

Meeting of Glenmoriston Deer Management Group
Held Virtually By ZOOM
on 11th August 2020 at 3.00 pm

Present

Martin Girvan	DMG Chair. Ceannacroc
Martin Girvan Jnr	Ceannacroc
Lynda Campbell	DMG Treasurer, Corrielaire
Doug Gilbert	Dundreggan, Trees for Life
Allan Common	Dundreggan, Trees for Life
Russell Cooper	Forest Enterprise
Simon Mclaughlin	RSPB Corrimony
Mary Bowman	Achlain
Steven Miller	Achlain
Willie Fraser	Affric and Kintail DMG
Sinclair Coghill	SNH
Linzi Seivwright	DMG Secretary
Ali McKnight	Consultant

1. Apologies

Steven Gray	Glenmoriston
Jimmy Gibb	Balmacaan
Ian Reynard	Wester Guisachan
Alan McIntosh	Wester Guisachan
Clive Meikle	Achlain

Agenda Item	Detail	Actions
1.	Welcome and Apologies	
	The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.	
2.	Draft Minutes of Meeting of held on 2nd December 2019	
	Adjustment of balance to £2,518.93 and no subs to come. Approval of the minutes was proposed by MG (Jr) and Seconded by DG.	
3.	Matters Arising from Meeting held on 2nd December 2019	
	All outstanding matters arising were covered under the Agenda.	
4.	Updated Working Plan	
	4.1 Cull Updates	
	LS provided a short summary of information collected to date. Some outstanding culls to get and once these have been gathered population model will be updated and recirculated to give an idea of where we might be right now. Each sub-group exceeded the hind cull for last year and most parties have given indication of what proposing to cull. Important to anticipate what proposing to cull this yea. Should have had the South Ross count done already but unfortunately didn't happen. Model will be a snap-shot but it is up to all individuals to gather as much information as possible to determine realistically what culls will this season. Huge challenge this autumn due to issue with venison prices, Covid-19 and bumper year of productively with lots of hinds pregnant last winter. Members to provide updated cull and proposed cull figures.	AP1
	4.2 Winter Mortality & Recruitment Counts	
	In the absence of Spring Recruitment counts Members are asked to note calving percentages this summer and report to LS.	AP2

	4.3 Updated Population Models & Targets	
	<p>LS to update working plan and population models and circulate to the Group. LS indicated that she had taken a summary of the information provided in the Survey Monkey and produced a short summary for each property in the Working Plan. This also included information about the possible impacts of Covid on deer management. This would form the basis of a short Annual Report which can be put onto the website.</p>	AP 3
	4.4 South Ross Count 2019	
	<p>SNH had been waiting on good snow cover to get the count done but Covid had caused it to be postponed. SNH have two counts for priority this year – South Ross being one. Hoping to get completed come what may. Count will still potentially be affected by Covid restrictions - hopeful that still do something with face-coverings but still intention to get it completed this winter.</p> <p>SNH indicated that a budget is in place on same basis of 50% share of the cots of the count between SNH and DMGs. The Chair indicated that it may be difficult for estates given the price of venison at the moment and the potential impact on income. It was proposed that the situation would have to be kept under review as the season moves forward and properties have a better indication of their financial position.</p> <p>SNH commented that the helicopter count was the only way to get a reliable count of the whole of the South Ross area given the extent of the area. Foot count likely to be more expensive to do well. SNH indicated that they had a project looking a drones and other methods in being able to capture population information. Currently restrictions on use of drones and licencing makes it restrictive. Possibly a year or two away. From a carbon point of view, helicopters are a huge carbon cost and climate emergency will be an important consideration moving forward. Means that helicopter counting likely to be coming to an end and will be phased out as soon as a good alternative is found.</p> <p>SNH confirmed that they would commonly try and do this kind of extensive count between January and March.</p> <p>The Chair proposed and the meeting agreed that given uncertainty – Group to wait until Autumn meeting to make final decision on the count. SC to take the concerns of the Group back to SNH. MG indicated that they could certainly count efficiently on foot within a day and would be happy for SNH to be present to verify.</p> <p>SM asked if there was a breakdown of costs so everyone could manage budgets. SNH to look back at last count in 2016 and share the information from that. Payment was based on time taken to count over each estate – the more deer present- the longer it takes to count regardless of the size of the estate.</p>	<p>AP4</p> <p>AP 5</p>
	4.5 Native Woodland Condition and Woodland Expansion	
	<p>Ceannacroc confirmed they had just finished the new native woodland planting – fencing had been completed. Two exclosures for regeneration had also been completed.</p> <p>DG indicated that they are planning on planting at high elevation in the Spring – 250 ha has been fenced at Carr na Curach – planting due to take place this autumn and for some years thereafter -should result in about 180 ha of new woodland.</p> <p>MG commented that Forestry Scotland has been slow in making payments- problem seems to be getting worse. Waiting for months for payments to come through after the work has been completed. Starting to reflect on the amount of woodland people are putting in.</p>	

	<p>Achlain likely not expanding further – felling will resume to complete the last section which will be fenced and replanted the following Spring 2022. Currently 25% of the estate is in trees.</p>	
4.6 Peatland Restoration		
	<p>MG Jr reported that Scottish Government has indicated that Peatland work will resume following a break due to Covid. For estates doing work over multiple years, it looks like one single application could be made which would be useful. This was being funded through SNH – still responsible for final projects but that Scot Gov will take over the larger projects spread over several years. SNH indicated that scheme had re-opened on 27th July for new applicants and more than one contact for Restoration Scheme. DG has a small amount of scattered haggling and that it is too remote and scattered to be viable – starting to recover due to reduction in deer numbers.</p> <p>Question asked if Group has enough potential projects to make a larger, combined scheme worth it. LC indicated that Corriclair was open to considering it and would into further but had similar concerns about whether there was enough to make it viable.</p> <p>RSPB have done two or three years worth of drain-blocking and have done as much as they can. Question was asked to FLS about land felled within the DMG area and whether there were plans to restore peatland on any areas of ex forestry ground. RC indicated that within the Glenmoriston DMG area when the area at Dalcreichart is felled they will be looking to do bog-restoration there. Will be submitting plan fairly soon but no more details at this stage.</p> <p>SNH indicated that there is a huge political push behind peatland restoration in the fight against Climate Change to mitigate carbon loss through eroded peat. £250 million pounds have been committed over the next 10 years so clearly ramping up ambition to do more. Funding pays 100% of costs and work being done to develop a carbon market for peatland in the same way as woodland. Will require private finance but watch this space. Message from Gov is to restore as much as you can.</p> <p>AM asked about progress with auditing Peatland Codes- is this at a trial stage? SNH was unsure and suggested making contact with Peatland action colleagues who will be more up to speed. SC to circulate contact details.</p>	AP5
4.7 Deer Vehicle Collisions		
	<p>There were no reports regarding deer. There had been a collision with a pig (sow) at the Dundreggan dam in May this year. Also one had been digging in fields at Ceannacroc that got killed on the road. One also at Achlain (sow at Millennium gates)– few moving around and evidence of them. With more and more incidents the Chair concluded that this is something that Group needs to be aware of. It was agreed that since March, seems to have been less collisions given that there are less vehicles.</p> <p>SM commented that it looked like there were cutting operations underway in the Forestry at the Achlain end of the Glen -could lead to displacement of anything living in there.</p> <p>SC has been coming across feral pigs in new places and currently Government don't have firm policy yet but had a holding position asking landowners to keep a lid on population and people shouldn't be introducing them anywhere new. Will likely have to learn to live with them.</p>	
4.8 CWD and Lyme Disease		
	<p>The Group discussed the ongoing need for vigilance in preventing the introduction of CWD to the UK. SNH hasn't heard of any further incidences in Scandinavia.</p>	

	<p>There was nothing to report on Lyme Disease other than raising awareness with others about the risks. Record of Tick Born Encephalopathy in England – very rare but not sure how it will spread.</p>	
	<p>4.9 Venison Update</p> <p>MG spoke to dealer and didn't sound too positive – price had fallen from £2.30 to £1 and doesn't reckon will rise due to supply far outweighing demand currently. Export trade has only just opened but dealers still getting rid of excess stock. Uncertainty about the future and risk that could collapse completely. Will have to watch space. Other commented that rates they had been offered were slightly higher.</p> <p>Estates just wanted the ability to sell – the risk was that if there was no price or pick ups being offered then people would be reluctant to shoot stags.</p> <p>Another game dealer had asked for a shooting plan moving forward to know what was being shot when.</p> <p>SNH were relatively relaxed on stag culls. Suggested that might be preferable to take less stags during the rut and if possible to take stags early season when carcasses are better quality. Hind cull is going to be more difficult and really need to follow through on this – so advised the Group to look at opportunities to market locally, even to giving it away locally in order to generate a future demand. Strathconon DMG had discussed this point at their meeting and the Secretary had offered to circulate information about this which could be circulated around this Group.</p> <p>The Chair indicated that the Group will just have to keep an eye on the situation as the season moves forward.</p>	
	<p>4.10 Deer Welfare</p> <p>LS thanked all those who had sent through welfare information to date. Information had been provided on hind and stag weights, calf weights last summer but the pregnant hinds figure is the one to note. SM pointed out that his figures should be updated and that calving last summer should be 25% for 2019. His figures for pregnant hinds was also based on a couple of yeld hinds that would have been expected to be pregnant so figures not representative. LS had noted in comments. LS advised that the calving was one to note – appreciate challenges this autumn but worse things Group could do is relax culls too much as population could bounce back very quickly. MG noted that although calving on Ceannacroc was good last year the winter was very wet and the Spring resulted in a lot of calf deaths from pneumonia. Although looks like a good crop of calves this year –the Spring weather will determine final numbers and ultimate calf survival.</p> <p>LS also asked those who had agreed to share larder to get in touch with her as it would be useful moving forward. Dundreggan agreed to send information. DG commented on the current way of reporting condition in live animals. LS reported that SNH had been looking to develop a system based on an assessment that you can do on farmed deer. The current way of reporting the Group was fairly subjective and therefore not standardised. LS agreed to circulate the information she had and to see if it could be applied or help make the scoring system more consistent.</p>	<p>AP 6</p>
5.	<p>Habitat Impact Assessment</p> <p>AM asked if there had been any comments received on the open ground HIA report. LS confirmed that it had been submitted to the group as a final Draft and had been circulated to SNH. SNH advised it was really for the benefit of the Group</p>	

	<p>to use the information to look at impacts, assess where they needed addressed and to help target future management. AM advised that the next round of survey was going to be due shortly and therefore it would be good to use the information. Mostly impacts had been low to moderate and document had discussed where there are wintering ground within each of the sub-groups, this tended to be where the main impacts were. Report not complete as need to include the woodland element – which will be relatively small and will include the designated site at Levishie as well as the data from various years from FLS. Pulled together the information will form a picture- including information from Dundreggan.</p> <p>AM explained that the woodland methodology had been discussed for Levishie. The assessment had been scheduled for this Spring but had been delayed. A recent site visit had found that it was going to be too difficult to do woodland monitoring now given the extent and growth in vegetation particularly high bracken cover, which made monitoring almost impossible. 10 plots (20m radius) required per habitat type. AM managed to do 8 and will do the remaining 12 plots in Spring 2021 plus a quick refresh of the 8 plots. This will at least give a short interim report to give an idea of the impacts on 40% of the ground. Next year will be more comprehensive.</p> <p>AM agreed to circulate the original plots from the open hill survey in order to allow properties to reassess the plots in future years. Unfortunately on Corriemony although the plots have all been GPS referenced, the plots might be possible to relocate due to the marking material used. However, some feel that the methodology doesn't have to be exactly repeatable. AM to send the spreadsheet to LS who can circulate per estate.</p> <p>It was asked whether we should be looking at woodland across the site and not just Levishie. It was discussed that as Levishie is a SSSI then it should be done as a minimum. It was recognised that there may be several other properties carrying out surveys which would be useful to the group. LS explained that it was always expected that DMGs would look at the wider habitats first and then would try and look at the NWSS data and ground truth it as it will be well out of date now. There has been a feeling that although the Woodland Grazing Tool Box is useful for experienced ecologists, it may be more difficult for practitioners to use. Currently awaiting Best Practice guidance to be developed in order to have standardised results across and between DMGs. If people already doing HIA in DMG then way could bring all data together and wait until we have standard method.</p> <p>Dundreggan suggested that their staff had been trained in the methodology and that it could be doable for members with some training. Corriemony planning to do this into the future. SM keen to see if methodology same as Dundreggan.</p> <p>For open range it was hoped the training would mean that estates could do this moving forward. For woodland there had been an element included in the budget to provide training for the Group and members of the local community which was part of the condition of the Funding Grant. It was hope that this could be arranged next year and possibly see if the likes of Dundreggan could host some training next Spring. If people felt comfortable doing it then estates could go off and do this for themselves. Could combine with some training on Ceannacroc also. LS to organise.</p>	<p>AP 7</p> <p>AP 8</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Affric Forestry Consultation</p>	
	<p>MG Jr had spoken to those holding the consultation and arranged to have a walk to the montane willow to investigate the possibility of fencing before Covid put paid. Will get done before the next meeting.</p>	

7.	Funding Update	
	<p>LC updated the meeting that the grant had been received for the HIA work and that a balance had been circulated the Group. Balance shows that AM invoice has been part-paid. LC asked about the funds available to provide extra elements such as training. Training on open hill could be covered by LS as part of the community day and that a day could be combined on a day when AM is already carrying out survey work at Levishie or perhaps could be provided by Dundreggan. An indoor session would be useful for people of starting from scratch and use a presentation to show different grazing and browsing pressures. Dundreggan potentially happy to organise with some preparation. LS to check what has been agreed within the contract and what extra resource might be required.</p> <p>LC reported that £5730 had been received from Windfarm – and AM invoice £6360.46 so grant doesn't quite cover the invoice. This has been part paid to cover the initial fieldwork element of the woodland survey. FLS were asked about the changes to subscriptions and RC agreed to check because although the bill was for last year it related to a previous year. RC to check.</p> <p>LS provided an overview of the subscription breakdown. ADMG invoice still outstanding from last year, website and secretariat expenses deducted. Excess amount each estate to contribute for HIA and contributions for DMG and ADMG. Members agreed to the breakdown of costs and LC to send the invoices.</p> <p>LC explained the balance spreadsheet that had been circulated. MG suggested that the Group shouldn't be committing themselves to too much spending looking ahead.</p> <p>It was pointed out that Hilton and Balnacarn didn't have any contribution to ADMG. LS explained that no cull returned had been received from these estates but that the DMG element of the subscriptions were divided equally between all estates. It was agreed that group members were compelled to give cull to SNH and that could be relayed to the Group. SC to check if cull returns had been received.</p> <p>SNH indicated that the organisation hadn't yet sent out cull returns on mass and that he would be sending these out individually and that members should respond to SC directly.</p>	<p>AP 9</p> <p>AP10</p> <p>AP11</p>
8.	Treasurers Report	
9.	Access Issues	
	<p>Ceannacroc has had an issue with litter and fly-tipping this year which is unusual and worst year seen. Achlain agreed that this year there seems to be extra people which has led to problems.</p>	
10.	Training Update	
	<p>Discussed previously.</p>	
11.	Community Engagement	
	<p>There were no Community issues to discuss.</p>	
12.	Out of Season Authorisations	
	<p>Dundreggan have an OOS/Night Shooting Authorisations in place as in previous years (for Sika and Reds in exclosures). RC indicated that they have OOS for woodlands in Glenmoriston to commence in mid-September. RC asked if there were set nights that out but not the case. Has been cases of people poaching previously.</p>	
13.	SNH Update	

	<p>SC updated the Group on the 374 page Deer Working Group report which has 99 recommendations some of which were benign but some quite significant including proposed changes to the season. SNH have been working through the recommendations to advise the Minister as to what is realistic and doable, what could be taken up quickly and what might require changes to primary legislation. It was unlikely that there would be parliamentary time for legislative changes for the foreseeable future but SNH were working up some of the other elements particularly where it was tidying up legislation.</p> <p>SNH report shows that groups had done well on planning but would expect minister to start picking up on this at the back end of the year. Some of the things that SNH were looking at now included the use of copper ammunition.</p> <p>All that likely to hear from Scottish Government is about the Green Recovery from Covid and the need to take action to respond to climate change and to help in reversing biodiversity loss. Actions will be focussed on delivering a nature rich future and making nature as resilient as possible. For DMGs this will mean a focus on Peatland restoration.</p>	
14.	ADMG Update	
	<p>LS reported that a virtual AGM had been held in July and that ADMG were now working behind the scenes to try and ensure guidance in place for staking. ADMG were also in conversation with the Scottish Venison Association to try and understand supply and demand, impacts of prices and when carcasses might be best taken. ADMG was mindful of impact on culls, particularly as things changing continuously.</p> <p>LS also reported that the Minister is currently sitting with lots of reports including the Deer Working Group (DWG) and the SNH report and that while the SNH report paints a reasonably positive view of DMGs, the DWG takes different view and downplays the collaborative element of DMGs. LS urged everyone to look at the recommendations in the DWG particulate as some are potentially quite hard hitting. There will likely be the usual process of committees taking evidence but this likely to happen toward the end of the year. If anyone feels strongly to support or otherwise the DWG –it is important to ensure that Scottish Government gets the feedback.</p>	
15.	Other DMG Update	
	<p>South Ross liaison meeting is scheduled for the 25th August. Will be interesting to hear what the other DMGs are thinking about the count.</p>	
16.	Any Other Business	
	<p>New member/owner coming into the Group - Ardochy estate and MG going to meet with him. It just leaves one more estate -Aberchalder to join.</p>	
17.	Date and Time of Next Meeting	
	<p>Next meeting was proposed for Monday 26th October at 7pm. I was hoped that some of the owners from afar might be willing to join using zoom. LS to check that everyone in the Group can access and are comfortable with zoom.</p> <p>Chair thanked everyone for coming.</p>	<p>AP 12</p>

4b. Summary of Action Points from 11th August 2020.

Action Point	Detail	Who
1.	Members to provide updated cull and proposed cull figures.	DMG Members
2.	Members to provide summer recruitment rates.	DMG Members
3.	Population models and updated Working plan circulated.	LS
4.	DMG to decide whether to go ahead with heli count at next meeting.	DMG Members
5.	SNH to circulate peatland action staff contact details.	SC
6.	LS to circulate condition scoring criteria.	LS
7.	Spreadsheet of HIA plot coordinates to be circulated	LS and AM
8.	Training days for woodland to be organised for members and community	LS, Ceannacroc and Dundreggan
9.	Check what provision for training has been included in Grant Funding	LS
10.	FLS to check that outstanding bills for previous cull years and financial years can be paid	RC
11.	SNH to check outstanding cull returns for the Group	SC
12.	Check that members have access to zoom for next meeting	LS