

## **Summary Report on Boat of Garten consultation - Wednesday 11 January 2012**

### **Background to interviews**

The purpose of the consultation was to ask people who use Boat of Garten woods for recreation whether they support various options for reducing the impacts of people on capercaillie, and how effective they are likely to be. Interviews were held with 49 people during the afternoon and early evening of 11<sup>th</sup> January 2012. One person who was housebound submitted a letter with comments which were recorded on line using survey analysis software and a further one was interviewed at the office on 13 January. A total of 51 interviews were thus recorded. Interviews were held individually where possible but several were undertaken jointly due to pressure of time and numbers of interested people who attended the drop-in. Separate survey sheets were however filled out for each applicant either at the time or retrospectively. Some 'couples' were interviewed together and recorded on a single survey sheet.

Five members of staff from the CNPA and SNH undertook the interviews. The data from the interviews was subsequently entered into the analysis software and results generated from that.

### **Key findings**

#### **1. Path Closures in areas most sensitive for capercaillie – permanent and seasonal**

Around 20% of people interviewed supported permanent closure of the 6 paths identified, and around 5% supported closing the car park. There were concerns that people wouldn't accept closure and that new paths would develop as a result.

People's attitudes towards seasonal closure of sensitive paths were more varied, but only around 30% of people supported this. Although there was recognition that seasonal closure would benefit capercaillie, the length of time of closure (1 April to 15 August) was of concern and felt to impact negatively on people at the best time of the year to be in the woods. In respect of alternative paths that could be used in event of closure, some people identified no others; some identified the rest of the woods and some pointed to the Salmon Trail which follows the west bank of the River Spey from the bridge southwards passed Wester Dalvout, across the railway line and linking to the south end of Kinchurdy road.

#### **2. Dog Walking**

Half the respondents indicated that they walked a dog around Boat of Garten. Of these over 90% walked a dog in the Boat woods. The top factors in favour of the woods paths are - in order of importance - that they are close to home, dogs can be run off lead, they are quiet and peaceful, away from traffic, and away from livestock. Over half the dog walkers indicated that ALL the paths in Boat woods were important. There was no overall preference for a single route, although circular routes in the north and north east corners of the woods (closest to the bulk of population) appeared the most popular.

#### **Dogs off lead**

Nearly two thirds of the respondents indicated that they let their dogs off lead in the woods, generally anywhere in the woods although several indicated that they keep their dogs on leads at sensitive times of year (1 April to 15 August). Half of those said that their dogs range over 10m away from the paths.

The most popular places for walking dogs aside from Boat woods were the Bonfire Field, Garten woods paths in Abernethy, and the Salmon Trail. Loch Vaa was also identified. A significant factor which would make the Salmon Trail more attractive to dog walkers was separation from livestock as a bull and cow and calves are run in open fields at times throughout the year.

In terms of opportunities for developing alternative paths for off-lead dog walking outwith the woods, a significant number of people felt there were no options. There was, however, support for an exercise area in the bonfire Field and a new route from here to Milton loch. Fencing and gate improvements would need to be done to make these viable alternatives. Breeding waders were also identified as a seasonal issue for these fields but these are mostly away from the existing houses. The east and west banks of the Spey were also identified as with potential for path development.

### **Dogs on leads in sensitive parts of the woods**

Around two thirds of dog walking interviewees indicated that they would be willing to keep their dogs on a lead *at all times* in the more sensitive areas – a slightly higher proportion (71%) indicated their willingness to do so on a *seasonal* basis. The dog play area proposal did not meet with support, mainly because it was considered that such an area was likely to be too small to properly exercise a dog in.

### **3. People off paths**

Half the interviewees indicated that they did go off paths in the woods but of these three quarters said it was once a month or less. Picking mushrooms and berries was the most common activity, and one very specific shortcut (between path no. 25 and path 9) was mentioned by several people. The other activities for which people went off path were wildlife related e.g. botanical recording, bird surveys and skiing was also mentioned. Around a fifth of interviewees said they venture off paths in the areas most sensitive for capercaillie which were shown on the map.

### **4. Screening between paths and areas most used by capercaillie**

#### **Vegetation screening**

Vegetation screening met with the support of around three quarters of people, and “to help capercaillie” was cited as the main reason for support. A significant qualifier to this was that natives only should be used – spruce was not popular, nor holly (though holly is a native to the area – it is found in Glenmore).

#### **Temporary screening using hessian fencing**

Incorporating hessian fencing as a temporary screen until the natural vegetation screening was effective was supported by about 50% of respondents. Although there was recognition that it would benefit capercaillie, there was also a feeling that it would be unsightly and would provide a poorer quality of experience for users.

### **5. Management Measures to promote compliance with path closures or requests to keep dogs on leads**

Of all the management measures proposed those with the most support and felt most likely to succeed in promoting public compliance were educational ones. Information signs, articles in community newsletters, promoting alternative routes, welcome packs for residents, (vegetative)

screening and a ranger were the top measures identified. A small minority of people did not support any works to benefit capercaillie, mostly because they did not consider this a good use of public money.

Regulatory or methods that relied on enforcement were not at all popular – support for a ranger was qualified by the need for such a person to have a strongly educational, community based role, similar to that of Explore Abernethy.

The strong overall message was that it would be much better to work constructively with the community using encouragement, good information and awareness raising, rather than trying to 'police' use of the woods or use enforcement.