

West Lochaber Deer Management Group

WEST LOCHABER DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP AGM

Friday 7th December 2018

10.30 – 12.45hrs

Glenfinnan Lodge, Glenfinnan Estate

Minute

Attendees:

Alistair Gibson – (DMG Chairman) (ADMG rep),
Glenfinnan
Bruce Taylor – (DMG Secretary & Treasurer), Fassfern
James Coulston - Arisaig
Ian Leith and Jane Mitchell – Glenfinnan
Mr James de Ferranti, Meoble
Mrs Sandra de Ferranti, Meoble
Raymond Fraser – Meoble
Laura Taylor – Taylor Wildlife
Dr Oliver Moore – Taylor Wildlife
Gary Servant – Native Woods Coop & NW Coast AWR
project
Alan Currie – Fassfern/Achdaliu
Michael Rhoden - Fassfern/Achdaliu
Paolo Berardelli - Glen Mamie
Niall Rowantree – Ardnish
Paul Dorrian - Glenfinnan
Graeme Taylor - SNH
Andrew MacMaster, SNH
John Morrison - Achnacarry Sporting
Alex MacDonald - Achnacarry south
John Jackson - FES

Apologies:

Pete MacLaren – Ranachan
Peter Stewart-Sandiman - Ardnish
Mark de Ferranti - Meoble,
Lynda Campbell, ADMG
John Tulloch - Fassfern/Achdaliu
Colin MacClean – DMP Consultant
Robert Spence - Scamadale
Steve Morris – WTS Loch Arkaig
Graham Nairn – Annat/Achanellan/Glen Fada
Simon Laird - Achnacarry Sporting
PC Hugo Martin (Mallaig) Wildlife Crime Officer

| No. | Summary | Action |
|-----|--|--------|
| 1 | <p>Apologies and Introductions</p> <p>As recorded above.</p> | |
| 2 | <p>Election of Chairman and Office Bearers, and any co-options</p> <p>There being no nominations from the floor, the committee remains as follows:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Alistair Gibson : Chairman Bruce Taylor : Secretary/Treasurer</p> | |

3 Wildlife Crime, Poaching, Road Traffic Accidents

PC Hugo Martin gave his report via email.

- RTC's involving deer, only these where injury occurs to a person, not the deer, are recorded. Within the last 12 months across the Northern Constabulary area there were 6 records of which one at Lochailort. There will be other RTCs where there was injury to deer.
- Wildlife crime reported in the Lochaber area of the last 12 months consists of 3 incidents of illegal fishing, 1 incident of habitat disturbance (water voles), 2 dead birds of prey although no crime could be proved, and one incident of deer poaching with a firearm in the Roy Bridge area which despite numerous positive lines of enquires has not been detected.
- This list does not include all the reports of possible poaching etc only those crimes/incidents that required further investigation.

4 Minutes of the last AGM and any Matters Arising

Minutes proposed for acceptance by Sandra de Ferranti, seconded by Ian Leith
 No matters arising from the Minutes

5 Members Reports.

- i) 2018 Culls**
- ii) Condition Report**
- iii) Proposed Hind for 2019 (Stag Cull to be reviewed after count)**

| Estate | Stags | | | Hinds Target Cull | Comments |
|-------------------|-------|-----------|--------|--------------------------------|---|
| | No. | Av Wt(kg) | Av Age | | |
| Glenfinnan | 24 | 84.3 | 8.2 | 50 (18 to date) | 1 sika stag also culled. Stags in reasonable condition. Hinds & calves mixed with rut. Difficult season |
| Forest Enterprise | 6 | | | 1 to date | Good condition 4 Roebuck 1 sika |
| WTS Loch Arkaig | 2 | | | | Culling report by Achnacarry Sporting |
| Ranachan | 7 | 90.2 | 10 | 15 | |
| Meoble | 22 | 92 | | 44 & 10 calves so far | Lack of mature stags but largest ever shot at 22 stones. Mixed hind condition – cull started early under licence. |
| Achdaliu | 31 | 87 | 9 | No target – mortality expected | 1 sika and 1 Feral Pig Lack of mature stags. Hinds now look surprisingly poor for time of year. Mortality expected |
| Fassfern Forest | 74 | 67 | | | incl 27 Out of Season Stags |
| Achnacarry South | 45 | 79.8 | 10 | 60-65 | Incl 1 stag in forestry The rut never got |

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| 6 | <p>Count organisation for 2019</p> <p>Helicopter count as covered in April meeting minutes, carried out 12/03/18-13/03/18 in fine conditions at short notice. Good count obtained and details available on website.</p> <p>The count data should now be linked to the Habitat Monitoring results in the process of compiling a Population Model. Glen Beasdale SSSI impact assessments associated with deer browsing can also be applied.</p> <p>No organised count proposed for 2019. Individual estates can count and make mortality assessments. Higher than average mortality expected and desirable to minimise disturbance during any count. Next coordinated count will be in 2020.</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | <p>Venison Markets</p> <p>Currently 4 members of SQA Wild Venison Scheme. Members are encouraged to join as it is not an onerous process. Pre-assessment is free and venison can achieve 10p/Kg more.</p> <p>Several members retail venison locally. Niall Rowantree reported a good market in prepared venison ex Ardnamurchan estates via Highland Venison marketed with estate label as a premium product.</p> <p>All estates sell via Simpson Game or Fyne Game.</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 | <p>ADMG - Report and Discussion</p> <p>Provided by Alistair Gibson as ADMG executive committee member. Attended 4 of 5 ADMG regional meetings and input into the Highland Working Group. Local authorities are not keen to increase their workload with Environmental Health monitoring of deer larder processing but another e-coli outbreak will be very bad news for the wild deer sector.</p> <p>Health Check – ADMG Pre-2019 SNH audit</p> <p>Neil Rowantree- commented on the impact of fire reference steam train. There is a high risk of regular fires. Ardnish should have been included in last week's meeting with SNH at Glen Beasdale attended by Arisaig, Glen Mamie and the DMG.</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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| | <p>Andrew MacMaster, SNH -Study of fires, timing and extent show that fires occur before steam train in 2017 and 2018 via satellite imagery. Network rail and West Coast Rail meeting on 9th January 2019. All welcome and should attend at 9:30 in Torlundy. West Coast railway is not effective in controlling railside vegetation. Do daily fire assessment at high risk periods and run the diesel train in tandem with steam (e.g. 7 days in 2018 despite high fire risk from for many weeks) Landowner expenses of dealing with issues reference SSSI via fires caused by others. Woodland fire insurance cannot be obtained for this level of fire risk. SNH recognised fire impact - the way to take forward is via FGS to fund protection and expansion of native woodland. Forestry cooperative grants can be obtained to assess woodland management needs and AECS grant for the open hill.</p> <p>Sward tool has been developed for effective deer management.</p> <p>Best Practice Guidance now becoming available online. All guidance being reviewed and the new version made available.- ADMG, BASC etc will be notified of availability to download - No printing in future.</p> | ALL |
| 9 | <p>Delivery of Public Interest Objectives in DMP</p> <p><u>Population modelling</u> Population model- DMG needs to consider and set targets eg Reduce hinds ? More culling around SSSI ? Basis of modelling = 1. Public interest need and 2. Owner needs</p> <p>SNH model presented. Various models are available and this is an example only. Habitat monitoring results: designated site information and discussion, RTC data, v populations now and what population is best. Decision made on gathering evidence to manage deer population.</p> <p>Mortality. SNH standard = 2% stags, 2% hinds, 6% calves. Based on experience, the West Coast mortality is 4% stag, 6% hind, 10% calves on average as in SNH model but variation in any one year. Suggestion that 10% overall would be more realistic e.g.if the lifespan of a wild deer is 12 years then 12th of the population would die of natural causes. Shooting in the early February of those about to die represents control of potential mortality..</p> <p>ADMG public interest benchmark does not specify which model to use. Put draft model online for membership to input data. Rubbish in equals rubbish out.</p> <p>Age structure recording recommended by Niall Rowantree with the aim of a normal age structure. Culling across the ages may not produce an average age of 8 to 10 yrs. The FE: average cull age is 3 to 4 years as it is not a sporting enterprise.</p> <p>SNH expectation is for Evolution not Revolution in the west Lochaber!</p> <p><u>Delivery of Designated Features into Favourable Condition</u> The DMG is supporting the membership in the delivery of favourable condition within the SSSIs found in the DMG area. Last week's meeting with SNH and members at Glen Beasdale SSSI demonstrates this commitment.</p> | ALL |

Management of Deer for Retention & Expansion of Native Woodland

The DMG audit carried out in 2018 shows the commitment of individual members to the retention and expansion of native woodland habitats where possible. The Woodland Habitat Audit of 2017 is currently being updated to highlight actions required across the DMG.

Woodland Expansion by new planting

Several new planting projects were recorded in the 2018 DMG audit; both coniferous and native woodland proposals

Monitoring & Managing Deer Impacts in the Wider Countryside:eg via Habitat monitoring

Taylor Wildlife carried out all Habitat Monitoring except Scamadale Estate and Ardnish Estates on contract. Laura Taylor and Oliver Moore reported to the meeting:

1. Survey of browse levels in Dwarf Shrub Heath (DSH) and Blanket Bog (BB) habitats (excluding grass plots as no Heather left due to sheep grazing in the past). More than 66% grazed equals "heavy" reference current year's growth.
2. Grass plots - only grass. Question whether there was ever any Heather. Plots selected from SNH habitat apps and adjusted on ground if not correct for habitat type. Grass equals baseline as grass can survive heavy browse due to basal meristem.
3. Dung presence in 2 x 2 m quadrat. Sheep noted where present as dung type not distinguishable. But Arisaig sheep not mentioned in the report . Therefore advise all members to check their own reports as they could become a public document of baseline data.

The sampling data of SNH is from the land cover Scotland 1988 survey. Habitat change will have occurred. Generally DSH to grass in WLDMG; not grass to DSH. Change due to historic sheep impacts e.g. Achnacarry had several thousand in the 1990s

Plot locations photographed, GPS referenced and stake inserted accepting that stake may not last.

Report does not separate Designated from non-special interest sites.

4. Hoof prints and heather breakage = trampling impact. Deer paths to transit between grazing areas.
5. All heavy impacts are noted on final map. Note Moy Farm browse is mainly crofter's sheep. Glen Beasdale = heavy browse recorded. Only nine plots at Meoble all showing heavy impacts although time of year and plot location influential.

Agreed that there is a need for a sheep layer to map as otherwise public could reach wrong conclusions. Membership need to be asking questions and identify cattle & sheep grazing as opposed to deer. Also to check reports for accuracy.

Ref most plots the public message should be that we have less than a 33% impact which is low pressure over most of the DMG.

ALL

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ALL

The current reports are in draft. The detailed reports for individual estates will contribute to deer population modelling and management discussions with SNH but will not be put in the wider public domain. The general DMG habitat monitoring maps that identify deer pressure areas may be put on the website once completed.

On a question of Scottish Government regulation of land use (e.g. large numbers of sheep removed in the 1970's-1990s now allowing higher deer populations in these areas) Graham Taylor indicated that there is no government policy on land use. Generally Designated sites have priority and if the area is not designated then owners have autonomy or can decide to collaborate on any advice provided by SNH which is then provided on the basis of "for information only".

Sheep farming requires an environmental subsidy measure of "good environmental and agricultural condition" (GEAC). Good condition parameter allows eligibility for agricultural grants.

Good habitat quality = higher nutrient value for deer quality and size. Better habitats = better deer.

Carbon impacts via Peatland management schemes

There is not a large area of peatland within the membership area. WTS are planning conifer clearance from the Loch Arkaig wood (note - not an SSSI).

Management of Non-native Invasive Species

Feral Pigs = Loch Morar roadsides at Hydro dam and Scamadale.

Sika Deer = 4 sika stags culled during season. Present but very small numbers.

Protection of Historic and Cultural Features

Not applicable

Delivering High Standards of Competence in Deer Management

The audit of the DMG shows very high levels of competence and qualification for managing wild deer. Two keepers have recently added to the list of those qualified to DSC Level 2.

Contributing to Public Health and Well Being

RTA avoidance, awareness & reporting : as recorded in the 2018 DMG audit
Lyme Disease - as recorded in the 2018 DMG audit (Significant prevalence)

Maximising the Economic Benefits of Deer Management Maximising the Economic Benefits of Deer Management

The 2018 DMG audit estimates that the value of the wild deer management business to the West Lochaber local economy is around £1 million.

Minimising the Economic Cost of Deer

This is in minimising RTAs and impacts to private property and farmland. No

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| | <p>significant impacts have been notified to date.</p> <p><u>Effective Communication on Deer Management Issues</u></p> <p>The DMG Chairman has attended Community Council meetings and other local group meetings Also on the job talking to public (21 people per day spoken to in the summer on the Cape Wrath trail, Munro baggers and Inverie walkers).</p> <p><u>Safeguarding Deer Welfare</u></p> <p>Chronic Wasting Disease -American clients informed if there is an issue. Spread in Scandinavia becoming prevalent.</p> <p>Scottish Deer Health Survey 2017-2019 by the Moredun Foundation & Edinburgh University ref prevalence of E.Coli 157: Of the 1000 approx samples collected throughout Scotland earlier in year, 3 were contaminated. But this is a significant number so particular attention and application of best practice required to avoid contamination from the anal area.</p> | ALL |
| 10 | <p>SNH - Report</p> <p>Andrew MacMaster is taking over from Cathy Mayne. Graham Taylor backing off but will cover the 2019 audit where there are 35 priority criteria to be assessed.</p> <p>Independent Deer Group being taken on by Andrew Barbour. Report will be submitted to Scottish government in 2019coll. This is a collective report on all deer management groups prepared by the widely experienced Robbie Kernahan.</p> <p>Glen Beasdale meeting was considered useful. The Minutes of the meeting will be available from SNH shortly.</p> | |
| 11 | <p>Deer Management Plan - review</p> <p>DMP covered in earlier discussion. Members to give time to read and actions applied.</p> | |
| 12 | <p>Administrative matters: Constitution, bank account, membership & subscriptions, Email/contact details</p> <p>The Treasurer reported that the DMG account was currently well in credit but there are larger invoices due to be received shortly that will make a significant impression on the balance.</p> <p>No changes to the constitution have been made over the year.</p> | |

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| 13 | Any other business Thanks to Glenfinnan Estate for hosting the AGM and providing a much appreciated light lunch. | |
| 14 | Date of next meeting AGM will be held on Friday 6th December 2019 | |