



VAT. No. 310378531

Minutes of the ACF Board Meeting held in Kilmorack Hall on Monday 20th June 2022 at 1900.

Present

Peter Smith PS
John Graham JG
Madeleine Robinson MR
Andrew Leaver AL
Russell Ross RR
Jo Young JY
Neil Valentine NV
Phil Masheter PM
Bob Hemingway BH
Chloe Denerley CD
Graeme Scott GS

In Attendance

Helge Hansen HH
Sir John Lister-Kaye JLK

Apologies

Hermione Jackson HJ
Mark Hedderwick MH

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

None declared

Minutes of Previous Board Meeting of 7th March 2022

These minutes had been circulated to the Board in advance.
Proposed JG. Seconded BH. Approved.

Chairman's Business

Nothing raised.

Vice-Chairman's Business

Nothing raised.

Report from Helge Hansen, Forest Manager

Windblow clearing continues. A bigger machine is being brought in to deal with some particularly large trees. Hopefully this will be completed by mid July. Road closures are planned during the school holidays while roadside work is completed. This is difficult dangerous work and HH emphasised the need to check the safety of the area carefully after Scottish Woodlands have finished. Work on the area around the blue path has been delayed to avoid disturbing a buzzard nest but will resume as soon as the nest is empty.

HH has spoken to Davy Reid and hopefully fencing work will resume shortly.

The claim form for the final funding from the Highland Council Nature Restoration Fund grant needs to be submitted by 30th June 2022. Delays caused by storm damage make this deadline difficult. HH and PS will explain the position to the Highland Council.

It was agreed that ACF will use Andy Drane of Davidson, Chalmers and Stewart as legal representatives in the contract negotiations with SSEN relating to biodiversity credits. SSEN have agreed to cover our reasonable legal costs. The contract for the first 3ha is being prepared and there is the possibility of a further 10ha project. ACF will be paid £8,000 per hectare planted. Other schemes such as wetland creation are being discussed in addition to this. JG requested that the areas involved should be shown to the Board on a map. HH confirmed that it will be a condition of any contract that changes have been approved by Scottish Forestry.

Paths and Access Group

Met on 15th June. Notes on the meeting were circulated to the Board and the full notes from the subgroup are attached to these minutes below. The group discussed the new signage proposed by the Highland Council relating to access to the River Beauly and Aigas Gorge. A sign will be sited at the lay-by. The proposed sign marks with a red dot an access point from the lay-by to the river. The subgroup recommended that ACF should endorse the sign and allow their logo to be used only if the red dot is removed. If the red dot is not removed the Highland Council should be asked formally on what basis they believe they have the right to indicate a specific (and implicitly safe) route to access the river without the agreement of the land owner.

JLK requested that it be minuted that he had never at any time agreed to the inclusion of the red dot on the signage due to the proximity of that access point to the osprey nest.

PS confirmed that the Board wholeheartedly supports the protection of wildlife. He will respond to the Highland Council Access Officer, Stuart Easthaugh.

JG will raise the matter with local councillors.

Various other measures to encourage responsible behaviour from visitors to the Gorge were discussed.

BH has still not received any quotes for the low level loop path but hopefully 2 are in the pipeline.

Deer Management

Not met.

Wood Fuel

Not met. The question of whether ACF should deliver firewood is to be discussed by the subgroup.

Wildlife and Ecology

Met on 6th June. Notes from the meeting were circulated to the Board. NV summarised that there will be a focus on biodiversity recording in specific areas with exchange of information between ACF and AFC to establish baseline data. Water course surveys will be included. Ways to engage public interest will be explored and developed.

The Board agreed to a request from CD for access to ACF by a group studying moths.

NV and CD will liaise to fix a date for an on-site meeting as soon as possible.

Business Improvement Review Group

Not met.

Financial Report

JG said that the bank balance stood at around £406,000 once outstanding payments go in. HH estimated another £30,000 is due from wood sales.

Secretary

An Open Day will be held on 17th September.

The AGM followed by a Board meeting will be held on Monday 19th September at 1900 In Kilmorack Hall.

AOCB

NV suggested a possible donation to the Beaulieu and District Care Project. There was some general discussion of what the criteria should be for charitable donations. The BIRG will consider this and report back to the Board.

The meeting closed at 20.54

Aigas Community Forest Paths & Access Committee Meeting

15th June 22

Present:

David Garvie (Chair), Madeleine Robinson, Jo Young, Bob Hemingway, Russell Ross, Neil Valentine, Helge Hansen, Stephen Cotterill, Cathryn Cotterill (minutes)

Apologies: Peter Smith, Mark Hedderick, Fiona Nicholson, Kyle McArthur.

The Committee discussed the new sign proposed by Highland Council Properties & Facilities Management Dept relating to access to the River Beauly and Aigas Gorge.

It was agreed that in principle the new sign is helpful in asking people not to use the river during the breeding season of protected birds and also in setting out the Code of Conduct to act responsibly at any time when using the river.

The Committee agreed however that the red dot placed by Highland Council indicating an access point to the river is unacceptable for following reasons:

- The dot suggests a formal and maintained route and point of access to the river. This is not the case. The Committee acknowledges that members of the public have a right of access but individuals need to exercise that right at their own discretion and subject to their own assessment of the risk of using a steep bank whilst carrying canoes/boards. The dot implies a safe and recommended route down (and up) a steep bank over ACF land and in doing so could create additional liability for ACF.
- Not marking the point of access will not be detrimental to users and will not limit access rights in any way. Members of public already use that route to the river bank without the need for a marker on the map and in doing so are making their own assessment of the suitability of the route for their ability.

The Committee recommends endorsing the sign with ACF logos subject to the red dot being removed. If Highland Council refuse to remove the red dot the Committee recommends that:

1. ACF does not endorse the sign
2. Highland Council be asked formally, on what basis they believe they have the right to indicate a specific (and implicitly safe) route to access the river without the agreement of the land owner.

More generally, concern was expressed by a number of those present about the ongoing risk of disruption to wildlife in the Gorge; it was recognised that this needs to be balanced with access rights and continues to be a broader discussion out with the specific issue relating to the signs.