



Scottish Mink Initiative
Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland
Information Sheet

1. Purpose

This document summarises the background, aims and objectives of the Scottish Mink Initiative (www.scottishmink.org.uk).

2. Background

The project is funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, Tubney Charitable Trust, Cairngorms National Park Authority and the Scottish Government and the European Community Cairngorms, Highland, Moray, Rural Aberdeenshire and Rural Tayside Local Action Groups LEADER 2007-2013 Programme. It is a partnership between the Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland (RAFTS), University of Aberdeen, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and at least 16 other organisations¹. This partnership represents a broad range of stakeholders including national government agencies, conservation and local organisations, estates and the general public with a network of over 100 trained volunteers that will be involved in project implementation.

The project, implemented over two and half years (01 April 2011 to 31 August 2013), builds upon and expands the work of three previous independently funded sister projects (the Cairngorms Water Vole Conservation Project; the North East of Scotland Water Vole Project; and the North West Highlands Mink Control Project) that were implemented from May 2007 to March 2010. These projects have developed best practice in delivery of control, as well as gathering extensive data to provide greater understanding of mink ecology.

3. Justification

The project addresses a number of key issues of conservation and economic importance, and is consistent with, and contributes to, key biodiversity and invasive non native species policies, strategies and plans.

The most significant of these are set out below:

- By eliminating predation by an invasive non native predator, the project will contribute to the protection of:
 - Nationally significant populations of water voles, salmonids, ground nesting birds² and other native riparian biodiversity;
 - Economically important populations of salmonids and game birds;
- Engages communities in the management and conservation of biodiversity in their local areas.

¹ The Cairngorms National Park Authority; Marine Scotland; Forestry Commission Scotland; River Dee Trust; Spey Fishery Board; Deveron, Bogie and Isla Trust; Cromarty Firth Fisheries Trust; the Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust; the Ness & Beaully Fisheries Trust; the Wester Ross Fisheries Trust; the West Sutherland Fisheries Trust; Esk Rivers Fisheries Trust; River Don Trust; Tay Foundation; Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Fisheries Trust; and the Ythan Fisheries Trust.

² Vulnerable species include: black-throated diver, red-throated diver, common scoter, greenshank, redshank, lapwing, curlew, oystercatcher, snipe and several other species of waterfowl and seabirds.





- Links applied research on mink genetics and dispersal behaviour to conservation management.
- Builds on the success and momentum generated by the previous projects and consolidates and expands their achievements over an expanded geographic area;
- Implements actions outlined in the:
 - UKBAP for protecting water voles and other species of conservation importance by removal of mink a key predator of those species thereby contributing to UKBAP targets;
 - GB Invasive Non-native Species Strategy Framework;
 - Species Action Framework;
 - Biosecurity Plans and Fisheries Management Plans of the thirteen participating Rivers and Fisheries Trusts. These plans, in turn, contribute to the relevant Water Framework Directive River Basin and Area Management Plans.
- The broad scale multi-catchment scale of the project is consistent with the broader strategic approach to mink control proposed by SNH during 2009 and endorsed by SNH's Scientific Advisory Committee.
- Contributes to the management of Habitats Directive SACs and SPAs where some of the species that form the qualifying interest for the sites are vulnerable to mink predation.
- Contributes to the management of SSSI with species vulnerable to mink predation.
- Through the removal of non-native predatory mink contributes to the maintenance and restoration of the ecological integrity of a range of coastal, riparian, woodland, urban and other habitats.

4. Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of the project is:

The protection of nationally significant populations of water voles, salmonids, ground nesting birds and other native riparian biodiversity by establishing a sustainable management framework to create and maintain an area free of breeding mink extending from the mid-Tay to the South Esk, around the east coast to the River Nairn; with a belt reaching from Dornoch and Cromarty on the east to Ullapool on the west.

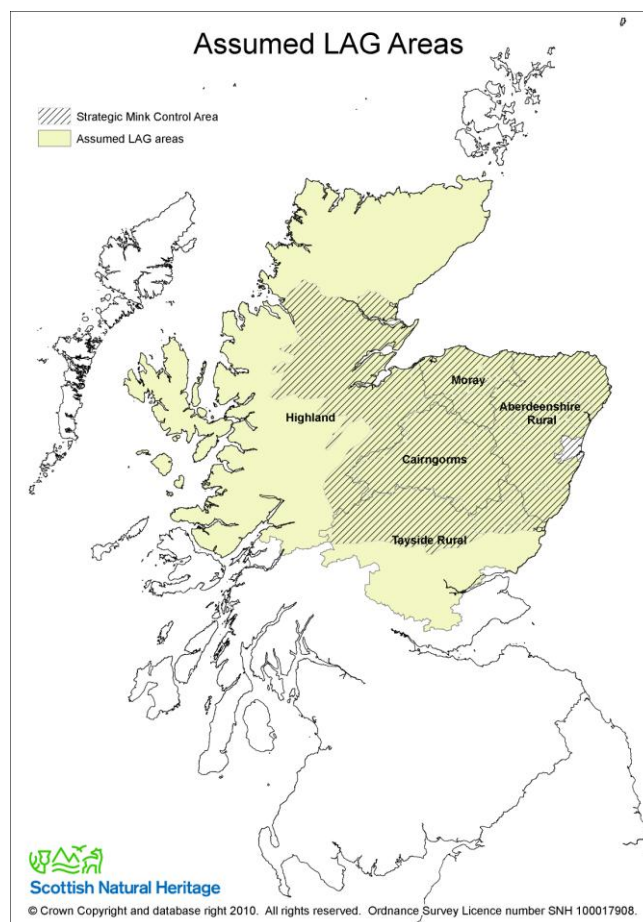
The aim of the Project will be achieved by the realisation of the following objectives:

1. To eradicate breeding mink from an area extending from the mid-Tay to the South Esk, around the east coast to the River Nairn; with a belt reaching from Dornoch and Cromarty on the east to Ullapool on the west, preventing mink encroachment to the far north (map A).
2. To ensure the long term sustainability of mink control in the project areas through the coordinated and resourced transfer of responsibility for ongoing mink management to local organisations.
3. To raise awareness of the benefits of the community-based and adaptive management approach to invasive non-native species management



Key outcomes of the project will be:

- A mink free zone extending from the mid-Tay to the South Esk, around the east coast to the River Nairn; with a belt reaching from Dornoch and Cromarty on the east to Ullapool on the west;
- A 'monitoring zone' to protect the mink-free areas of northern Scotland, which are of immense biodiversity importance, from potential mink incursion;
- A sustainable locally based management framework to prevent future recolonisation of mink free areas; and
- An engaged network of informed volunteers that participate in mink and possibly other invasive non native control and eradication initiatives.



Map A. Northern Scotland strategic mink control area.

5. Strategy

The project will incorporate and further develop key elements that contributed to the previous related projects namely:

- A community based approach in establishing and maintaining mink monitoring and trapping networks;
- The utilisation of an adaptive management strategy;



- The linkage between applied research and elements of the management strategy; and
- The employment of a dedicated and coordinated project team to ensure the objectives, activities and implementation strategy are achieved.

The co-operative community-based approach utilises the expertise and experience of the existing skilled workforce, made up of gamekeepers, fishing ghillies, water bailiffs, other wildlife and conservation professionals and local residents to operate the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) mink raft, which has proved an effective device for both monitoring and trapping mink.

The project will establish a cohesive network of mink monitoring rafts across the project area (Map A), with mink rafts to be established at optimal intervals on target catchments.

Support for this network will be provided by the project staff who will work closely with nominated representatives from the participating fishery trusts and other local organisations. Staff will maintain and develop the already good links with current and potential future mink raft operators in their respective areas. Project staff will recruit and motivate the volunteers and coordinate their efforts to ensure a systematic and efficient approach with no replication of effort is maintained. In some areas, where there are gaps in volunteer coverage, project staff will also have mink monitoring and trapping responsibilities. The project will also collect data (using standard protocols) from and deliver training (as required) to raft operators individually and at group training days.

The raft and trap network will serve to:

- Protect the Ythan, upper Spey and upper Dee catchments that are now free of breeding mink;
- Eradicate breeding mink from the rest of the Dee and Spey catchments; and
- Expand to eradicate breeding mink from the South Esk, North Esk, Bervie, the Aberdeenshire Carron, Cowie, Don, Cruden, Deveron, the Sutherland Carron, Fleet, Oykel, Einig, Kanaird, Ullapool, upper Tay, Isla, Ugie, Strathbeg, Philorth, Lossie, Findhorn, Nairn and Ness catchments.

The community-based nature of the project will allow the conservation practices and, therefore, the benefits of the project, to be sustainable in the long term.

In doing this the project will instigate, facilitate and finalise the comprehensive transfer of mink control to local organisations particularly, but not necessarily exclusively, individual rivers and fisheries trusts. The transfer will be triggered when catchments reach a stage where raft and volunteer coverage is sufficiently high, and mink activity sufficiently low, for this to be an acceptable financial and staff commitment for those bodies. The transfer of responsibilities envisaged can only take place if willing partner organisations are, themselves, prepared to accept this role and have sufficient capacity and necessary resources in place. This transfer will ensure development from a project coordinated by project staff and funded by large national/regional packages, to a lower-cost project, primarily run by local organisations to maintain mink monitoring/control on a local scale.

Furthermore, the project will establish a response mechanism to rapidly deploy rafts and traps to deal with any re-invasion of previously declared mink free areas.





It is also vital that the wider community, including local residents and visitors, understand and support the action. Therefore, education will be a crucial element of the programme, both for the general public and the active participants. Project activities will include:

- Communication of the project's outputs and outcomes through a programme of outreach events and production of written material including:
 - Education visits to schools, community groups
 - Production and dissemination of interpretation information
 - Production and dissemination of briefings, technical reports and project plan updates
 - Regular press releases and broadcast media activity
 - Regular newsletter for stakeholders
 - Regular website updates
 - Contributions to relevant seminars and conferences through posters and presentations

6 The Post and Management Arrangements

RAFTS on behalf of the project partnership of RAFTS, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Wildlife Trust and University of Aberdeen are seeking applicants for the position of Mink Control Officer for Rural Aberdeenshire.

The fixed term position commences in April 2012 and terminates on the 31st August 2013.

The project is funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, Tubney Charitable Trust, Cairngorms National Park Authority and the Scottish Government and the European Community Cairngorms, Highland, Moray, Rural Aberdeenshire and Rural Tayside Local Action Groups LEADER 2007-2013 Programme.

The **Mink Control Officer** will work in Rural Aberdeenshire and will be responsible for recruiting and maintaining volunteer networks, coordinating the management of the network of rafts and traps, promoting awareness, building local capacity and monitoring the outcomes and impacts of the project.

Salary is anticipated to be between £22 000 - £26 000 depending on experience.

7. Further information

Further general information on RAFTS is available from our website: www.rafts.org.uk

For further information on this project or to discuss the position in confidence contact:

Hollie Walker (Strategic Mink Initiative Coordinator)

Mail: hollie@rafts.org.uk

Mobile: 07825 183037

8. Making an application

The closing date for applications is Wednesday 22nd February 2012.





Applications of c.v and covering letter which together will fully set out your skills and experience for the position should be received not later than Wednesday 22nd February 2012 to the address below or (preferred) in electronic format to hollie@rafts.org.uk.

Mink Control Officer Application
RAFTS
Capital Business Centre
24 Canning Street
Edinburgh
EH3 8EG

Interviews will be held in Edinburgh on the 2nd of March 2012.

