



March 2023: Beaver Blethers Summary

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Background

Four Beaver Blethers were organised in March 2023, two in Kincaig, one in Kingussie and one in Aviemore. They took place on Wednesdays or Thursdays from 2pm to 7pm. They were advertised in the press and via the Park Authority website. Usually 2 or 3 Park Authority staff were in attendance along with a NatureScot representative (Anne Elliott and on 3 occasions Kirsten Brewster) in addition Elliot McCandless from the Beaver Trust and Ian Wilson from NFUS attended all the events and Alison McKnight attended the first two events.

The Park Authority decided that a series of informal events focussing on raising the awareness of beaver's behaviour and ecology that were aimed at landowners and local residents would be the best way to engage with them before any formal process took place. This format would allow those attending to highlight any issues or concerns they had relating to land management/ use and beavers. The conversations at the events would allow the Park Authority staff attending to hear these views, record them and either come up with a solution or explanation on the day or go away and think about solutions to these issues. It also gave an opportunity to view large, habitat suitability and damming capacity maps produced for the beaver modelling work undertaken by Exeter University.

Often people had 20 to 30 minute conversations with one or more of the staff at the event. This allowed interactions to be discursive (in a good way) around the subject of beaver. The lack of time pressure allowed subjects raised to be addressed in detail.

If the attendees wished to find out more about the project or simply wished to leave written comments, then they were asked to fill in a form.



The Blethers

Beaver Blether 1. Wednesday 1st March. Community Hall, Kincaig.

Farmers and land managers were invited to this event.

Attendees 11.

Written comments from the event;

- Concern around beaver being yet another 'thing' to consider when there is already so much pressure on farmers.
- Want reassurance that CNPA will be their long term along with NatureScot.
- General feeling from Estate representatives who attended, was that beavers can have positive impacts on the environment and for tourism.
- Need support from NS & CNPA to do mitigation farmers don't have resources and struggling to recruit staff (cost of living in CNP/Brexit etc) - is there an opportunity for the CNPA to pilot a scheme based around ecosystem services and riparian corridor (Industry linked??) LENS Project/Water stewardship etc.
- Will there be support across the whole of the CNP or just release area?
- Will we be providing assistance with aspen planting and enclosures- individual fencing?
- What is the reality of impacts (many keen to have a visit to their landholding to have an assessment of this before beavers arrive).
- Farming land (*in the CNP*) not classified as PAL (Prime Agricultural Land) but the floodplain is the best bit of land.
- Laggan floodbanks already in poor condition – will this be another impact on the floodplain – worry over dams in ditches.
- Will there be an impact on claims through forestry grant schemes or carbon credits for beaver felled trees (*SG aware and looking into this*).
- Worries over flood bank burrowing.
- Individuals keen to develop tourism opportunities but very aware there may be impacts.
- Very important that we (CNPA) are transparent in communication.

The feeling about beaver was split between undiversified farmers and land managers and those with tourism interests. i.e. those that can see a financial cost with no benefit to their business and those who may see a cost but also see a financial benefit.



Beaver Blether 2. Thursday 9th March at the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie

A mix of land managers and the general public attended this event.

Attendees. 30

Written comments from the event;

- Very positive, interested in mitigation for beaver feeding on older native trees.
- Estate representative. Worried about impacts on salmon fishing.
- Useful info but remain unconvinced - am concerned that beaver may cause serious issues further down the line (especially on aspen).
- Very helpful and informative.
- Newtonmore resident – positive.

Four more local area residents visited for general interest and all were positive. Five attendees were from outwith the area. Aspen and fish migration were mentioned as topics of concern and those who brought them up wanted to find out more about them.

Beaver Blether 3. Thursday 22nd March. Community Hall, Kincaig.

Mainly the general public in attendance,

Attendees 23.

Written comments from the event;

- Positive, fully supportive, “enlightened” after the discussion.
- Very exciting
- Very Positive
- Salmon impacts. Spoken to Roger SFB.
- Great project..... lots of detailed information given.
- A wonderful visit, informative and reassuring.
- They would like Beaver on their estate.
- Fascinating, positive.
- More to learn
- Keen for a visit.
- Yes, to bringing Beaver back!
- RZSS are supportive.
- Looking forward to having Beaver in the area.



- Get it done!
- Positive, see opportunity for an increase in ecotourism. What about riparian trees – impact also material getting in the channels and blocking passage of watersports.
- Would like to see Beaver and have a visit from us.
- All very interesting
- Interesting
- Fascinating information.

Beaver Blether 4. Wednesday 22nd March. Youth Hostel, Aviemore.

Mainly the general public in attendance, a handful of land managers/ farmers,
Attendees. 12

Written comments from the event;

- Full support!
- Looking forward to beavers in the NP
- Not sure. X (no?) beavers Grantown.
- Interesting
- Follow up with site visit – worried about flooding of prime land for food production, concern of population explosion, what is the max capacity for beaver?
- Interesting. Love the idea.
- Let's see! Lots of pluses.
- Let's see! Lots of pluses.
- Correct idea – further north (*from the Central Belt*)
- Estate road erosion concerns.



Discussion

Opinions voiced

Similar to the 1998 public consultation, there was generally a split in opinion between landowners/ farmers and the general public. The former generally concerned about beavers impacting on farm/ land use income and the latter overwhelmingly positive. However, what has changed since 1998 is that some landowners, particularly diversified estates or farms, see the economic potential of beavers in relation to tourism.

Further information

Many attendees wanted more information about beavers in general and on some specific issues. The Park Authority will look to link Q&A material with scientific papers to back up our answers and allow those interested to delve deeper into the subject.

Maps, posters and interpretive materials

The maps showing the modelling of dam capacity and habitat suitability were very useful, of great interest and helped to facilitate detailed, site-specific discussions and further questions about beavers. The information available for folk to browse was well-received. Beaver props, such as a pelt and a skull, were great for a real “hands-on” experience.

Tea and biscuits

This went down very well and gave an informal and friendly feel to the event and encouraged people to stay a wee while longer.



Conclusions

The Beaver Blethers worked well; allowing, as hoped for, a neutral space to bring up concerns or issues that will inform the formal engagement process. Awareness about beaver's behaviour and their ecology was also raised.

The conversations were respectful and the time available to have an in-depth conversation was invaluable, as points could be made by both speakers and these fully responded to.

The impacts that beavers could have, which were brought up by those attending the Beaver Blethers, were all felt to be either mitigatable or avoidable. Details of how these techniques will be enacted and delivered will be contained in the Formal Engagement Document.