existing population in Strathglass. This would include data on population size, distribution and impact.
5. Discuss any stakeholder concerns about beavers in the area and how these can best be addressed.
6. Discuss any management or mitigation measures undertaken, including their effectiveness.
7. Advise on how best to maintain two-way communication between stakeholders so that people are well-informed about the issues and so that concerns are raised and addressed promptly.

While Forestry and Land Scotland will pay close attention to the Forum discussions and views, they will retain decision-making autonomy for their landholding.

Forming the Beaver Monitoring and Mitigation Group

The Forum will comprise a manageable number of people representing the main interests in the catchment of Glen Affric and Strathglass. The membership below is proposed for now, subject to further discussion with stakeholders and people's willingness to join the Forum:

- Strathglass Community Council
- Local farmer/crofter representative x 2
- Neighbouring landowner representative
- Beaully District Fishery Board/Strathglass Fishery Syndicate.
- SSE
- Strathglass beaver monitoring volunteer
- Forestry and Land Scotland
- Nature Scot (advisory seat)
- Trees For Life (advisory seat)

FLS has offered to provide the Chair for the first year of the Forum, after which they hope that another party will step forward.

Meetings will be held in person, with minutes taken and published on the Glen Affric beaver webpage.

The forum is to meet quarterly from spring 25 until spring 26. Beyond that the regularity of meetings would be reviewed and increased or decreased as necessary.

Annex 2 – Draft Species and Habitat Monitoring Plan

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beaver population size and distribution 	<p>Promotion of citizen science to report beaver sightings and field signs to produce an annual update on beaver presence in the catchments. Annual review of records to inform all other monitoring.</p>	<p>Action to annually review and share.</p>	<p>Must</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Release site monitoring 	<p>Monitoring of beaver activity, field signs, herbivore impacts annually.</p>	<p>Likely conditioned on release licence</p>	<p>Must</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring of herbivore impacts in SAC woodlands – Strathglass complex Caledonian Forest 	<p>Risk based assessment of herbivore impacts using Woodland Grazing Toolbox methods. Identify riparian woodland within sites that are likely to incur beaver impacts and plan surveys informed by beaver presence. Annually initially moving to biannual. Review after 5 years.</p>	<p>Noting the Caledonian forest interests span a number of land ownerships in the Strathglass Complex SAC. Will need some co-ordination and resource to carry out annual site checks.</p>	<p>Must</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring of damming on clear-water lochs SAC interests (smaller lochs). 	<p>Annual site check in addition to SCM to check for dams and potential impacts.</p>	<p>NatureScot – Site check</p>	<p>Must</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dam assessment and implementation of mitigation and management as required for fish passage/ otters/ FWPM interests 	<p>Risk assessment of key burns with spawning habitat of salmonids and FWPM at risk of beaver damming. Informed by beaver presence. Biannual walk over surveys to check for beaver dams in advance of key periods for migration (spring and autumn)</p>	<p>For discussion with Ness & Beaully District Salmon Fisheries Board.</p>	<p>Must</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring of herbivore impacts on riparian woodlands in wider catchment 	<p>Risk based assessment of herbivore impacts using Woodland Grazing Toolbox methods. Identify riparian woodland that are likely to incur beaver impacts and plan surveys informed by beaver presence. Annually initially moving to biannual. Review after 5 years.</p>	<p>For discussion at Monitoring and Management Group?</p>	<p>Should</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beaver disease screening and health surveillance. 	<p>Disease screening carried out prior to release. Collection of beaver carcasses for postmortem.</p>	<p>NatureScot have a Partnership agreement with the Five Sisters Zoo for disease screening prior to release and with independent vets for PMs (currently RDSV). Carcass collection can be arranged by contacting beavers@nature.scot</p>	<p>Must</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Site Condition Monitoring of SSSI woodland features, vascular plants and lowland neutral grassland 	<p>SCM programme managed by NatureScot with risk-based prioritisation informed by the site interests and beaver presence.</p>	<p>NatureScot Operations teams.</p>	<p>Should</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk assessment and implementation of monitoring of specific lichen interests and heritage trees. (Glen Affric SSSI and Strathfarrar in particular). 	<p>Engage with specialist interest groups to identify 'at risk' interests and propose risk-based monitoring involving specialist volunteers.</p>	<p>For discussion at Monitoring and Management Group?</p>	<p>Should</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public health 	<p>Generic human disease screening – enhanced surveillance proposed in EPIC risk assessment in 2015.</p>	<p>Inform Local Authority Environmental health teams and Scottish Water if a release takes place.</p>	<p>Should</p>