

# The Ness Beaver Project

## Report on Community Engagement

BEAVER TRUST | Trees for Life

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# Executive Summary

This report summarises community engagement undertaken to explore a proposal to reintroduce the Eurasian beaver (Castor fiber) to the Loch Ness catchment, including Loch Ness and its watershed between Fort Augustus and Lochend. The project was developed by Trees for Life and Beaver Trust during the first half of 2025, following guidance within Scotland's Beaver Strategy and drawing on experience from previous licensed beaver translocation projects. Community engagement took place from September 2025 onwards.

While Scotland's Beaver Strategy provides the wider policy framework for beaver restoration, there is limited guidance on how community engagement should be delivered in practice. To address this, the project adopted five guiding principles for engagement: inclusivity, local focus, objectivity, proportionality, and transparency.

The work was also informed by NatureScot's Strategic Environmental Assessment screening report for beaver translocation to the area, which identified a low risk of conflict and high potential for ecological restoration benefits. The engagement process was therefore designed to test this strategic assessment against local knowledge, concerns, and perspectives.

Engagement was delivered in three phases. The first focused on awareness raising and included public drop-in Information Days across six communities within the proposal area. The second phase involved smaller site meetings and targeted discussions with stakeholder organisations to explore local issues and concerns in greater depth. Additional engagement opportunities were later added specifically for farmers and crofters, which proved particularly valuable. The final phase focused on reporting back findings and outlining potential next steps for the project.

Overall, responses to the proposal were positive, with 73% of respondents supportive, 21% unsure, and 6% opposed. The principal issues raised related to potential impacts on farming, particularly localised flooding caused by beaver dams and increased bank erosion associated with burrowing. Concerns were also raised regarding potential impacts of dams on fish passage. However, the characteristics of the Loch Ness catchment — including steep gradients and predominantly rocky banks — are likely to limit the scale of such impacts, and established mitigation and management measures are available where required. Monitoring of future



beaver distribution and activity was consistently identified as a key management requirement, with over half of respondents expressing interest in participating in monitoring should releases proceed.

Based on the engagement findings and wider ecological assessment, the Loch Ness catchment is considered an appropriate area for licensed beaver translocation in line with Scotland's Beaver Strategy. A licence application to NatureScot is currently being developed for submission in March 2026. Subject to approval, the first releases could take place in autumn 2026.

# Section 1. Introduction

This report describes the approach and outcomes of a process to engage local communities in considering the risks and opportunities of a proposal to establish a wild beaver population in the area around Loch Ness, incorporating the area from Fort Augustus at the west end of the loch to Lochend in the east.

As a keystone species, long missing from Scotland, beavers can bring multiple benefits to the natural environment that help a range of other wildlife and plant life to thrive (Kemp at al 2012, Stringer & Gaywood 2016, Law et al 2019). Beavers bring change and these changes can affect land managers and communities. As a result, it is important to discuss the potential advantages and disadvantages of a beaver restoration proposal widely. These discussions can be varied and challenging - establishing trust is key in ensuring any negative impacts are assessed and deliberated. The engagement process for the Ness Beaver Project was therefore designed not just to raise awareness of how the project could work in practice, but also what the different implications might be and to ask people for their local knowledge and their views on what this would look like in their local area.

The Ness Beaver Project is led by a partnership between Trees for Life and Beaver Trust. They both have experience and learning from previous beaver translocation proposals which have informed the design and implementation of this engagement process. The Project is informed by Scotland's Beaver Strategy, which was co-developed by multiple stakeholders from across the land management sector and published by the Scottish government in 2022. The Strategy's Vision for 2045 is that:

> *"Throughout Scotland, communities are supported in working together to maximise the ecosystem and wider benefits of beavers while minimising negative impacts.*
>
> *The beaver population is actively expanded into appropriate areas; adaptive management and mitigation is used to protect assets and interests."*

The Strategy calls for carefully planned, stakeholder-inclusive engagement and the priority of beaver translocations to higher benefit, lower conflict areas as part of a phased programme of beaver translocations. The Beaver Management Framework, under which NatureScot provides practical support in managing beaver impacts on various land use and management interests, is a key element of the Strategy. Through proportionate stakeholder engagement, in line with the Scottish Code on Conservation Translocations, which applies international guidelines on wildlife translocation to a Scottish context. NatureScot has provided guidance on the consultation and assessment of beaver translocation proposals and it falls to the parties proposing a translocation to apply these to the specific circumstances around each proposal.

Our work was also informed by NatureScot's Ness Catchment Strategic Environmental Assessment of Beaver reintroduction to the area. This high level study concluded that there is 'a low risk of conflict and a high potential for nature restoration from beaver presence' in the area. The engagement work was designed to test this broad overview against local knowledge and perspectives of the area.

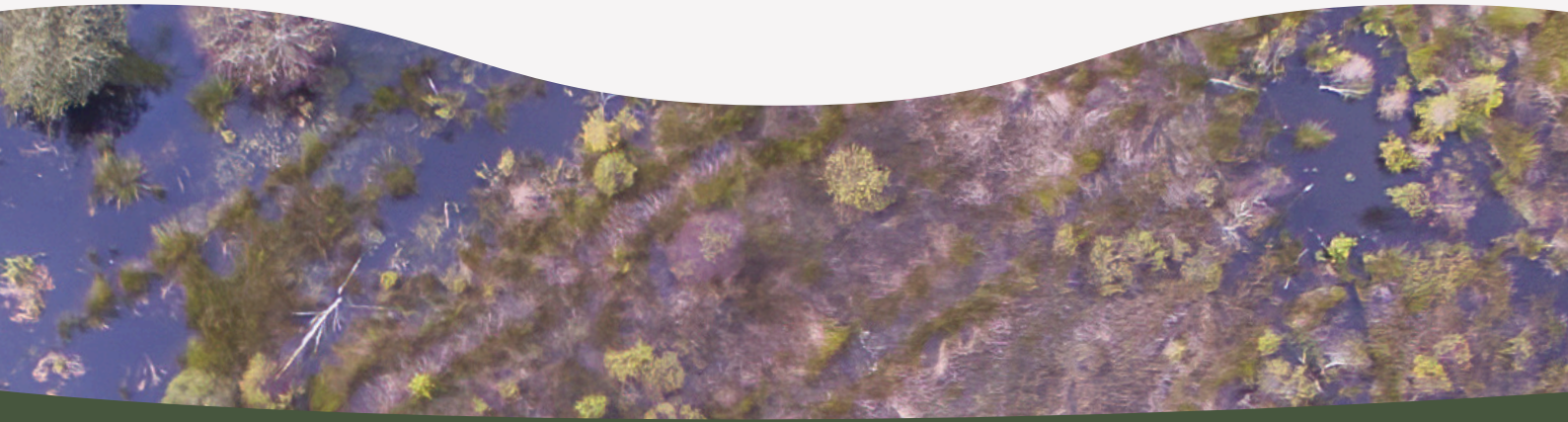


# Section 2. Engagement Principles for the Ness Beaver Project

To date, all the beaver translocation projects progressed in Scotland have been undertaken by beaver-supportive nature organisations and landowners. While this has provided the impetus to implement Scotland's Beaver Strategy, it is challenging for those organisations to operate an engagement process that stakeholders can trust while being openly pro-beaver voices. To help address this, Trees for Life and Beaver Trust agreed on five principles to guide their approach to engagement. The design of the engagement work and decisions made about how to proceed in light of the engagement would need to meet these standards.

## 1. Inclusivity - all relevant parties have the opportunity to participate.

- Awareness of the proposal is key. We used Royal Mail to deliver over 14,000 flyers to all households and businesses in the relevant postcodes around the Ness catchment to introduce the proposal, ask for their participation and advertise how to get involved
- We advertised the proposal digitally with locally targeted social media
- We wrote to representative organisations and key stakeholders including Scottish Land & Estates and NFUS proposing the project and asking for feedback
- We issued a press release that was taken up widely in Scottish newspapers and the BBC, featuring on Reporting Scotland and Radio Scotland



## 2. Local focus – views from outside the area may be considered but are identified separately and given less weight than those of the local community.

- Advertising the process to be targeted as locally as possible through the mailshot and social media, which allows a postcode-level of resolution to targeting.
- Anyone submitting feedback will be asked to share their postcode so that we can distinguish responses from local communities and those further afield.
- Responses from outside the local communities will be reported but not included in the assessment of the response to the proposal.

## 3. Objectivity – the information used in the process is evidenced, accurate and balanced to show the potential benefits and risks of the proposal.

- Much of the information used is drawn from NatureScot publications and reports or scientific literature cited in those publications.
- Information material has come from tried and tested engagement materials used in previous translocation engagement processe

## 4. Proportionality – a depth of process that would allow everyone to explain their views, for those views to be considered and to consider other perspectives on the issues.

- An engagement plan based on the three phases outlined below under Engagement Methods, with the intention of adapting the process flexibly in response to feedback received throughout the engagement period.
- Phase 2 is a pivotal step as it seeks to fully understand stakeholders' specific concerns by engaging with them directly, on site and on a 121 basis before next steps are considered.

## 5. Transparency

- We advertised the three phases described at the outset of the process and shared details of dates and venues for each stage at the earliest opportunity.

- All formal feedback received was anonymised and published verbatim (see Annex C).

- We published the criteria guiding our decision-making, including the process leading to a licence application, discussion of ecological suitability and evidence of potential land use or other impacts that could not be readily managed (see Section 5 of this report).

We discussed these principles and our proposed methods for implementing them with NatureScot in advance of opening the engagement process. We particularly sought their views on whether it met their view of the requirements of Scotland's Beaver Strategy and were reassured that they felt this was a sound approach. We also used these principles to assess our progress as we moved through the 6 months engagement period.



# Section 3. Engagement Methods

The engagement activity was developed according to three phases.

## Phase 1: Launch and in-person Information Days

***Advertising and awareness raising***

Royal Mail began delivering flyers advertising the project, dates and venues of the drop-in Information Days from 15th September. As this was closer to the first Dundreggan Information Day (23rd September) than intended, limiting advance notice for local residents, Trees for Life staff hand-delivered flyers in Glenmoriston on 11th September. Royal Mail also distributed flyers to all households and businesses within the IV2 6, IV3 8, IV63 and PH32 postcode areas (which includes Fort Augustus, Drumnadrochit, Dores, Lochend, Invermoriston and Dalchreichart, along with the settlements and households in between). In addition, information posters were displayed on community noticeboards across the same area. Postcodes IV2 and IV3 include both the rural communities targeted for engagement and parts of the City of Inverness, so distribution within the city was limited by restricting the mailshot to IV2 6 and IV3 8 only. A copy of the flyer is included in Annex A.

The Project and Information Days were also advertised on social media, including paid adverts on Facebook with local targeting as well as by posting on relevant local Facebook groups as another way of reaching local audiences. The paid adverts on social media reached 10,208 Facebook and Instagram accounts and made 74,153 impressions, leading directly to 383 views of the Ness Beaver Project website. We also sought to raise general awareness of the project and the engagement work through a press release which was picked up by national media including the Scotsman, Herald, Daily Record, STV News and the BBC.



***Information Days***

Drop-in information days were held in six centres around Loch Ness from mid-September to early October. Each drop-in day was open from 11am to 8pm. They featured information displays covering:

- Beaver biology and behaviour
- Practical details of What, Where, How and When the proposal could unfold
- Potential local benefits of beaver restoration
- Potential risks, including NatureScot's current understanding of the potential impacts on economic interests
- Ways of monitoring beaver activity and the scope for managing risks through the existing NatureScot Beaver Mitigation Framework
- Sources of further information, how to ask further questions and how people could submit their views.

Each Information Day was staffed by Trees for Life and Beaver Trust staff to guide people through the information, listen to views and answer questions. We were supported by NatureScot staff who were on hand to answer any questions about NatureScot's twin roles in a) assessing any beaver translocation proposals and b) supporting the management of beaver impacts where these arise on the ground through the Beaver Management Framework.

***Project Website***

The Ness Beaver Project website was available from mid-September. It held specific information on the engagement process, how to make enquiries, share views and feedback, details of the proposal itself, background information and scientific literature on beaver biology and Scottish Beaver policy.



***Provide clear channels for feedback***

We provided different options for people to use to feed their views on the Ness Beaver Project back to us:

1. A dedicated email address was created for the project and promoted as a way for people to get in touch, ask questions or share their views.

2. An online form was created and made available on the project website. It consisted of a sequence of open questions and space for freeform comment. We offered to send hard copy forms to anyone who wanted to comment but did not have digital access.

3. Trees for Life's Beaver Management Officer's email address and mobile number were shared for people to contact, ask questions and share their views.

## Phase 2: In-person site meetings and engagement with stakeholder organisations

***In-person site meetings***

We were keen to visit locations on the ground where people had specific concerns about potential beaver impacts. In our experience, it helps to be on site to consider the specifics of any given situation and to better understand the concerns people hold. This approach led to a total of eleven site visits. At each visit, we walked out to the stretch of water concerned with the stakeholder and discussed any concerns in detail. These conversations allowed us to share our rationales for how beavers were likely to behave if they came to the location. The discussions were constructive and each agreed on conclusions that the stakeholders found reassuring around the low likelihood of beaver impacts and/or the options to acceptably manage those if they start to happen.

***Direct engagement with key stakeholder organisations***

We wrote directly to organisations identified as key stakeholders with interests in the Loch Ness area that might see the potential to be affected by beavers. We wrote to a range of bodies including Community Councils, Community Development Trusts, the Scottish Crofting Federation, National Farmers Union Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, Scottish Canals, the Ness & District Salmon Fishery Board, Atlantic Salmon Trust, SSE Renewables, hydro scheme developers, SEPA, Visit Inverness Loch Ness, Highland Council, Highland Counsellors and local MSPs.

We offered to meet with all of these organisations and subsequently held calls or online meetings with the Scottish Crofting Federation, National Farmers Union Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, Scottish Canals, the Ness & District Salmon Fishery Board, SSE Renewables, a hydro scheme developer, Visit Inverness Loch Ness, Highland Council and a Highland Counsellor. These were extremely useful to the project in enabling us to understand their specific interests and perspectives on beavers in this area. For instance, with Scottish Canals, we discussed the value of Beaver Trust training their staff in recognising beaver signs and the design of bank protection if that is ever needed. SSE Renewables discussed the potential long-term interactions between beavers and nature restoration projects they are involved with. In addition, staff from some of these organisations were able to suggest other relevant people to contact from their own networks, particularly in agriculture and tourism sectors.

***Phase 3: Reporting back drop-in days***

We will host follow-up drop-in days to report back on the feedback received during the engagement process, address the most commonly asked questions, and also set out the likely next steps for the project, including how all the information gathered has fed into this report.



# Section 4. Response to the Proposal

***Overview of the responses***

The engagement process received a range of responses, all of which have been reproduced verbatim and anonymised for viewing via a link enclosed at Annex C to this report. The majority of the responses received from individuals came via the online feedback form (enclosed at Annex B). The form invited people to express their views on the potential benefits and challenges that could come from a beaver translocation to the Loch Ness area. The form offers some options for people to select under each of the benefits and challenges headings and also provides free space for any other thoughts that people have.

As a first step in explaining the shades of opinion expressed, we have broken responses down into categories reflecting the range and nuance of views received:

- '**Supportive**' - responses within this category covered a range of views. Some expressed support with little or no mention of concerns, while a larger number acknowledged potential concerns but also recorded high confidence in the ability of beaver management to address them effectively, scoring 4 or 5 in response to Question 9a. One respondent scored 3 for Question 9a but expressed clear confidence in management elsewhere in their response.

- '**Unsure**' - responses acknowledged a mix of benefits and challenges but remained unsure or undecided about the issues involved, or how effectively potential challenges can be managed. Confidence in management scores for this group were generally 3 or below in response to Question 9a, although one response scoring 4 was included based on its overall content.

- '**Opposed'** - responses typically reflected a belief that no potential benefits were perceived and no or low confidence in the ability of management to meet the challenges they associate with beavers.

The balance of responses is shown in Table 1. In line with the principle of keeping the engagement locally focused, responses received from postcodes other than IV2 6, IV3 8, IV63 and PH32 are omitted from these figures and our analysis of the response.



*Table 1: Percentage of responses in broad categories*

| | |
|---|---|
| Supportive | 73% |
| Unsure | 21% |
| Opposed | 6% |
| | 100% |

***Perceived benefits and opportunities***

Table 2 below shows the benefits and opportunities perceived by respondents. There is a heavy weighting to the benefits for the natural environment, people's wellbeing and the local economic opportunities in ecotourism.

Brief summaries of each type of potential benefit:

- **Biodiversity and nature** – increased habitat complexity within freshwater environments; greater nutrient availability, particularly benefiting insect populations; improved water quality through filtration by beaver dams.
- **Connection to nature and wellbeing** – opportunities for wildlife enjoyment and experiencing landscapes shaped by more natural processes.
- **Ecotourism and local economy** – wildlife viewing opportunities and potential growth in 'slow tourism'.
- **Climate change resilience** – reduced flood peaks through water storage in dams; increased water retention during drought; greater habitat diversity to support wildlife adaptation to climate change; increased stream-side shading helping maintain cooler water temperatures for fish.
- **Agriculture** – potential moderation of flood flows and increased water retention during dry periods; potential disadvantages are outlined below.
- **Fishing** – enhanced freshwater habitat diversity; increased nutrient availability supporting aquatic invertebrates; improved water quality through filtration by dams; increased stream-side shading helping maintain cooler temperatures for fish.

*Table 2: Perceived benefits and opportunities overall and per respondent category*

| **Response Category** | **Frequency of mentions of each potential benefit, overall and broken down by category of respondent** | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Biodiversity & nature | Connect to nature | Ecotourism & local economy | Climate change resilience | Fishing | Farming | Other |
| Overall | 87% | 72% | 64% | 60% | 18% | 15% | 4% |
| Supportive | 99% | 85% | 77% | 73% | 23% | 19% | 6% |
| Unsure | 70% | 30% | 33% | 30% | 4% | 4% | 0% |
| Opposed | 13% | 13% | 0% | 13% | 0% | 0% | 0% |

Specific potential benefits mentioned under 'Other' included '*Protect pearl mussels*', '*Pride of place*' '*Societal wellbeing*' and '*Righting a wrong i.e. humans causing their extinction*'



***Perceived challenges***

Table 3 displays feedback on the perceived challenges recorded. Agriculture was listed as the most frequently noted area of concern in the comments from the *Opposed* category. Concerns around fishing and biodiversity also featured prominently.

Brief summaries of each type of potential challenge:

- **Agriculture** - localised flooding affecting farmland; tree felling and burrowing by beavers leading to stream/river bank erosion and potential loss of farmland.
- **Fishing** - beaver dams acting as potential obstacles to migrating salmon and sea trout.
- **Biodiversity and nature** - tree impacts, potential for beavers to affect rare and fragile lichen species through tree felling.
- **Ecotourism and local economy** - potential for overcrowding of visitors, with associated negative impacts including increased littering or disturbance at wildlife viewing points.
- **Connection to nature and wellbeing** - beavers flooding access routes, potential overcrowding or littering at wildlife viewing points, people disturbing beavers in the wild.

*Table 2: Perceived benefits and opportunities overall and per respondent category*

| **Response Category** | **Frequency of mentions of each potential challenge, overall and broken down by category of respondent** | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Biodiversity & nature | Connect to nature | Ecotourism & local economy | Climate change resilience | Fishing | Farming | Other |
| Overall | 17% | 6% | 9% | 5% | 22% | 48% | 16% |
| Supportive | 14% | 6% | 9% | 4% | 24% | 48% | 12% |
| Unsure | 7% | 4% | 19% | 4% | 15% | 26% | 22% |
| Opposed | 75% | 63% | 0% | 38% | 13% | 88% | 25% |

Specific challenges mentioned under 'Other':

- **Social tensions** - comments indicating tensions between different groups of stakeholders about proposals for change.

- **Beaver welfare** - '*Having enough of a population to spread*'; '*The A82 road is my concern, perhaps signs and lower speed limits in areas near beavers could help*'; '*Illegal shooting*'; '*Love the creatures and wish them well. But can you be sure everyone would feel the same?*'

- **Property and Infrastructure** - '*Flooding and bank erosion*'; '*Possible flooding in the short term*'; '*Housing*' (from localised flooding); '*Might provide a challenge to the local canal system*'; '*Renewable energy projects would cause an issue for beavers eg, PSH and streams used for this?*'; '*Conflict with wind generation/dumped storage*' (sic); '*Health and safety*'.

- **Trees** - 'Perhaps tree damage'; 'threat to some species of tree'; 'Destruction of some trees in local areas near water like the Ness Islands'.

- **Bank erosion** - 'Also concerned about tree loss leading to bank erosion.'

### Confidence in managing unwanted effects from beaver activity

Looking in more detail at the responses, variation in perceptions of potential challenges may partly relate to answers given to the following question on the feedback form:
'Are you confident that potentially unwanted effects arising from beaver activity could be managed, for example through NatureScot's Beaver Management Framework?'

Responses were scored on a five-point scale, where 1 indicated 'Not confident at all', 3 indicated 'Neutral', and 5 indicated 'Very confident'. Average scores are shown in Table 4 below.

*Table 4: Average confidence scores for concerns being addressable.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Overall | 4.2 |
| Supportive | 4.63 |
| Unsure | 2.8 |
| Opposed | 1.25 |

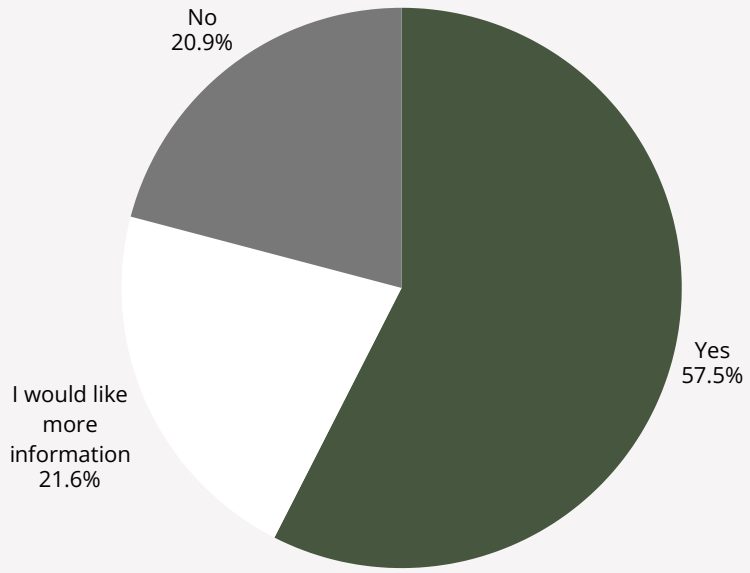
*1 is 'not confident at all', 5 is 'very confident'*

Overall confidence in the ability to manage beaver-related challenges in the Ness area is strong. However, the lower confidence levels expressed within the smaller respondent categories, particularly the Opposed category, are a significant feature of the response. While Scotland's Beaver Strategy is founded on extensive experience of effective beaver mitigation and management across Europe and Scotland, any proposal to proceed with translocation in this area would need to include measures to build confidence in this support, particularly within the farming community.

### Interest in taking part in local monitoring

A high proportion of respondents were interested in volunteering to help with beaver monitoring.

*Figure 1. If beavers were present, would you be interested in taking part in local monitoring? (e.g. wildlife recording, water levels, habitat checks)*




### *Assessment of the engagement against the five engagement principles*

As discussed above Section 2, it is challenging for openly pro-beaver organisations to demonstrably operate an engagement process that all stakeholders can trust as fair and even-handed. It is of course incumbent on us to both seek out and represent stakeholder views as objectively as possible to NatureScot as the licensing authority for beaver translocations. We therefore developed engagement principles to guide our work on the Ness Beaver Project and discussed the appropriateness of these in advance with NatureScot.

The five principles developed guided both the design of the engagement work itself and the decisions made about how to proceed once the engagement process was complete. Ultimately, it is for others to judge how successfully these principles were met, but we include our own assessment below. While this inevitably involves a degree of 'marking our own homework' we believe there is value in sharing our reasoning transparently for others to assess for themselves.

### Inclusivity

We used Royal Mail to deliver over 14,000 flyers to every household and business in the postcodes around the Ness catchment to introduce the proposal, ask for people's participation and advertise how to get involved. We issued a press release to raise awareness and advertised the proposal digitally with locally targeted social media. We also re-advertised the engagement channels in the Inverness Courier halfway through the engagement period and wrote to everyone on the list of contacts we had built up since preparing the September 2025 launch of the project.

As the engagement progressed, we noted that the response from the farming and crofting community might have been somewhat lower than expected. 10.9% of the responses came from farmers and crofters, with a further 7% from people who described themselves as land managers. We had been speaking with representative organisations like Scottish Land & Estates and NFUS, as well as some farmers and crofters with whom we had pre-existing relationships. They helped us in our efforts to engage with others, in some cases by reaching out directly on our behalf to invite them to farmer-led discussions. This produced some further engagement and the farmers we discussed this with suggested three possible lines of thought in how their peers looked at the project:

1. Polarisation and lack of trust - accounts of beaver proposals and farming interests elsewhere, especially from Tayside, portray conflict and mistrust between farmers and pro-beaver organisations. For some, engagement about beaver proposals is a sham and part of fait accompli.

2. Beavers may not be seen by all as likely to affect them here and as something they will deal with if impacts arise.

3. Capacity - farmers are busy people, given the two points above, they may not see value in getting involved.

As a result, we decided to advertise and run a farmer-only discussion day in Balnain in late January 2026 to provide a bespoke opportunity for farmers and crofters to speak with us. We wrote to everyone we could contact and asked the NFUS and the Scottish Crofting Federation to advertise it through their own networks.

We spoke with ten farmers and crofters, from the Drumnadrochit and Glen Urquhart area that day and found it a valuable opportunity to listen to their perspectives and discuss practical questions around beaver impacts and management.

Following this, we met with a small group of six farmers from the south side of Loch Ness. We are grateful to the NFUS Highland Regional Manager for organising this discussion. The group expressed a preference for beavers to arrive through natural expansion rather than translocation, but the conversation remained constructive and pragmatic, focusing on potential impacts on farming, practical management approaches, the advantages of preparedness following a planned release, and the importance of long-term support for management measures.




### Local focus

We targeted the advertising of the engagement process as locally as possible through the mailshot and our use of social media. We received fourteen responses from people from outside of the area we targeted and, while these views have been recorded and can be viewed via the link included at Annex C, they have been omitted from the figures used in our analysis of the response.

### Objectivity

The information we used on the display material at the drop-in days and on the project website was sourced from trusted sources such as Scotland's Beaver Strategy, NatureScot or published and peer-reviewed literature. We also sought to use a similar mix of materials to previous translocation engagement processes to provide a balanced picture of the potential benefits and risks of the proposal, adapted for the specific characteristics of the Ness area.

Assessing our own objectivity in weighing the outcomes of this engagement process is more challenging, particularly in the final two sections of this report. However, in considering the stakeholder concerns identified through the engagement work, we have been able to draw on a substantial body of research and practical experience from across Europe relating to coexistence with beaver populations and management of their impacts. This same evidence base informed the development of Scotland's Beaver Strategy, which was produced through a broad and balanced stakeholder process and provides the framework within which proposals such as the Ness Beaver Project can be considered.

Finally, regarding objectivity, while the applicant is responsible for gathering and collating responses to a beaver translocation proposal, decisions on any licence application rest with NatureScot, a public body whose licensing team operates independently of both its operational staff and the applicant.

### Proportionality

We aimed to provide a depth of engagement that allowed people to express and explain their views, have those views considered, and reflect on other perspectives. The engagement plan was designed to first identify potential issues raised by stakeholders and then follow these up through face to face meetings on the ground. These site meetings proved extremely valuable in developing a fuller understanding of people's views and concerns, while also creating constructive spaces for discussion focused on specific concerns. While we remained mindful of the need to adapt our engagement approach in response to feedback, it has generally felt that those we spoke with considered their views to have been heard and understood.

### Transparency

As with objectivity, assessing our own performance against this inherently subjective principle presents a challenge. However, we believe we have delivered on the commitments and approach set out at the start of the process. We clearly communicated how the engagement would proceed and evolve, and shared details of dates and venues for each stage with stakeholders at the earliest opportunity. In this publicly available report, we have included all feedback received, presented verbatim and anonymised where appropriate (see Annex C). The report also sets out the criteria guiding decisions on how to proceed following the conclusion of the engagement process.



# Section 5. Consideration of concerns and impacts

The engagement process identified ten themes of concern, or perceived challenges, relating to a potential beaver translocation to the Loch Ness area, as outlined in Section 4 above. Each is considered here in relation to its likely relevance within the Loch Ness area and the extent to which any associated impacts could be effectively managed.

### Farming

This was the most frequently raised potential challenge associated with a beaver translocation. Where beavers affect farming, impacts generally occur in one or both of two ways.

The first is through localised flooding of farmland adjacent to watercourses caused by beaver dams, particularly on low-lying floodplains. The second relates to burrowing into non-rocky riverbanks to create shelter, resting and breeding features. These burrows can extend several metres into a bank, potentially leading to erosion, loss of farmland and weakened ground that may present hazards for livestock, tractors and other machinery. Riverbanks may also be weakened where beavers fell trees or burrow around root systems. While many trees survive through re-sprouting, some may be lost, reducing root reinforcement within the bank or destabilising trees and encouraging root plate failure.

These issues have been most prominent on the flat floodplain farmland of parts of lower Tayside, where much of the controversy surrounding beavers in Scotland has arisen. However, farmland across much of the wider Scottish beaver range has not experienced impacts to the same extent. In relation to the Loch Ness area specifically, NatureScot's Strategic Environmental Assessment of beaver recolonisation concluded that there is a low risk of such impacts becoming significant.

This largely reflects the way beavers respond to different physical environments. Beavers are relatively clumsy on land and spend around 90% of their time within 10 metres of water. Although capable of crossing steep ground, they tend not to occupy fast-flowing upland environments extensively. They also increasingly struggle to build and maintain dams on steep, high-energy streams, particularly on gradients above around 6%, where water flow becomes too powerful to work against.

Much of the Ness catchment is steep-sided and rocky, considerably limiting the scope for beavers to build dams and burrow into banks. There is also relatively little cropland within the area, and while silage fields are an important component of local farming systems for winter livestock feed, many are located above river and stream channels and away from low lying floodplains.

This is not to suggest that beavers would have no impacts on farming, but any impacts are expected to be relatively minor and manageable through established mitigation techniques. Monitoring beaver distribution is key to this approach, allowing situations where beavers are close to a potentially sensitive land to be identified and management actions implemented where appropriate.

Management and mitigation actions include:

- **Tree protection** - important trees can be protected from felling by beavers with suitable wire mesh encircling the trunk or some cases with more extensive fencing.

- **Dam lowering or removal** - beaver dams that may lead to localised flooding of farmland can be lowered to reduce water retention or removed entirely.

- **Flow devices** - pipes installed through beaver dams can allow water to pass once it reaches a specified level, enabling the dam to remain while limiting excessive water retention, as shown in the photo below.



Beaver dam mitigation requires a licence from NatureScot if the dam is more than two weeks old. Staff from Trees for Life, Beaver Trust and NatureScot can all provide support for this process. In particularly challenging situations, especially in parts of lower Tayside, more interventionist approaches have also been used. These include trapping and translocating beavers where impacts cannot be adequately managed through other means and, as a last resort, licensed lethal control to protect important interests where necessary.

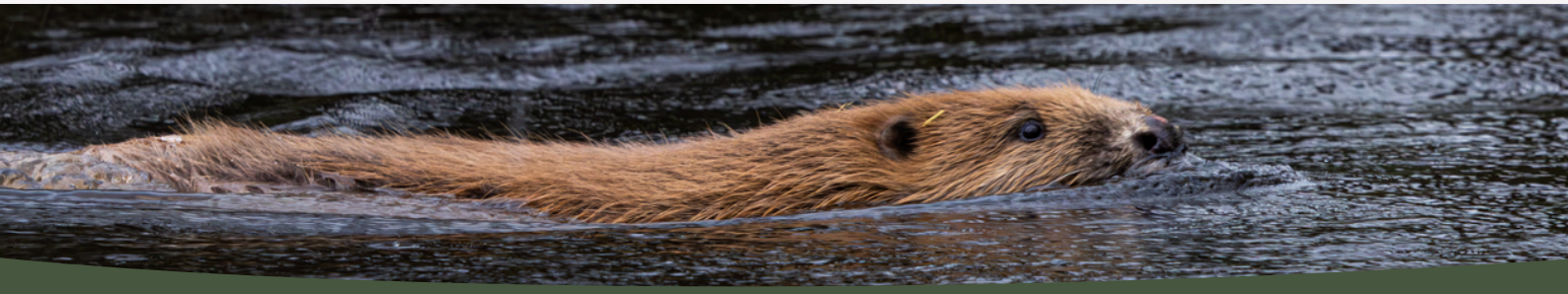
### Fishing

Beavers are strictly vegetarian mammals, but they may affect fishing interests where dams temporarily impede upstream or downstream movements of some migratory fish. In the Loch Ness catchment, the spring salmon run is particularly important for the population. If a beaver dam were present on a spawning burn during this period, especially under low-flow conditions, there is potential for some fish to be delayed or prevented from reaching spawning grounds. In certain circumstances, this could negatively affect recruitment success within individual tributaries or local fish populations.

Discussions with the Ness Salmon District Fishery Board highlighted the importance of spawning habitat for salmon and sea trout within the catchment, particularly in the lower reaches of tributaries where there is greatest potential overlap with suitable beaver habitat. These lower-gradient areas provide more favourable conditions for dam construction and therefore present the greatest potential risk of dams impeding fish passage under some flow conditions. The Board therefore considers that releasing beavers to the area carries some risk for migratory fish populations.

These risks are recognised within Scotland's Beaver Strategy. Salmonids and beavers have coexisted for millennia and an increasing body of research in Scotland is improving understanding of how fish interact with beaver dams. A study undertaken close to Loch Ness recorded brown trout successfully passing beaver dams by swimming around and over them during typical autumn flow conditions (Needham et al., 2025). The study also highlighted the complexity of these interactions, with fish passage varying between dams and influenced by environmental conditions as well as biological factors such as fish size and migratory motivation.

The same research identified potential ecological benefits associated with beaver activity, including increased abundance of larger trout, improved body condition, and positive winter growth rates in brown trout populations (Needham et al., 2021). In addition, a catchment-scale eDNA survey of the River Tay found no negative effects of beaver presence on the distribution of Atlantic salmon, brown trout or lamprey, while identifying a positive co-occurrence between beavers and European eels (MacArthur et al., 2026, under review).



Salmon and sea trout are keystone species in Scotland, providing an important link between the mineral riches of the sea and our nutrient-dependent uplands. Protecting and growing these fish populations is of major ecological and economic importance, so we need to be diligent about any risks to these populations posed by beavers. We can put this in place by monitoring where beavers go, and noting if they move into a stream used as a spawning run. If this happens, we can then pay close attention to whether any dams are present during the spawning seasons and be prepared to lower or remove any dams thought to present a barrier to fish migration. Delivering this task will be assisted by overlaying maps of where modelling data indicates that beavers are likely to build dams (see Annex D) with NDSFB data on where salmonids spawn. We have also discussed the potential to secure funding to develop this data further with more detailed survey activity.

Beaver activity can also benefit fish populations in a myriad of ways (Kemp et al., 2012). It has been shown to put more deadwood into stream channels, which provides more places for fish to rest and hide from predators. Where beavers fell trees beside rivers and lochs, the trees tend to sprout anew, sending up a burst of leafy shoots that cast more and deeper shade onto the water, which in turn protects temperature-sensitive young salmon from the climate change driven trend of warming in our salmon streams. This activity also increases natural nutrient levels in water bodies, which helps them support more of the insects that are key prey species for fish populations.

**Biodiversity and nature**

This was the most commonly cited benefit identified by respondents. However, the environmental changes created by beavers can also have implications for some specific biodiversity interests. Beavers are well known for felling trees and, although many trees re-sprout from the stump, this can still affect species associated with those trees. In Scotland, this concern has mainly related to rare mosses and lichens dependent on specialised microhabitats found on trees within particular woodland settings.

We discussed this issue with NatureScot and, again, monitoring is considered central to managing any risk. Understanding where beavers are active allows expert knowledge of important lichen locations, or areas likely to support them, to be incorporated into management decisions. Where necessary, important trees can be protected from beaver felling using stout protective mesh around the trunk. Although some important moss species occur within the area, the likelihood of significant impacts from beavers is considered to be low.

### Ecotourism and local economy

Many respondents identified ecotourism as a potential benefit of beaver presence in the area, although the engagement process also highlighted concerns about possible negative impacts associated with increased visitor numbers. These included road congestion, loss of tranquillity, littering, and the potential for disturbance to beavers themselves. Such impacts could affect both local residents' enjoyment of the area and, potentially, the wider tourism experience.

While there are a few dedicated beaver viewing facilities in Scotland, and several locations where the beaver presence is well known, significant issues with foot traffic and parking have not arisen. Spotting a beaver generally requires dedication or some luck, even at a well-recognised site. Although some locations attract hopeful beaver-watchers, sighting success rate have never been high enough to create a reputation capable of drawing large crowds to a single place. Instead, experience from areas such as Knapdale in Argyll, where beavers have been present since 2009, suggest that simply knowledge of their existence in the wider landscape, and the sense of a richer, more natural environment this creates, has enhanced the overall attractiveness of the area.



### Connection to nature and wellbeing

The potential for beavers to cause flooding of access routes was mentioned a small number of times during the engagement process. This has occurred at a limited number of locations elsewhere where dams have been built close to walking routes. Responses need to be tailored to the specific circumstances but can include dam management measures to reduce water retention levels.




### Social tension

Some responses reflected existing tensions between differing perspectives on the role and importance of nature within the local land-use economy. Some stakeholders felt that greater flexibility from land-based industries is needed to realise opportunities for nature recovery, including through beaver restoration. At the same time, some people whose livelihoods depend on the land, particularly within farming, expressed concern about the potential impacts of beavers and the practicalities of managing alongside them. These differing perspectives can place strain on individuals and risk undermining constructive relationships between people with contrasting views.

Any tension is of course not confined to beaver reintroduction and is present in much of the discourse about land management. Improvements in relationships in other issues have come from open dialogue sustained over time to build understanding and trust. If beavers are brought to this area, proactive communication about how they disperse and behave in the area will be an essential part of starting this dialogue.

### Beaver welfare

Four comments were grouped under this heading, relating to establishment of a viable population, road traffic risks on the A82, and the potential for illegal shooting.

Whether sufficient numbers of beavers are translocated to establish a viable population is a key consideration within NatureScot's licensing process. International conservation translocation guidelines, reflected in NatureScot's approach, require projects to demonstrate that enough suitable habitat exists to support a healthy long-term population before any licence can be granted.

Like other wildlife, beavers can be vulnerable to road traffic accidents and public interference, although their strong preference for remaining within or close to freshwater habitats reduces this risk to some extent. We consider use of roads such as the A82 less likely because Loch Ness itself provides a more suitable movement corridor, although the risk cannot be entirely ruled out. Illegal shooting is also a possibility, but with effective monitoring, communication and management support, we hope impacts can be addressed through the legal management measures available.

In Scotland, beavers are protected as a European Protected Species under the Habitats Regulations 2017, making it an offence to intentionally capture, injure, kill or disturb them, or damage key habitat features such as lodges and dams.
Beaver welfare is a core component of all translocation projects and is embedded throughout both pre- and post-release monitoring. Animals for this project would most likely include family groups or pairs relocated from the Tayside catchment by experienced Beaver Trust team, helping maintain natural social structures and support successful establishment. Removal only takes place under licence in areas of high-grade agricultural land and after strict licensing criteria have been met.
Prior to release, all beavers are trapped in accordance with best-practice standards and undergo comprehensive veterinary health and welfare assessments at Five Sisters Zoo to ensure they are fit for transport and release.

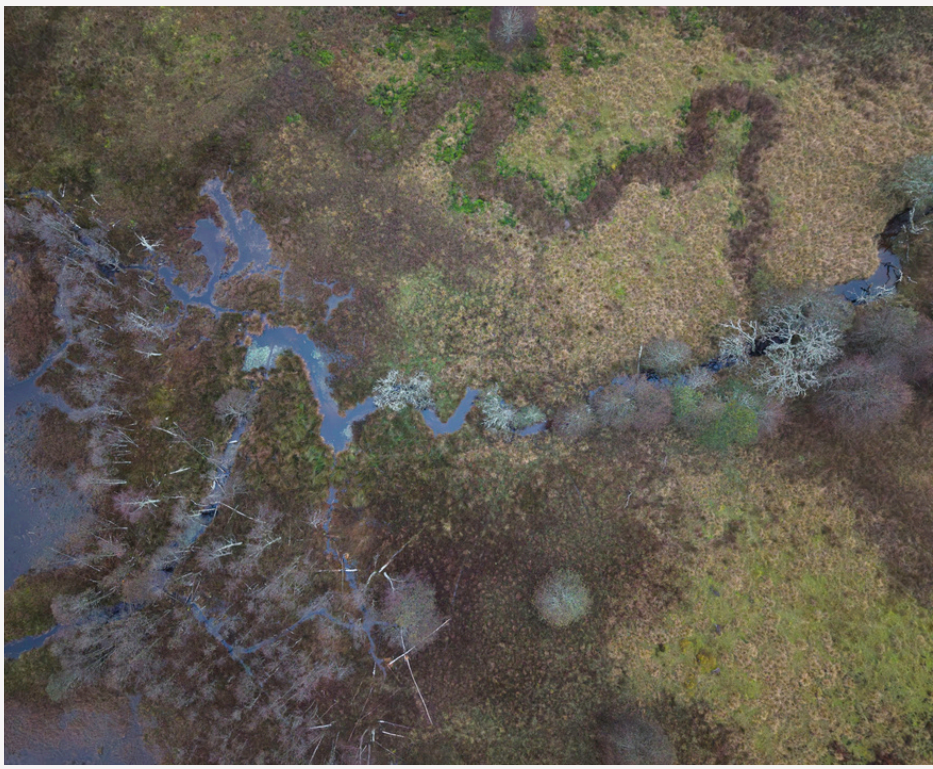
Following release, animals would be translocated to carefully selected sites offering suitable habitat, food resources and shelter. Ongoing monitoring would then track their adaptation, welfare and integration into the environment, helping ensure positive outcomes for both the animals and the wider ecosystem.



### Property and Infrastructure

Seven comments were grouped under this heading. Concerns focused on the potential for flooding and bank erosion associated with beaver dams and burrowing to affect property or infrastructure, including roads. Flash flooding is already an issue on the northern side of Loch Ness, particularly around Glen Urquhart and Drumnadrochit, where the River Enrick and the Coiltie can rise rapidly during heavy rainfall events. Any beaver dams established on these rivers would almost certainly be overtopped during such spates and are therefore unlikely to significantly influence peak flood levels under these conditions. A SEPA report on flood risk within the Coiltie catchment concluded that slowing water flow in the headwaters through natural flood management could help reduce downstream flood risk, and beaver dams could potentially contribute to this process.

As across much of the Ness catchment, these rivers are characterised by rocky or gravelly banks, which considerably limits the scope for burrowing. Based on their experience of beavers elsewhere in Scotland, SSE Renewables have advised that they do not have significant concerns regarding potential impacts on hydro-electric infrastructure associated with this proposal.



The potential for burrowing to affect the canal system has also been discussed with Scottish Canals, who have experience of beavers dating back to their arrival near the Crinan Canal in Knapdale more than fifteen years ago. Scottish Canals expressed confidence that any potential issues could be identified and managed through routine inspection and maintenance processes.

### Trees

Beavers are strictly herbivorous, consuming a wide range of vegetation ranging from soft aquatic vegetation growing in rivers and lochs, to scrub and mature trees. Tree felling not only provides food through accessing the bark, leaves and smaller twigs but also secures building materials for dams and lodges. They tend to prefer smaller diameter trees and particular species (like willow, hazel and aspen) for feeding, but will potentially fell any tree.

That said, beavers do not systematically clearfell an area of trees and will rotate habitat use and intensity around their established territory. They are fiercely territorial and each territory is large enough to meet a beaver family's needs throughout the year. Because many trees felled by beavers coppice and re-sprout rather than die, often alongside influences from other large herbivore, beaver territories typically retain tree cover over time, developing into structurally diverse woodlands with mixed age trees, shrub layers and greater plant diversity, along with creating standing and fallen dead wood.

Trees can hold significant value for individuals and communities alike. Where beavers pose a risk to valued trees, straightforward and effective mitigation measures are available most commonly the installation of protective mesh guards around individual trunks to prevent gnawing, as illustrated below.



# Section 6. Conclusion

What to make of all this information? The engagement process found strong support overall for the Project, with 73% of responses classified as *Supportive*, 21% as *Unsure* and 6% as *Opposed*. Free-form comments showed that many respondents had carefully considered both the potential benefits and possible negative impacts of any beaver releases. Across all responses, potential benefits were mentioned 392 times compared with 145 mentions of potential challenges. Confidence in the ability to manage these challenges was also relatively high, with an average score of 4.2 out of 5 (where 5 was *very confident*).

At the same time, the engagement highlighted the importance of continuing to address concerns around potential impacts, particularly for those who may feel most directly affected. Scotland's Beaver Strategy places strong emphasis on adaptive management, supported by extensive practical experience from beaver restoration projects across Europe and through Scotland's Beaver Management Framework. While most respondents expressed confidence in this approach, those within the Opposed and Unsure groups reported substantially lower confidence levels, particularly in relation to potential impacts on farming and land management. This underlines the importance of ongoing communication, proactive monitoring, and accessible long-term support for land managers should releases proceed.

Engagement with the farming community was initially limited, and additional efforts were made to increase participation and better understand agricultural concerns. Although further dialogue would still be beneficial, this later engagement provided valuable insight, particularly regarding the need for effective monitoring and prompt, practical management support.



***Next Steps***

NatureScot's Strategic Environmental Assessment concluded that the Ness catchment presents "a low risk of conflict and a high potential for nature restoration from beaver presence". Having considered the findings of this engagement process, site visits, and discussions with local communities and stakeholders, we found no significant evidence that would alter this conclusion, including in relation to potential impacts on farmland. Overall, we consider there to be sufficient local support to proceed with submission of a licence application to NatureScot for the translocation of beavers to the Loch Ness area.

A competent Monitoring and Mitigation Plan, informed by this engagement process, will be an essential part of the licence application. This Plan will include clear actions and specify who will be delivering those. Trees for Life and Beaver Trust will be responsible for the monitoring elements of this Plan, allowing us to stay abreast of the distribution of beavers in the area and identify potential overlaps between beaver presence and sensitive areas such as salmonid spawning runs or localised flood risks. Remarkably, well over 50% of respondents to the engagement process have noted interest in being part of such monitoring. These risks can then be mitigated or managed through the Beaver Management Framework. The licence application also needs to include a robust strategy for meeting the practical requirements of establishing an ecologically viable population of beavers. To this end, a plan for precise release sites for around fifteen translocated beaver groups, over say three years, is in ongoing development.

A draft release plan will be discussed with NatureScot and will evolve with their input from modelling of how beavers will form a coherently connected population depending on the release locations. This plan then needs to be discussed with the landowners concerned before the first set of release sites can be confirmed. While there is a need for a degree of discretion to safeguard release sites from too much human disturbance in the early days, if a licence is issued, we would share as much as we can about where and when releases go ahead. Our current estimate of the earliest date when beaver releases could become possible is during the coming autumn.



Reintroductions remain a subject with the potential to be highly contentious and while there have been a few signs of tension between stakeholders in relation to this project, the dialogue has been constructive throughout. While we hope that the design of the engagement work has helped with this, we see translocations as long term projects. They do not end when a licence is issued or the first beavers are released to the wild. This report notes the importance of monitoring and management over time. We are committed to sustaining monitoring effort over time and offering practical support to supplement the package available under the Beaver Management Framework.



# Section 7. References and other resources

Scotland's Beaver Strategy 2022-2045 can be read via this link:
https://www.nature.scot/doc/scotlands-beaver-strategy-2022-2045

Gaywood, M. (Ed.) (2015). Beavers in Scotland – A Report to the Scottish Government. Scottish Natural Heritage

NatureScot's Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report template - Effects of Beaver Translocation to the River Ness can be read via this link:
https://www.nature.scot/doc/assessment-effects-translocation-eurasian-beaver-great-glen-river-ness-and-river-lochy-catchments

The Ness Beaver Project website, including FAQs is here:
https://treesforlife.org.uk/about-us/missing-species/beavers/ness-beaver-project/

Beaver Management information and resources
https://beavermanagement.org

NatureScot beaver management web guidance
https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/protected-areas-and-species/protected-species/protected-species-z-guide/beaver/beaver-mitigation-scheme

IUCN Guidelines for Reintroductions and Other Conservation Translocations
https://portals.iucn.org/library/efiles/documents/2013-009.pdf

Scottish Code for Conservation Translocations
https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2019-02/Scottish%20Code%20for%20Conservation%20Translocations%20-%20Summary.pdf

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Brazier, R. E., Puttock, A., Graham, H. A., Auster, R. E., Davies, K. H., & Brown, C. M. (2021). Beaver: Nature's ecosystem engineers. Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Water, 8(1), e1494. https://www.google.com/url?q=https://wires.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002%252Fwat2.1494&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1774173668343524&usg=AOvVaw2ay95QbQIJK73hLfu2d_qv

Campbell-Palmer, R., Gow, D., Schwab, G., Halley, D., Gurnell, J., Girling, S., ... & Rosell, F. (2016). The Eurasian beaver handbook: ecology and management of Castor fiber. Pelagic Publishing Ltd

Kemp, P. S., Worthington, T. A., Langford, T. E. L., Tree, A. R. J., & Gaywood, M. J. (2012). Qualitative and quantitative effects of reintroduced beavers on stream fish. Fish and fisheries, 13, 158–181

Law, A., Levanoni, O., Foster, G., Ecke, F., & Willby, N. J. (2019a). Are beavers a solution to the freshwater biodiversity crisis? Diversity & distributions, 25, 1763–1772.

Macarthur, J. A., Law, A., Willby, N., Svobodova, D., Griffiths, N. P., Campbell, R., Gaywood, M., Bean, C., Lawson Handley, L., Smith, M., Leonard, S., Conroy, C., Pritchard, V. L. & Hanfling, B. (2026). eDNA sampling reveals no negative effects of beaver recolonisation on the catchment-scale distribution of migratory fish. bioRxiv (Preprint)

Needham, R. J., Zabel, R. W., Roberts, D., & Kemp, P. S. (2025). The impact of reintroduced Eurasian beaver (Castor fiber) dams on the upstream movement of brown trout (Salmo trutta) in upland areas of Great Britain. PloS one, 20, e0313648.

Needham, R. J., Gaywood, M., Tree, A., Sotherton, N., Roberts, D., Bean, C. W., & Kemp, P. S. (2021). The response of a brown trout (Salmo trutta) population to reintroduced Eurasian beaver (Castor fiber) habitat modification. Canadian journal of fisheries and aquatic sciences. Journal canadien des sciences halieutiques et aquatiques, 78, 1650– 1660.

Stringer, A. P., & Gaywood, M. J. (2016). The impacts of beavers Castor spp. on biodiversity and the ecological basis for their reintroduction to Scotland, UK. Mammal review, 46, 270–283.

## *Annex A: Project Mailshot Flyer*



Ness Beaver Project

Your voice matters

BEAVER TRUST

Trees for Life

### Ness Beaver Project

The area around Loch Ness is being considered for the potential reintroduction of beavers.

**Join our drop-in days on the Ness Beaver Project and help shape the future of your local area.**

Once widespread across Scotland, beavers were hunted to extinction in the 16th century. Now, the Scottish Government's Beaver Strategy calls for their ongoing expansion across the country.

Your voice matters and will feed into how the project is evaluated and how the project may be taken forward. Both in person and online, we're inviting people to share their thoughts on the beaver project across the coming autumn, starting with these drop-in days:

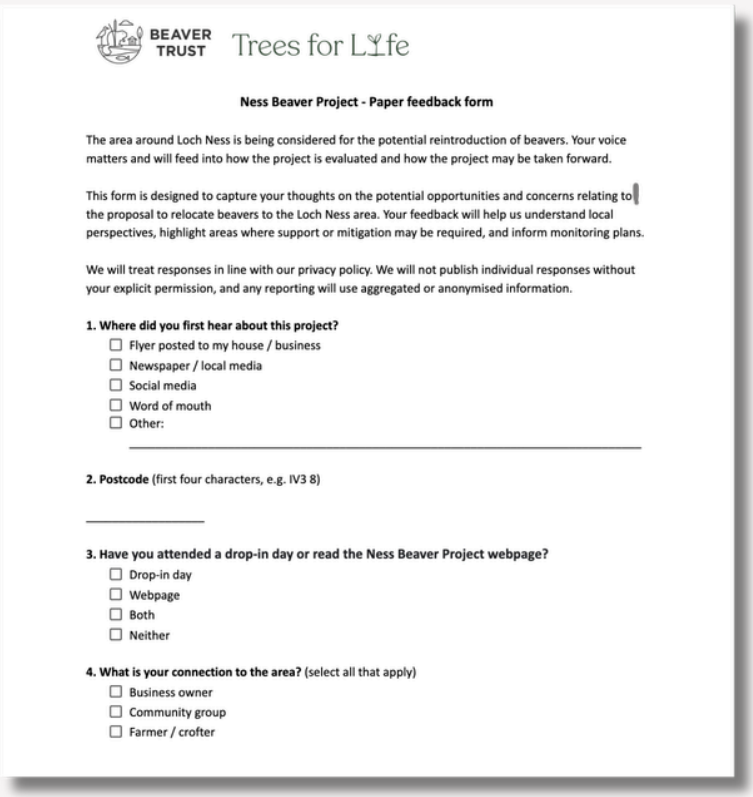
23 September, 11am - 8pm, Dundreggan Rewilding Centre, Glenmoriston
29 September, 11am - 8pm, Craigmonie Centre, Drumnadrochit
30 September, 11am - 8pm, Wildside Centre, Foyers
8 October, 11am - 8pm, Millennium Hall, Invermoriston
9 October, 11am - 8pm, Village Hall, Fort Augustus
10 October, 11am - 8pm, Village Hall, Dores

Staff from Trees for Life and the Beaver Trust will be present to welcome you, provide background on beavers, discuss this project, answer questions and listen to your views. Light refreshments will be available and children are welcome.

For more information: **treesforlife.org.uk/ness-beaver-project**
Or email: **beavers@treesforlife.org.uk**

BEAVER TRUST Trees for Life

## *Annex B: Engagement Questionnaire*



BEAVER TRUST Trees for Life

**Ness Beaver Project - Paper feedback form**

The area around Loch Ness is being considered for the potential reintroduction of beavers. Your voice matters and will feed into how the project is evaluated and how the project may be taken forward.

This form is designed to capture your thoughts on the potential opportunities and concerns relating to the proposal to relocate beavers to the Loch Ness area. Your feedback will help us understand local perspectives, highlight areas where support or mitigation may be required, and inform monitoring plans.

We will treat responses in line with our privacy policy. We will not publish individual responses without your explicit permission, and any reporting will use aggregated or anonymised information.

**1. Where did you first hear about this project?**
- ☐ Flyer posted to my house / business
- ☐ Newspaper / local media
- ☐ Social media
- ☐ Word of mouth
- ☐ Other: _____

**2. Postcode** (first four characters, e.g. IV3 8)

_____

**3. Have you attended a drop-in day or read the Ness Beaver Project webpage?**
- ☐ Drop-in day
- ☐ Webpage
- ☐ Both
- ☐ Neither

**4. What is your connection to the area?** (select all that apply)
- ☐ Business owner
- ☐ Community group
- ☐ Farmer / crofter
- ☐ Fishery manager / angler
- ☐ Land manager
- ☐ Public body
- ☐ Resident
- ☐ Visitor
- ☐ Other: _____

**5. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please provide details** (name and role).

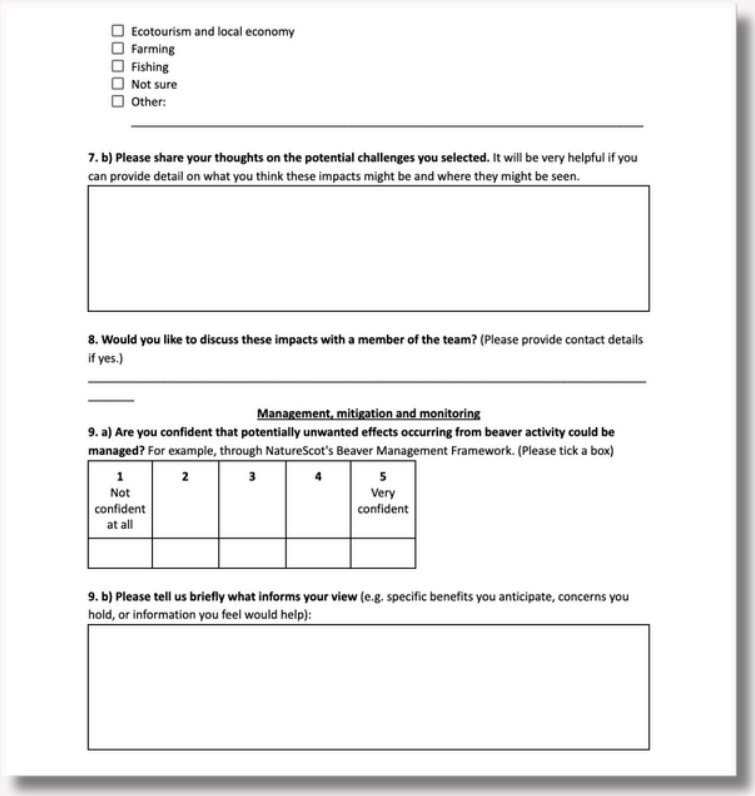
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**Beaver impacts**

**6. a) In your view, what benefits could be created in your local area if beavers were present?** (Please tick all that apply.)
- ☐ Biodiversity and nature
- ☐ Climate change resilience
- ☐ Connection to nature and wellbeing
- ☐ Ecotourism and local economy
- ☐ Farming
- ☐ Fishing
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other: _____

**6. b) Please share your thoughts on the benefits you selected.** It will be very helpful if you can provide detail on what you think these impacts might be and where they might be seen.

**7. a) In your view, what potential challenges could be created in your local area if beavers were present?** (Please tick all that apply.)
- ☐ Biodiversity and nature
- ☐ Climate change resilience
- ☐ Connection to nature and wellbeing



☐ Ecotourism and local economy
☐ Farming
☐ Fishing
☐ Not sure
☐ Other: _____

**7. b) Please share your thoughts on the potential challenges you selected.** It will be very helpful if you can provide detail on what you think these impacts might be and where they might be seen.

**8. Would you like to discuss these impacts with a member of the team?** (Please provide contact details if yes.)

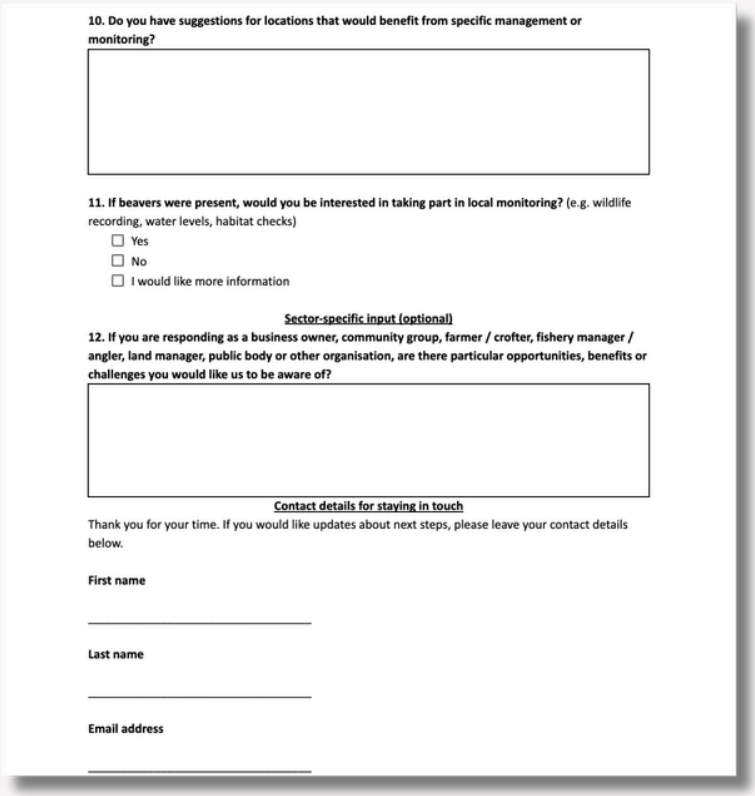
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**Management, mitigation and monitoring**

**9. a) Are you confident that potentially unwanted effects occurring from beaver activity could be managed?** For example, through NatureScot's Beaver Management Framework. (Please tick a box)

| 1 Not confident at all | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 Very confident |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

**9. b) Please tell us briefly what informs your view** (e.g. specific benefits you anticipate, concerns you hold, or information you feel would help):



**10. Do you have suggestions for locations that would benefit from specific management or monitoring?**

**11. If beavers were present, would you be interested in taking part in local monitoring?** (e.g. wildlife recording, water levels, habitat checks)

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I would like more information

**Sector-specific input (optional)**

**12. If you are responding as a business owner, community group, farmer / crofter, fishery manager / angler, land manager, public body or other organisation, are there particular opportunities, benefits or challenges you would like us to be aware of?**

**Contact details for staying in touch**

Thank you for your time. If you would like updates about next steps, please leave your contact details below.

**First name**

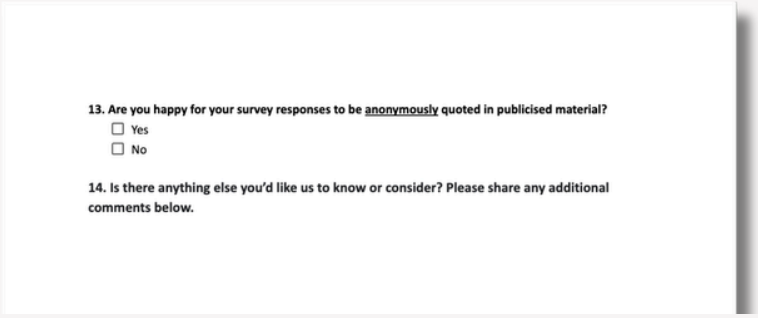
_____

**Last name**

_____

**Email address**

_____



**13. Are you happy for your survey responses to be anonymously quoted in publicised material?**

☐ Yes
☐ No

**14. Is there anything else you'd like us to know or consider? Please share any additional comments below.**

***Annex C: Responses***

A spreadsheet containing verbatim, anonymised copies of all responses received from both individuals and organisations can be downloaded here.

Note that fourteen respondents either answered no to the question 'Are you happy for your survey responses to be anonymously quoted in publicised material?' or did not provide an answer. These responses were therefore left off the published copy of the responses.

**Responses from Stakeholder Organisations**

We contacted the following organisations at the outset of the engagement work and updated them updated as the work progressed:

Community Councils, Community Development Trusts, National Farmers Union Scotland, the Scottish Crofting Federation, Scottish Land & Estates, the Ness & District Salmon Fishery Board, Atlantic Salmon Trust, hydro scheme developers, Forestry & Land Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Highland Council, Highland Council Archaeology, Historic Environment Scotland, Scottish Canals, Scottish Forestry, Scottish Water, SSE Renewables, SEPA and Visit Inverness Loch Ness.

We asked to meet with each of these organisations to discuss the proposal. Where we received a written response, we have reproduced it below. Where we have had discussions but not received a written response, we have simply reported the subjects discussed.

*Scottish Land & Estates*

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the proposed beaver release in the Loch Ness area. SLE recognise the potential ecological benefits that beavers can bring, including habitat creation, natural flood management and increased biodiversity.

However, their integration and management require a robust and well-resourced approach to mitigation, monitoring and long-term management. Beaver activity can pose challenges for farming, forestry, infrastructure and drainage, and it is essential that these potential impacts are identified early and addressed proactively.

We therefore emphasise the following key points:

Mitigation Measures
Effective mitigation must be in place from the outset, including clear processes for timely response to problematic beaver activity, accessible funding for mitigation tools, and guidance tailored to the specific landscapes and land uses around Loch Ness. Adaptive management should be embedded, with regular review of impacts and effectiveness of interventions.

Continued Land Manager Engagement
Ongoing, meaningful engagement with land managers is essential. Those who work the land are often the first to notice emerging issues and their insight should directly inform management decisions. We strongly support the provision of practical training, clear reporting mechanisms, and assurances that land managers will not be left to absorb the costs or administrative burden of beaver impacts.

Community Communication and Involvement
Local communities should remain central to both planning and delivery. We encourage transparent, accessible communication about expected benefits and risks, opportunities for involvement in monitoring and clarity about responsibilities and support available.

Monitoring and Evidence-Based Approach
Post-release monitoring should be thorough and long-term, focusing not only on beaver population dynamics but also on ecological outcomes, land management impacts and the effectiveness of mitigation. Adjustments to management strategies should follow evidence rather than fixed assumptions.

In summary, we believe any release should be accompanied by strong and sustained mitigation measures, and that land managers and local communities are involved as active partners throughout the process in order to enable benefits while minimising conflicts.

Kind regards,

Acting Policy Adviser

*Ness & District Salmon Fishery Board*

Hi Alan,

Thanks for the prompt. We have reviewed the Loch Ness Catchment: Beaver Feasibility Mapping report. The report shows that beavers could occupy much of the catchment although it looks as if the extent of suitable beaver habitat has been greatly exaggerated by the model. One example is the extensive area of "highly suitable" beaver habitat shown on Figure 10, to the north of the east end of Loch Garry. Unless there is a recent broadleaf plantation there, that is upland moorland habitat, which would be unsuitable for beavers.

Aside from specific examples such as the above the model does not seem to factor in gradient as many of the small Loch Ness tributaries are shown as providing highly suitable habitat. These high gradient streams (too high for trout access or spawning, would, to my understanding, be unsuitable for beavers. I raised this point about the failure to account for gradient in the app presented at the meeting held in Great Glen House earlier in the year

The net effect is that the amount of potential habitat identified within the catchment is probably greatly exaggerated.

That does not diminish the potential for important salmon spawning tributaries of the Moriston (SAC), such as the Allt Phocaichain to be impacted. The mapping study shows this tributary as providing moderate to highly suitable habitat, with damming capacity ranging from occasional to pervasive. We agree with this assessment of an important and productive salmon spawning tributary of the Moriston SAC.

We note that NatureScot, in it final response to the forthcoming, Loch Kemp pump storage hydro public local inquiry, stated that "the population of Atlantic salmon in the SAC (Moriston) is in unfavourable condition, with suboptimal and declining resilience to threats and pressures". Quite how/where beavers fit into that thinking has not been detailed.

The Allt Mhor, a tributary of the River Farigaig, provides the largest length, and extent of accessible burn trout spawning of any Loch Ness tributary. It is also shown as providing suitable beaver habitat and with high dam capacity. Loch Ness is a very large loch, with a good trout population, but trout spawning habitat is limited. Almost all the small tributaries are high gradient and spawning habitat is restricted to the extreme lower reaches, if at all. We have not attempted to quantify the significance of the Allt Mhor to the trout population in the loch but it is likely to be high.

If I recall from Robert's study at South Clunes, the damming of one of the two burns increased the size of the trout present. I would have to read the study again, but my conclusion at the time was that the spawning habitat available to trout was reduced, which has implications for recruitment. Is there a similar risk for loch Ness?

The examples above are just some of what we would perceive to be risks to salmonid populations in the Ness catchment. There will be many more.

There is clearly great potential overlap between beaver habitat and spawning areas for salmonids in the Ness catchment. Freshwater pearl mussels are present in the Ness catchment although to the best of our knowledge restricted to large river habitat such as the Moriston and Oich, where damming will be less of an issue. The potential for beaver dams to become an impediment to salmonid spawning is a concern for NDSFB. Gradients on most spawning burns are high, consequently spawning, for salmon, is often restricted to the lower gradient, lower reaches. Hence there is potential for a high degree of overlap between salmon spawning and beaver habitat, as per the Allt Phocaichain example given above.

The scope for joint working regarding ongoing monitoring of beavers if they are present on spawning tributaries during or close to the time of a spawning was discussed.

NDSFB agreed to share the data they hold on spawning runs for Beaver Trust to pass to Exeter University to analyse the locations of those runs in relation to beaver habitat in the Ness catchment. Ness DSFB have a very good understanding of where salmon are present in the catchment but do not have a complete inventory of where all the spawning habitat exists. It can be assumed that where salmon are present there must be spawning habitat in close proximity.

It was agreed that if a beaver release strategy is agreed with NatureScot, the detail of that should be discussed with NDSFB before it is finalised. The potential to collaborate on future funding bids in support of monitoring salmonids and beavers and in supporting riparian habitat improvement, was noted.

Trees for Life/Beaver Trust have stated that the there is a low risk associated with beaver introduction into the Ness catchment. However, we the high degree of overlap between potential beaver habitat and human habitation. That introduces a different type of risk from high value agricultural land which will require a high level of human behavioural change. Culvert screens are commonplace in the suburbs of Inverness and it is easy to anticipate that beaver activity upstream of these screens will require enhanced maintenance of these screens if flooding is to be avoided.

I hope these comments are helpful. Clearly Ness DSFB consider there to be risks to its interests from the introduction of beavers into the catchment. It is essential that key stakeholders such as Ness DSFB are kept in the loop regarding introduction and mitigation plans.

Regards

*Scottish Canals*
Hello,

Please see below our support for the Beaver reintroduction project to the Ness Catchment

Scottish Canals are fully supportive of the project to reintroduce beavers to the Ness Catchment.

Scottish Canals met with representatives from Trees for Life and the Beaver Trust in October to discuss the project. The Caledonian Canal utilises Loch Ness as a water supply for the canal rather than a traditional reservoir, which have relatively narrow spillways. Scottish Canals confirmed that the canals infrastructure around Loch Ness were large waterbodies with masonry walls supporting the embankments, which were at low risk of impact from beavers.

We did highlight our concern about beavers in the River Oich, a tributary of Loch Ness, which runs parallel to the Caledonian Canal. The canal is supported by earth embankments adjacent to the River Oich, which are relatively close to the river in sections. We discussed having staff trained in monitoring for beaver activity which could be provided by the Beaver Trust and would allow Scottish Canals to detect early signs of beaver activity on our estate

Scottish Canals has had little issue with the beavers in Knapdale as they have remained on lochs out with our operational infrastructure. Scottish Canals has a robust inspection programme in place and are keen to have our inspectors trained in monitoring for beaver field signs to ensure any burrowing activity or dam creation can be identified at an early stage.  Scottish Canlas would welcome the offer of training from the Beaver Trust in recognising beaver signs. We would also appreciate information on recommended bank protection, although this would need to align with the protection of our engineered embankments.

Kind regards

Senior Environmental Scientist

*Visit Inverness Loch Ness*
Dear Ness Beaver Project Team,

On behalf of Visit Inverness Loch Ness (VILN), I'm writing to provide formal feedback on the Ness Beaver Project following our review of the project information shared on your website and stakeholder engagement to date. We appreciate the opportunity to engage with your work exploring the potential return of beavers to the Loch Ness area.

VILN's 2024–2029 Business Plan sets out a clear mission to deliver a sustainable, attractive, and resilient tourism destination for communities, businesses, and visitors alike. Central to this plan is responsible destination development that enriches visitor experience while safeguarding the natural environment that makes Inverness and Loch Ness internationally distinctive.

We recognise that the Ness Beaver Project aims to explore the reintroduction of Scottish native beaver, a species historically present around Loch Ness, with the potential to enhance wetland habitat restoration, increase biodiversity, and contribute to a revitalised natural landscape in the Highlands.

1**. Alignment with Sustainability and Destination Stewardship**
VILN places sustainability at the core of our objectives, including championing initiatives that support long-term environmental wellbeing. As the first carbon-neutral BID in the UK, we work collaboratively with partners to protect the natural assets that underlie our destination's appeal.

The ecological benefits associated with beaver activity—such as wetland creation, water purification, and enhanced habitat complexity—directly align with our broader sustainability goals. This supports the objectives to help visitors make sustainable travel choices and protect sensitive landscapes for future generations.

**2. Tourism Opportunities Through Nature-Based Experiences**
One of VILN's key ambitions is to enhance the visitor experience and reputation of the destination by highlighting unique and authentic natural and cultural assets.

The reintroduction of beavers could present new nature-based tourism opportunities, such as wildlife watching, guided ecological experiences, and community-led interpretation that enriches the destination offer year-round. When managed alongside appropriate visitor infrastructure, this could help drive visitation to shoulder seasons, a priority identified in our business plan.

**3. Community and Stakeholder Engagement**

We welcome your ongoing dialogue with local landowners and community members, and are encouraged that drop-in events have already provided valuable insights. As outlined in our business plan, VILN supports co-creative engagement where community perspectives help shape sustainable outcomes that are beneficial at both local and destination scale. Continued transparent engagement—particularly addressing concerns around land use, agriculture impacts, and visitor behaviour—will be crucial for broad community support and shared benefits.

**4. Recommendation and Areas for Continued Collaboration**

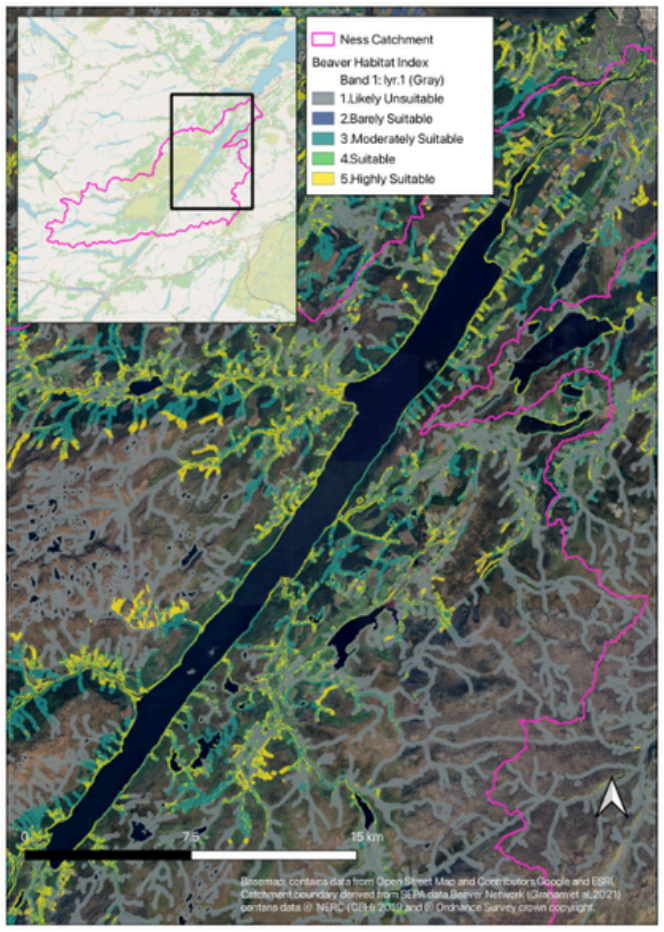
In summary, VILN broadly supports the vision of ecological restoration represented by the Ness Beaver Project, recognising its potential to contribute to destination sustainability and diversified tourism experiences. In moving forward we recommend:

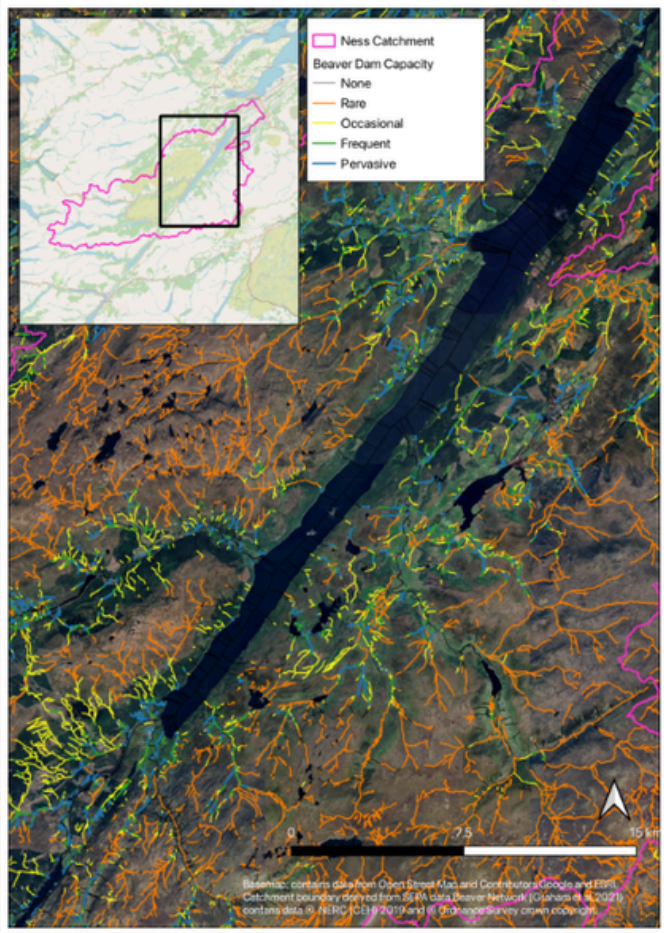
- Continued collaborative planning to ensure wildlife conservation goals complement tourism development and local economic benefits.
- Impact assessments and mitigations for sensitive land uses (e.g., agriculture) to maintain harmony between nature restoration and local livelihoods.
- Visitor management and interpretation planning to safely incorporate beaver-related experiences into the wider destination offer without compromising habitat protection or community values.

We would welcome further dialogue to explore how VILN and your project partners might work together to integrate nature-based tourism opportunities into future destination development plans.
Kind regards,

Destination Director

***Annex D: Beaver Habitat Index and Beaver Dam Capacity Maps***



BEAVER TRUST | Trees for Life



*Trees for Life is a registered Scottish charity (SC021303) and a company limited by guarantee (SC143304) with registered offices at The Park, Findhorn Bay, Forres, Moray, IV36 3TH. VAT Registered (GB369350669).*

*Beaver Trust is a registered charity (number 1185451) in England and Wales, with registered offices at 61 Bridge Street, Kington, HR5 3DJ*