



Future of the SSRS and RSSS Projects

14 March 2012

Summary

- SNH has confirmed 2 further years funding at their current rate of contribution of £175k.p.a. This will be allocated across SSRS and RSSS. Previously the funding came from the Species Action Framework budget, but with this Framework coming to an end, it will now come from the Biodiversity Programme funding.
- Forestry Commission Scotland is to continue their central funding of £7k p.a., with another £30k coming to us via local conservancies and District Offices. They will continue to fund 3 grey squirrel control officers to work on National Forest Estate in South Scotland in co-ordination with RSSS.
- SWT has committed £50k p.a. of its own funding and has embarked on raising the matched funding to bring the total up to an estimated £900k over the two years. Aberdeen Greenspace has confirmed a contribution of £33k p.a. and other applications are pending. This leaves £324K still to find.
- Targeted grey squirrel control is to continue for two more years in South Scotland and Grampian as the priorities; and in Tayside and Argyll & Trossachs where resources allow.
- There is to be a continuation of gathering data on the efficacy of grey squirrel control in terms of long-term sustainability, costs and outcomes for red squirrels.
- We are to seek to establish a national monitoring framework for squirrel distributions based on the SSRS tetrad system of presence/absence surveys. In south Scotland, these surveys are to be carried out, whereas elsewhere, mechanisms for getting them done need to be explored and reported on.
- RSSS is to be brought under management by SWT for the two years, which should bring data handling and analysis assistance and expertise to south Scotland.
- SNH anticipates that a successor to SRDP will be set in place during the next 2 years. We will have to wait to see if it will continue to support red squirrel conservation.

Objectives of Phase 2

- Secure long-term control efforts (mainly by SRDP) in key gaps identified by SSRS Phase 1 and RSSS Phase IV.
- Improve the targeting of grey squirrel control work across the Central Lowlands to prevent incursions into the Highlands and Grampian if funding is secured.
- Improve the targeting of grey squirrel control work in South Scotland to squirrelpox outbreak areas and seropositive areas rather than attempting to maintain a grey free zone, and with less work to protect red squirrels from competitive replacement by grey squirrels.
- In South Scotland, SRDP eligibility boundaries need to be re-assessed in view of recent changes in the distribution of squirrelpox.
- Liaison with FCS to co-ordinate grey squirrel control in defence of Strongholds.
- Continue the work to reduce grey squirrel populations in Aberdeen, to reduce numbers and spread in rural Aberdeenshire.

- By the end of 2013, produce a report identifying costs and benefits of grey squirrel control to benefit red squirrel conservation, with recommendations on the level of financial and grey squirrel control commitment required to deliver this effectively long-term.
- Increase surveillance of squirrelpox seroprevalence to enable early detection of new locations: with a systematic sampling network and an increased number of sampling locations.
- Awareness-raising activities and educational activities to have a lower priority than at present.
- SWT envisages that Karen's and 3 GSCO posts will continue, but with modifications to re-focus grey squirrel activity.
- In Grampian we expect to have a PO, 1 F/T GSCO and two seasonal controllers.
- In Tayside we will retain Ken, and so far have funding for this year for 3 seasonal GSCOs working a shorter season than last year.
- In Argyll and Trossachs, we will be retaining Lewis in a 0.5 post, and subject to success with a LEADER application, a seasonal GSCO.
- We are hoping to raise sufficient funds to take on another 0.5 Project officer and a 0.5 Data and Survey officer for South Scotland – possibly combined as one post.
- SWT also intends to take on a 0.6 Survey and Data officer for the SSRS half of the project.

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