



## Sunart Rainforest - Working Group Meeting, Confirmed Minutes

**Location:** Online (Microsoft Teams) & Sunart Centre, School Road, Strontian

**Date:** 24.07.2025

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Attending:</b><br/>Rory Sinclair (Resipol)<br/>James Hilder (SCC Director)<br/>John Jones (SCC Chair)<br/>Ross MacLean – Stalker - Conaglen<br/>Malcolm Gillespie (Camusfearna)</p> <p><b>Apologies:</b><br/>Andrew McMaster (NatureScot)<br/>Mike Loginov (Camuschoirch)<br/>Ross Dunsmore (SGRPID)<br/>Paolo Berardelli &amp; Laura Sutherland (Ranachan Croft)<br/>Craig Holden (SCC Longrigg Coordinator)</p> | <p><b>Attending via Teams Link:</b><br/>Duncan Henderson (Arderly 2)<br/>Callum Strong (FLS)<br/>Nathan Berrie (NatureScot)<br/>Diane Baum (Woodland Trust)<br/>Jamie MacIntyre (Longrigg Woodland)<br/>Bruce Taylor (Brambletree)<br/>David Mosgrove (East Loch Shiel DMG)<br/>Alison Gainsford (SCC Treasurer)<br/>Euan Palmer (SCC Rainforest Coordinator)<br/>Mary Paton (SGRPID)</p> |
|---|---|

### 1. Welcome & Introductions

EP led introductions and noted given apologies. All present introduced themselves.

### 2. Actions From Last Meeting – 19<sup>th</sup> June 2025

**Action 1:** JH to amend Project Outcome 2a) and to make request for Andrew McMaster (NatureScot) to acknowledge change. – **Completed**

**Action 2:** EP to make introduction to WG through email correspondence. – **Completed**

**Action 3:** BT to share tender returns with JH, RS & EP for comment and feedback. – **Completed**

**Action 4:** JH to further enquire about WG nomination to support community engagement events. – **Completed**

**Action 5:** BT to submit additional funding request to Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest. – **Incomplete** - Application to be submitted 04/08/2025.

**Action 6:** JH to further pursue additional funding request with NatureScot. – **Completed**

**Action 7:** JH to publicise the Sunart Rainforest Project through social media and local media channels. – **Completed**



**Action 8:** JH & EP to set schedule for future Sunart Rainforest Working Group meetings. – **Completed** – see agenda with dates until end of March

### **3. Notes From Last Meeting**

Sunart Rainforest Working Group Meeting notes dated 19.06.2025 accepted as read. Proposed by John Jones. Seconded by Rory Sinclair.

### **4. Update on Tender Appointments**

BT updated WG on tenders received for future works. Tenders for future works have been separated into Lots 1, 2, 3 & 4.

#### **LOT 1 - INNS Drone and Ground Survey**

To date, no tenders have been returned for the ground survey of INNS across the SRP area. Due to the time of year, this work must now be deferred to the later part of the year. BT expects 3 parties to tender for this work.

**Action - BT** to re-issue tender for INNS ground survey in coming weeks.

#### **LOT 2 - Open Hill HIA and Woodland Expansion survey**

Gary Servant (Upland Ecology) was successful in winning this tender. This tender was combined with a tender return for Lot 4. However, GS has communicated a lack of time to complete work. BT to speak to GS to try work out a way to deliver this work before October.

#### **LOT 3 -Deer Management Plan and Nature Recovery Plan**

Victor Clements & Gary Servant (The Native Woods Co-operative (Scotland) Ltd) successful in winning this tender. GS has communicated eagerness to begin early consultation with landowners across SRP area.

RS noted open hill area is within the ELSDMG, and as such it is important that contractors consult with ELSDMG. BT confirmed that VC is aware of obligation to consult with ELSDMG.

#### **LOT 4 - Woodland Management Plans and GIS**

Gary Servant (Upland Ecology) was the only eventual bidder but the planned output was not in line with our requirements and the tender was over budget. BT noted frustration about tender return and has suggested an alternative. A further discussion with GS is required to emphasise specifications and delivery of the work required. The main output of this work is the production of a holistic WMP for the SRP area, which will be reflected in individual landowners WMP.

A roundtable discussion was had about the suitability of GS for delivering this work, after declining to continue with work included in LOT 2. RS & JH discussed the potential around Brambletree Management taking on this LOT. This would need express consent of committee. The committee were in agreement that this option is explored.

NB noted that the possibility of such an arrangement would need confirmation from SRP's NatureScot funding team, using the single tender justification request.

**Action – JH & EP** to make enquiry to NatureScot funding team about the option of appointing Brambletree Management to do work included in LOT 4.

## **5. Future Funding Opportunities**

### **a. Alliance for Scotland's Rainforests Funding Request (ASR) – Applications Open**

BT provided a background to the funding requests discussed in previous SRPWG meetings and Proposals 1-5 included in the agenda.

After some discussion JH suggested that support for proposals 3, (Herbivore Impact Assessment in March) 4 (equipment for community tree nursery), & 5 (additional revenue support for SCC to deliver the ASR project) can be taken for granted, given nature of already funded activities in SRP. This was agreed.

A discussion ensued regarding the two proposals of repairing the strategic deer fence and introducing a short-term incentive scheme for increased culling of deer within the fenced area:

NB kicked-off discussion around mechanism for implementing incentive scheme for cull headage payments. NB provided some background information on currently operational pilot schemes which NatureScot support. Any scheme implemented by SRP would need to be in line with payment, administrative and quality assurance mechanisms which other projects are currently operating with. Noted that deer culled on public land would not be eligible for headage payments.

CS gave an update to group on the larder capacity of the FLS Strontian Larder. There may be limited capacity this year, however there will be no capacity to take extra deer carcasses next year, as FLS plan to increase culling. CS noted that FLS strongly support the proposal to fix strategic deer fence, and are supportive of combining efforts to repair and maintain although no budget remains for this F/Yr.

CS also explained that FLS is currently seeking a 2026/7 core budget which will enable FLS to repair and install fencing through to Glenhurich, which will impact East/West deer migration and offers increased deer management opportunities from 2027 and beyond for the life of the fence. This could highlight opportunities for some new fencing in the east of the SRP area to reduce eastern porosity.

JM noted that including proposals 1 & 2 make for a stronger application. Suggested also exploring the option of the SCC acquiring the shooting rights on SGRPID land. MP expressed an interest in exploring this proposal further although was unfamiliar with community empowerment protocols. NB noted that this is a longer-term option so not applicable to the immediate pre-March 2025 ASR funding bid, as the sporting rights are currently let beyond spend deadline.



DM noted the difficulty in trying to pursue both proposals simultaneously. Culling deer inside fence will encourage more deer to transit porous fence and enter woodland. Strategic deer fence must be repaired for culling to be effective.

This was followed by a round table discussion about the practicalities of implementing a deer cull incentive scheme. NB noted that incentive schemes should be perceived as an over & above scheme to incentivise more culling of deer. There are various models for setting minimum cull requirements and qualification for headage payments. NB further added that with Proposal 1 thought must be given to the inclusion of compensatory culling. NatureScot likely to scrutinise funding request for fixing strategic deer fence based on accommodation of compensatory cull within proposal.

RS noted that deer management within the SRP should include perspectives that deer are sustainable business model to many within the group, and this must be recognised throughout any discussions around culling deer within the SRP area.

**Action DM** – to share current culling information available from ELSDMG to help inform possible targets for a pilot headage payment scheme

The meeting noted PB's (Ranachan Croft) paper circulated within the last 24 hours, which critiqued the effectiveness of fencing, and urged more intensive culling effort over the long term. Many of the recommendations contained therein relate to longer term deer and INNS management.

The meeting conceded that in order to make an immediate impact, improving existing fencing would enable greater control of the numbers within the existing woodland areas providing an immediate opportunity to reduce herbivore impact.

**Action: EP – BT** continue to liaise with fencing contractors to obtain outline costings for the repairing the fence (especially the eastern 9 km) which can inform the funding application. Notes that one contractor intend to walk the fence line to offer a more detailed tender in the coming fortnight.

**Action: EP / BT / JH** to include proposal for a modest incentive scheme pre-March 2026 in the funding application (although operational details will require further work)

BT summarised the discussion by outlining the timeline for completing the works set out in Proposals 1-5. Attendees accepted that the funding bid should be submitted based on Proposals set out in agenda and discussed at meeting.

JH outlined steps to be taken for completing ASR funding application before 04.08.2025. CS requested sight of application before submission, for opportunity to give feedback.

**Action - EP** to share draft application with WG before submission. Noted that there is very limited time to receive feedback on final form.

**Action – BT, EP & JH** to submit ASR funding application before deadline on 04.08.2025.

b. NatureScot Underspend Response

JH noted that no further correspondence was received from NatureScot.

**6. Draft Terms of Reference for Committee**

a. Confirmation of agreement from NatureScot.

SRP Objectives still need final approval from NatureScot.

b. Review and adopt edit.

ToR to be accompanied by comprehensive guidelines for voting eligibility. Meeting accepted that should a decision of the working group come to a vote then only those directly representing landholdings within the project area would have a vote. However, there were other factors to consider:

- a) The scale of landholding – i.e. should the owner of a small croft have the same voting eligibility as the owner of much larger landholding?
- b) Who should vote – should there be a vote per land owner, or should the party actually managing the land or deer management on the ground also get a vote. E.g. RPID have acquired the sporting rights over a large area of hill, but don't own the land. In some cases, these rights have been sublet.

**Action – JH** to draft comprehensive list of voting members before next SRPWG meeting.

**7. Proposed Dates of Next Meetings:**

All attendees in agreement of proposed dates for future SRPWG meetings. Meetings to be held simultaneously in online and in-person format. Sunart Centre has been booked for every month for those wishing to attend in person.