

GLENMORISTON DMG MEETING
Held at Glenmoriston Memorial Hall, Invermoriston
on Tuesday 10th May at 7pm

Present

Martin Girvan	DMG Chair. Ceannacroc
Lynda Campbell	DMG Treasurer, Corriclair
Linzi Seivwright	DMG Secretary
Allan Common	Dundreggan, Trees for Life
Doug Gilbert	Dundreggan, Trees for Life
Jimmy Gibb	Balmacaan
Willie Fraser	Chair Affric and Kintail
Sinclair Coghill	SNH
Russell Cooper	FCS
Wat Forbes	Corrimony
Tom Girvan	Tomcrasky
Mike Toms	Community Representative
Alan Boulton	Plan Author, Huntaway Consulting
Alison McKnight	Consultant

A minute's silence was held in memory of the late Professor Duncan Poore.

1. Apologies

Simon McLaughlin RSPB Corrimony

Alan McIntosh Wester Guisigan

2. Draft Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday 16th February.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

A point about the wording in the Minutes of the meeting held in February was raised regarding the process of Authorisations and Out of Season shooting.

It was agreed that applications should be brought to the Group and discussed in the first instance with the opportunity to try and find solutions.

3. Matters Arising.

There were no matters arising.

4. Chairman's Report.

The Chairman reported the passing of Professor Duncan Poore - a great man, whose wealth of knowledge of local environmental information was a great loss.

The helicopter count had been conducted in March 2016 and would be reported on later in the meeting under Agenda Item 7.

The Chairman reported on a meeting held on 9th of May of the South Ross DMG Liaison Group. This is an informal group that gathers to discuss cross-DMG issues. Most of the discussion had surrounded the development of Deer Management Plans which were in various stages of development.

The meeting had given support in principle to SWARD (a deer management database tool for deer managers that is currently being developed by ADMG) which requires further funding to finish the project and to roll it out across DMGs. The Liaison Group recognised the value of such an initiative and had agreed to support ADMG raising possible additional funding through an increase in subscriptions if this was required.

5. Deer Management Plan

The Deer Management Plan author Alan Boulton (AB) provided an update on progress with the development of the Plan. He reported that it was almost complete and that most have commented, with comments being straightforward.

The following elements of the plan were discussed:

Aims and Objectives: Trees for Life, in an email circulated to the Group, had proposed the following paragraph to replace the current aims and objectives in the plan:

“There is a conflict of objectives within the DMG. The majority of estates wish to carry out stalking activity for sporting enjoyment or as part of a sporting business, based on red deer stag stalking. As a consequence, they feel that the numbers of deer on the open hill should be maintained at approximately current (2016) levels in order to maintain the numbers of stags available for stalking. A minority of owners have nature conservation, and in particular native woodland expansion, as a primary objective with the consequential desire to see browsing levels reduced to a point where natural regeneration can occur. The DMG as a whole respects these differences, has adopted a conciliatory approach within its constitution (see statements in the “Membership” section above) and has resolved to address the conflict between these objectives through constructive dialogue.

The aim of this group is therefore to find ways, through discussion, information exchange and expert input, to meet the reasonable objectives of all members.”

The Group agreed to the wording and the Plan to be amended.

Action AB

Out of Season Shooting: it was agreed that the plan should be amended to reflect the discussion under Agenda Item 2.

Action AB

General Public: liaison with the general public including attendance at meetings and meeting minutes of the Group being available on the website was discussed and agreed that both would be adopted.

Population Models: AB indicated that these had been amended in light of the recent count figures.

Deer Density: Following the count, the current deer density for the Group was around 9 deer per km² (similar to neighbouring Affric and Kintail DMG). The Chairman commended AB on the last DMP as numbers counted had been what was expected.

Dundreggan noted that the density reported had been calculated including open range not available for deer therefore the density of 12.9 deer per km² was lower than in reality. SNH commented that not all fenced areas are reported or accounted for in the count figures, so if anyone wished to amend this, they should contact SNH.

There followed a discussion about the proposed target density for the Group taking into account the sustainable harvest of 220 stags currently required by the Group. In theory this would require a population of some 1650 stags (7.5 times the annual stag cull, 1650 hinds (based on a 1:1 sex ratio) plus calves (at approx. 30% recruitment rate). This final population figure would give broadly the current total population of the Group (737 stags, 2275 hinds, 689 calves) but it was noted that the population is skewed towards hinds (with a sex ratio of approximately 1:3).

There followed a discussion about the potential impact of having a hind biased sex ratio and the continued sustainable harvest of 220 stags.

The Chairman of Affric and Kintail reported that the count had flagged up generally throughout the South Ross area, that most groups had noticed an increase in numbers particularly hinds (the current South Ross total is 9406 stags, 16137 hinds and 4850 calves). He indicated that in the past this had been less of an issue because most had broadly the same objectives. It was noted however, that in Affric and Kintail, both Forest Enterprise and NTS were intending to significantly reduce deer numbers. It was also noted that whilst reducing hinds is a critical element of a reduction cull, this can in cases lead to stags being drawn into areas.

There was concern however, that reductions in hind numbers may make it harder to attract stags and achieve the stag cull.

The point was made that everyone should be considering the implications of the numbers of deer they currently hold and think about what management is needed if they wish to continue to hold stags during the season.

Group Boundaries: in light of proposed reduction culls to be implemented in Affric and Kintail, the Group discussed current DMG boundaries. The issue of DMG boundaries had also been discussed at the South Ross Liaison meeting. Following discussion it was generally agreed that the issue of boundaries should be kept under review and that the Group should continue to think about deer movements across and between DMGs. It was noted that FCS may look to open up areas in Affric and Kintail to provide shelter for deer and other were encouraged to do so also. It was also suggested that it would be useful for the Group to look at deer movements as a whole and see if areas and changes in movement of deer could be identified. **Action: DMG**

Deer Densities: the question was asked of SNH as to what the “optimum” density for deer was considered to be. SNH responded that habitat impacts should inform local deer management decision making and target densities will be down to local circumstances. Ideally habitat monitoring should be in place and repeated every three years or so, in order to look at trends in browsing/trampling impacts. The point was emphasised that information is critical to making long-term management decisions at a land-scape scale.

Sheep and Cattle: The issue of Scottish Government conditions about Livestock Units sometimes contradicting environmental concerns was discussed. The point was made that it is up to all those managing deer and livestock to use their own experience and Habitat Impact Assessment information to make decisions.

Habitat Impact Assessment: AB reported that he had set up baseline monitoring on some properties in 2009. Dundreggan had carried out a survey in 2007 (NVC) and completed HIA in

2010. AB indicated that the points that had previously been monitored were all available to be reassessed (plus photos were also available). The deer plan to state that the DMG is continuing HIA (which will also include the newer properties to the Group).

Funding for DMG Future Activities: the Group discussed the possible use of the Scottish Government Environmental Cooperation Action Fund (ECAP) as a possible source of future funding. This could fund a range of activities carried out by a “facilitator” which would be eligible for 50% funding (including a repeat deer count in 2019 which has been proposed for the whole South Ross area).

6. Treasurer’s Report.

The Treasurer reported that as of 23 March, there was £1815.66 in the Group account (which included part payment to the Planning Consultant).

It was forecast that after the Group had paid for the plan and taking into account an outstanding contribution from an estate plus other expenditure, the Group would have around £1500.

7. 2016 Count Results

The 2016 Count results were discussed. Overall it was agreed that the weather conditions had been good and that it had been an accurate count. It was pointed out that there was a possible double-count discrepancy between South Affric and Corrielaire which was being checked by SNH.

The Chair thanked Trees for Life for taking on the payment and invoicing of the count. Trees for Life thanked everyone for paying so promptly. There was a request for contact details for Hilton so an outstanding invoice could be sent.

8. Stag and Hind Cull Targets for 2016/17.

The cull targets for the 2017/17 season would be set by AB according to the plan and population models provided.

Action AB

9. SNH Update.

SNH updated the Group on the up and coming DMG Assessment which would be an exact repeat of the baseline assessment carried out in 2014. Following Assessments of all the DMGs, which is due to be completed by the end of June, SNH will be compiling a report to be sent to the Minister, upon which a decision will be made about the future of deer management. SNH will be carrying out a preliminary assessment based on an early draft of the plan which will be shared with the Group. A date for the Assessment was set for the 9th June at 11am at Great Glen House. It was agreed that the Chair and Secretary would carry this out on behalf of the Group along with AB and SNH.

10. Any Other Business.

The issue of Out of Season Authorisations (OSAs) was discussed. FE indicated that OSAs had been put in place for Red and Sika males until the end of March on a number of properties including Strathglass, and Glen Urquhart. Dundreggan indicated that they

would be applying for an Out of Season and Night Shooting Authorisation for Sika and for Red deer only in enclosed woodland as a back-up in case it was required.

It was agreed that everyone would provide details of any OSAs and that this would be added as an Agenda item for future meetings.

ADMG –Regional Executive Meeting. Willie Fraser provided an update on the meeting. All DMGs had been asked by ADMG to think about a good news story that could be publicised locally or through Dick Playfair of ADMG.

DMGs were also asked to consider if they would like to invite any of their members to a special meeting to be held in London on 16th June which would provide an update on deer management. A member was identified and LS asked to contact them. **Action LS**

It was raised that FE currently do not contribute financially to the DMG as Strathglass management unit lies within Affric and Kintail DMG. It was agreed that FE would become official members and would pay on a headage basis for Alt Sighe and Blairie.

11. Date of next meeting.

The date of the next meeting will be 9th August 2016 at 7pm in Invermoriston Memorial Hall.