



**CONSULTATION BY SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE:  
PROTECTING SCOTLAND'S RED SQUIRRELS –  
A draft strategy for targeted grey squirrel control**

**RESPONSE BY SCOTTISH ESTATES BUSINESS GROUP**

**1. BACKGROUND**

The Scottish Estates Business Group (SEBG) represents a group of progressive land-based estates with significant agricultural and rural business interests. It aims to promote a modern business approach in the management of Scotland's land resource in ways which deliver social, economic and environmental benefits. The group seeks to secure a sustainable and prosperous future for rural areas.

Estates are proven business models that assist the development of smaller rural businesses, and landowners and estates have a vital role to play in the ongoing and future development and prosperity of Scotland. SEBG is committed to rural economies and its members work hard across Scotland to stimulate enterprise and economic development.

**2. OVERVIEW**

SEBG welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft strategy for targeted grey squirrel control, and agrees with its overall aims. Scotland's Estates play host to a number of red squirrel strongholds, and readily recognise the threats posed by burgeoning populations of greys and the squirrelpox they are known to be able to transmit. A partnership of public, private and voluntary sector interests is essential if efforts to protect and promote Scotland's indigenous population of red squirrels are to be successful. Members of SEBG are already involved in Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels and the Red Squirrels in South Scotland (RSSS) Project and support the efforts of these groups. We have also seen and fully endorse the response of the RSSS Project Steering Group to the draft strategy for targeted grey squirrel control, and add our comments, below, in support of their submission on this consultation.

**3. RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS**

Q1. Do the aims of the Strategy cover all the actions needed to protect red squirrels? If not why not?

The four main aims of the Strategy as set out – to control and where possible remove the risk of squirrelpox virus to red squirrels in Scotland; to prevent further spread of grey squirrels in Scotland; to support a core population of red squirrels; and to ensure all mechanisms agreed under the strategy are in place by December 2009 – are fairly comprehensive. However, SEBG suggests there is another key element which should be added, that of Communication.

For the Strategy to be effective there is a need for widespread public understanding of the issues faced and support for the action needed to tackle them. This will be essential not only to underpin the vigilance needed to challenge successfully the rampant progress across Scotland of greys and the lethal virus they carry, but also to ensure continued public backing for the financial support needed to

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prevent the annihilation of the reds. Some form of continuing information programme should be added to the Strategy to ensure that effort is also devoted, on a regular basis, to briefing audiences, at both a local and national level, on the progress being made, how it might be supported, and sharing best practice.

Q2. Do you think the Strategy can be adequately managed using this structure? If not why not?

The partnership approach as set out is clearly the way to go - the public, private and voluntary sectors each have contribution to make. But the partnership will need to be maintained carefully if it is to be effective in delivering the objectives of the Strategy. There will need to be exemplary co-ordination between initiatives such as Save Scotland's Red Squirrels, Red Squirrels in South Scotland, the local groups of key stakeholders and the national steering group, if the project is to be successful in achieving its aims. It will also be important that those overseeing the Strategy at a national level take account of the views and particularly the practical experience and expertise of those people "on the ground" who are required to implement it.

SEBG would further suggest that management of the Strategy should also include regular liaison with similar groups and organisations in the north of England who are engaged in similar activities in order share experience and best practice – squirrels know no political or administrative boundaries.

Q3. Do you think the Scottish Rural Development Programme is the best way to pay for the work involved in controlling grey squirrels under this Strategy? If not why not?

The SRDP is certainly one route by which funding might be directed towards programmes to protect the reds. The system is up and running and includes an element of European funding. However, experience has shown it to be difficult to access, and with funding priorities set at a regional level, direction will be needed from the Rural Directorate about the importance which should be attached to projects aimed at grey squirrel control, in order to ensure they are given the level of financial backing needed. Further, the Strategy must necessarily be long term – longer than the current SRDP – if it is to succeed, so funding support requires similarly to be long-term. Some form of commitment to future funding needs to be given by SNH if projects are to have any confidence that they will be sufficiently long-lived that they will be able to deliver their objectives.

Q4. Does the Strategy identify appropriate locations for controlling grey squirrels to protect red squirrels? If not why not?

The locations identified by the Strategy are appropriate – for now. But it will be important that the Strategy is flexible and responsive enough to be able to accommodate promptly any changes to targeted areas should evidence emerge that the incidence either of greys or of squirrelopox are not being adequately controlled or of outbreak into other areas. This will require regular monitoring and sampling, not only in existing target areas for action, but across adjacent areas too.

**SEBG**  
**10<sup>th</sup> August '09**

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