

West Lochaber Deer Management Group

WEST LOCHABER DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP AGM

Friday 3rd December 2021

Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88618306059?pwd=dmlXTElCazluM0wxc1dadkpNNkpxdz09>

Meeting ID: 886 1830 6059

Passcode: 465962

10.00 – 12.00hrs

Minute

Attendees:

In person:

Alistair Gibson – (DMG Chairman) (ADMG rep),
Glenfinnan
Bruce Taylor – (DMG Secretary & Treasurer), Fassfern
Victor Clements – DMP consultant
Sandra de Ferranti, Meoble
Raymond Fraser – Meoble
Craig Higgins – Glenfinnan
Xander Entwistle - Glenfinnan.
John Morrison - Achnacarry Sporting
Alex MacDonald - Achnacarry south
PC Hugo Martin (Mallaig) Wildlife Crime Officer
Paolo Berardelli - Glen Mamie
Graham Nairn – Annat/Achanellan/Glen Fada
Alan Currie – Fassfern/Achdaliu
Henry Dobson – WTS Loch Arkaig
Gary Servant – Arkaig Community Forest
Andrew MacMaster, NatureScot

By Zoom

James de Ferranti, Meoble
Ian Leith and Jane Mitchell – Glenfinnan
Robert Spence - Scamadale
James Colston - Arisaig

Apologies:

Pete MacLaren – Ranachan
Mark de Ferranti - Meoble,
Richard Tulloch - Fassfern/Achdaliu
Ian Collier – Scottish Forestry
John Jackson – FLS
Peter Stewart-Sandiman – Ardnish
Niall Rowantree – Ardnish
Simon Laird - Achnacarry Sporting
Cathy Mayne – Ecologist : Mountain Environment
Services
James Morrison – Network Rail (ecologist)
Michael Rhoden - Fassfern/Achdaliu

No.	Summary	Action																																																								
1	<p>Apologies and Introductions 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 (proposed Sandra Ferranti; seconded Michael Rhoden) Bruce Taylor :Secretary/Treasurer(proposed Alistair Gibson; seconded Alex MacDonald)</p>																																																									
3	<p>Wildlife Crime, Poaching, Road Traffic Accidents - Police report</p> <p>PC Hugo Martin reported on crimes within the locality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the killing of a barn owl • the use of a crossbow to kill deer • poaching at Ranachan • bird parts illegally sold. <p>RSPCA call outs for dispatching injured deer. Difficult to handle, especially if location not clear. Refer matter to police if such calls are received or email direct to local wildlife crime officer as it is difficult to contact via the number provided. Mallaig to Glenfinnan- concern at number of road traffic accidents via community council. BEAR Scotland are paid a fee to remove carcasses off the road or verge. Web portal available.</p>																																																									
4	<p>Minutes of the last AGM and any Matters Arising</p> <p>Minutes proposed for acceptance and there were no matters arising.</p>																																																									
5.	<p>Members Reports</p> <p>i) 2021 Culls ii) Condition Report etc iii) Proposed Hind and Stag Cull for 2021/22</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Estate</th> <th colspan="3">Stags</th> <th>Hind Cull</th> <th>Recruitmt</th> <th>Comments</th> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <th>No.</th> <th>Av Wt(kg)</th> <th>Av Age</th> <th>To date/Target</th> <th>%</th> <td></td> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Glenfinnan</td> <td>26</td> <td>94</td> <td>8</td> <td>40+</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>FLS Loy and Mallie</td> <td>6</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>Enclosed forestry. 2 hinds to date</td> </tr> <tr> <td>WTS Loch Arkaig</td> <td>6</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>30 x2</td> <td></td> <td>2 hinds 7 followers to date. 1 sika. Hind cull based on thermal imagery assessment of population using drone.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Glen Loy Forest</td> <td>0</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ranachan</td> <td>7</td> <td>88.5</td> <td>8</td> <td>15</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Meoble</td> <td>34</td> <td>89</td> <td>9</td> <td>60+</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Estate	Stags			Hind Cull	Recruitmt	Comments		No.	Av Wt(kg)	Av Age	To date/Target	%		Glenfinnan	26	94	8	40+			FLS Loy and Mallie	6					Enclosed forestry. 2 hinds to date	WTS Loch Arkaig	6			30 x2		2 hinds 7 followers to date. 1 sika. Hind cull based on thermal imagery assessment of population using drone.	Glen Loy Forest	0						Ranachan	7	88.5	8	15			Meoble	34	89	9	60+			
Estate	Stags			Hind Cull	Recruitmt	Comments																																																				
	No.	Av Wt(kg)	Av Age	To date/Target	%																																																					
Glenfinnan	26	94	8	40+																																																						
FLS Loy and Mallie	6					Enclosed forestry. 2 hinds to date																																																				
WTS Loch Arkaig	6			30 x2		2 hinds 7 followers to date. 1 sika. Hind cull based on thermal imagery assessment of population using drone.																																																				
Glen Loy Forest	0																																																									
Ranachan	7	88.5	8	15																																																						
Meoble	34	89	9	60+																																																						

Achdaliu	35	85	9	60-80		
Fassfern Forest	27	64				13 in season and 14 out of season
Achnacarry South Hill	43	86	9	100		47 hinds culled to date. 6 wild boar
Glen Loy (Nairn)	16	68		30		17 hinds & 8 calves to date
Glen Mamie	17		8.5	25		
Ardnish	10			8		
Scamadale	2			10		Reduced stags 1 sika; 2 hinds & calves to date and 2 sika hinds. Target 10
Arisaig	16			50		

Condition report:

Weather conditions were very poor for the stag cull (5m of rain in October & November). Stag weight down despite mild weather. In the hot weather the deer were continually on the move giving rise to a poorer condition despite grass availability. Very variable ruts and late improvement in condition. Meoble estate report very good condition during stag cull starting 24th September.

6 Count organisation for 2022

Full foot count agreed by the end of March 2022. To be coordinated by foot. Support be made available to estates with few staff. Same day proposed if possible for Glenfinnan, Fassfern and Achnacarry.

- Co-ordinators :Alistair Gibson and Craig Higgins
- 12 men required from all Estates. 3 From Fassfern & 3 from Glenfinnan.
- Those not able to supply can assist by paying for contract personnel.
- Weather dependant.
- 5 day count.

AG/CH

7 Venison Markets

Highland Game and Simpson Game offering 40p/kg for SQWV a on top of the standard £1/kg.

Deer larder is being set up at Clunes for community forest use.

250 carcasses being sold by John MacDonald giving evidence of a local market scale.

The Scottish Venison Association has received £160,00 over the last two years from Scottish Government. This money has been made available for market research, a promotional recovery campaign and for a pilot chill/processing project.

There has also been a clear trend during Covid of local sales initiatives of venison which is to be encouraged and has helped to preserve value for those that have been able to do it.

9 ADMG - Report and Discussion

AG

ADMG Meetings have mainly been online and it is hoped that such meetings going forward will encourage a closer link to member groups.

Political update.

- Scotgov have accepted almost all of the 99 recommendations of the Deer Working Group Report. Some of the headline recommendations are as follows:

4 – End the use of lead bullets. This will happen anyway due to the pressure imposed by game dealers.

7 – Nature Scot will continue their trials to consider use of night sights under authorisation, with a view to allowing this.

8 – The close season for male deer will be removed and Nature Scot will continue to review whether to reduce the close season for female deer.

59 – NatureScot to develop options for a publicly accessible National Cull Database

84 – DMG assessments to end. NatureScot to focus on measuring and monitoring the impacts of deer management, with greater focus on minimising damage to the public interest.

86 – Upper limit of 10 deer per sq/km over large areas of open range in the Highlands, to be considered alongside impacts and damage

87 – An end to the direct heli counts of open hill deer – NatureScot to work with DMGs to collate information, and use existing data to assess damage, whilst they develop alternatives to heli counts.

97 – NatureScot to assess feasibility of and develop proposals for a planned cull approval system

- It is clear that we will be entering into a period of continued stakeholder consultation and ADMG have written to the new Minister for Environment and Land Reform, Mairi McAllan outlining the good work that has gone on in DMGs and requesting an opportunity to meet with her team. ADMG have also requested further meetings with NatureScot to continue to liaise on all the issues involved within the Recommendations of the Deer Working Group Report.

- ADMG have also written to Lorna Slater the Green MSP, (Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity since 2021) to requested a meeting following the agreement made between the SNP and Scottish Greens in August.

- There will be a period of limbo while the outcomes of the recommendations of the Deer Working Group Report are considered. This is frustrating considering the progress of the last 6 years in terms of deer management planning but there is little doubt that the climate crisis will be the focus of future deer management policy. This will bring opportunities and challenges for land managers.

Access

Following some reports from members of irresponsible access issues, ADMG have been liaising with NatureScot on the issue. NatureScot have produced a social media access poster that has come up on Twitter to remind walkers about the need to cull deer at certain times of the year.

<https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/sites/default/files/2021-09/SOAC%20tiles%20-%20Avoid%20deer%20stalking%20areas.jpg>

ADMG have tried to encourage members to report any news that they might have on access, whether that be positive or negative. If anyone would like to feed into this process then please look at the more recent escapes for details of how to do this.

ADMG Projects

- ADMG together with SLE, Cairngorms National Park, Trees for Life and The Woodland Trust have formed a Steering Group 'Common Ground Project' to address conflicts between sporting and environmental concerns and are currently considering how to find funding for further work on this important matter.
- ADMG in conjunction with The Scottish Venison Association and NatureScot have requested the James Hutton Institute to provide costings to undertake an investigation into the Green House Gas Emissions from Deer including all elements of deer management. There have in the past been many claims about the carbon footprint of deer but we feel it is important to understand this better, not only to counter spurious claims but also to help with venison marketing.
- Consideration of Deermap as a mapping database to enable mapping of the impact of management decisions on deer populations and their movements. It is hoped that this will enable DMGs make decisions more clearly based on the increasing data that we all have now.
- ADMG are considering how and in what form the three yearly DMG assessment process will take with Nature Scot following the recommendation in the DWG report to end this process. It did provide an opportunity to demonstrate DMG progress and how effective collaborative deer management can be.

September Culling

There have been concerns over the September culling of Hinds and Calves by FLS, ADMG were asked for comment at the time and our stance was very clear.

"The Association of Deer Management Groups welcomes the chance to comment on the early culling of females and calves from 1st September. ADMG would always encourage deer managers to undertake culls during the open season where possible which starts each year on 21st October for females and calves.

We accept that it is sometimes necessary to undertake early culling under Section 5(6) of the Deer Act to protect woodland from damage. ADMG stresses that where damage necessitates out of season culling all deer management must be done in accordance with Best Practice Guidance and avoids the orphaning of any dependent calves".

- ADMG's publication "e-Scope" is available to all. Sign up on <https://us12.listmanage.com/subscribe?u=d3fc8c5fa7488240ad43cd222&id=9b75d86623>
-

9 Delivery of Public Interest Objectives in DMP

Population modelling

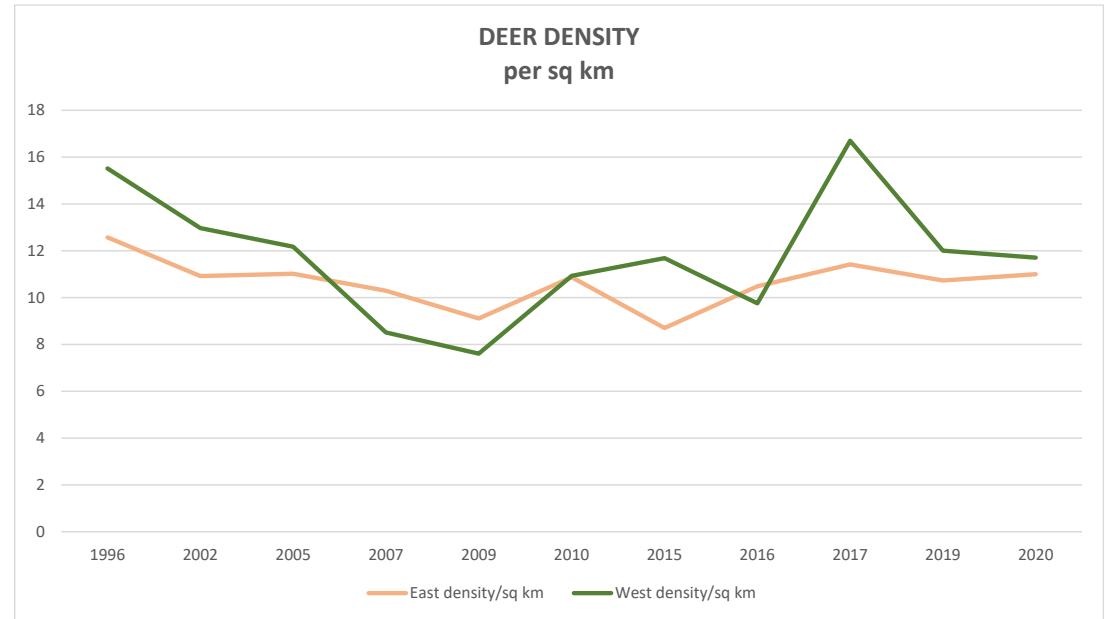
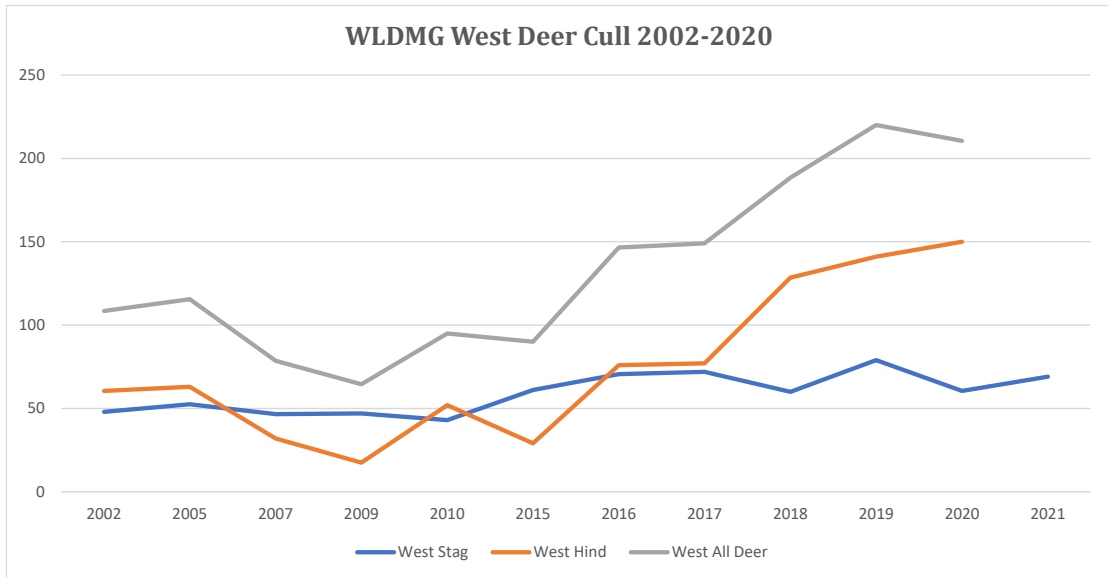
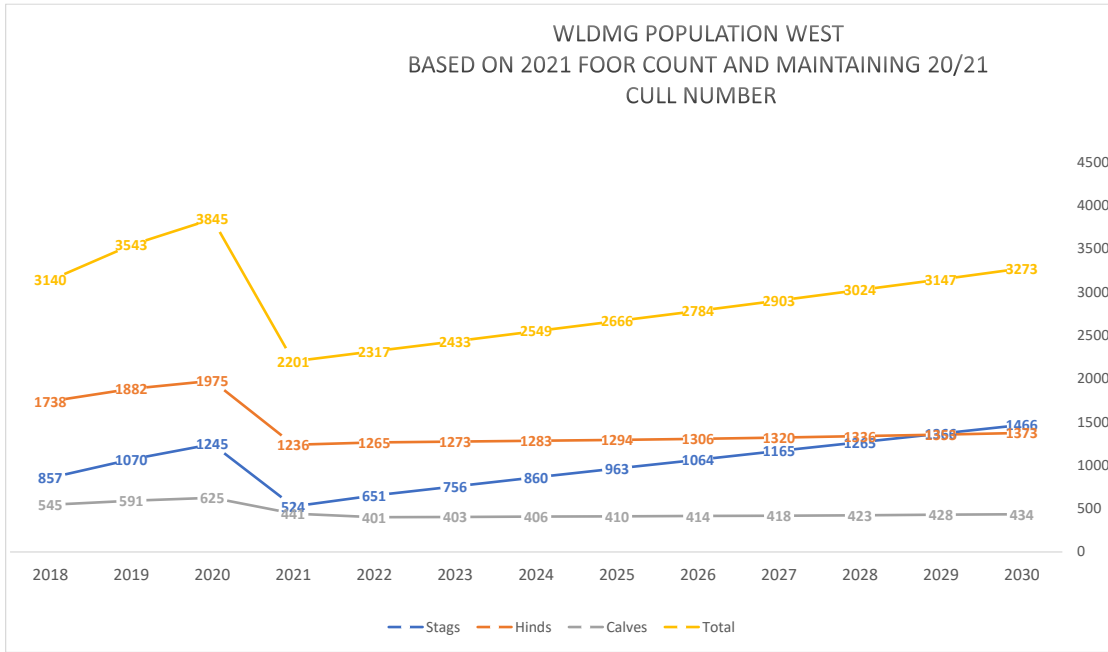
Victor Clements commented that the Deer Working Group recommendation of 10 deer per 100 hectares refers to open land only. West Breadalbane reports 16 to 18 deer per kilometre squared showing no limit of 10 as natural fertility allows a higher carrying capacity. The population model graphs are shown below, with the West area continuing to show population growth despite increased culling in recent years. On average, the West density is now between 12-14 deer/km² and the East is on a level trajectory at around 10-12 deer/km². The relationship to habitat impact will be addressed within the new Deer Management Plan using the survey data collected since 2017.

Railway traffic accidents equates to 1 deer/Km of track. eg 12 at Arisaig. Population model to be continually adjusted with new data..

Deer management group objective is to manage the deer at sustainable numbers to achieve the aim of a healthy deer population. eg 10 deer/Km² in the east possibly 12 deer/Km² in the West. Deer fencing of native woodlands is necessary to allow natural regeneration of most broadleaved species.

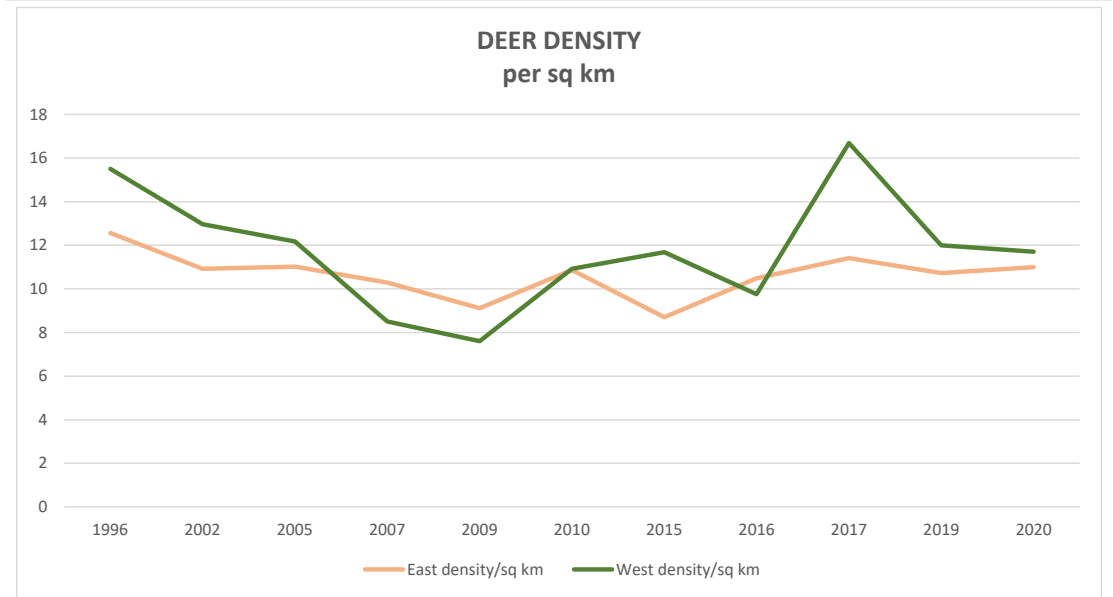
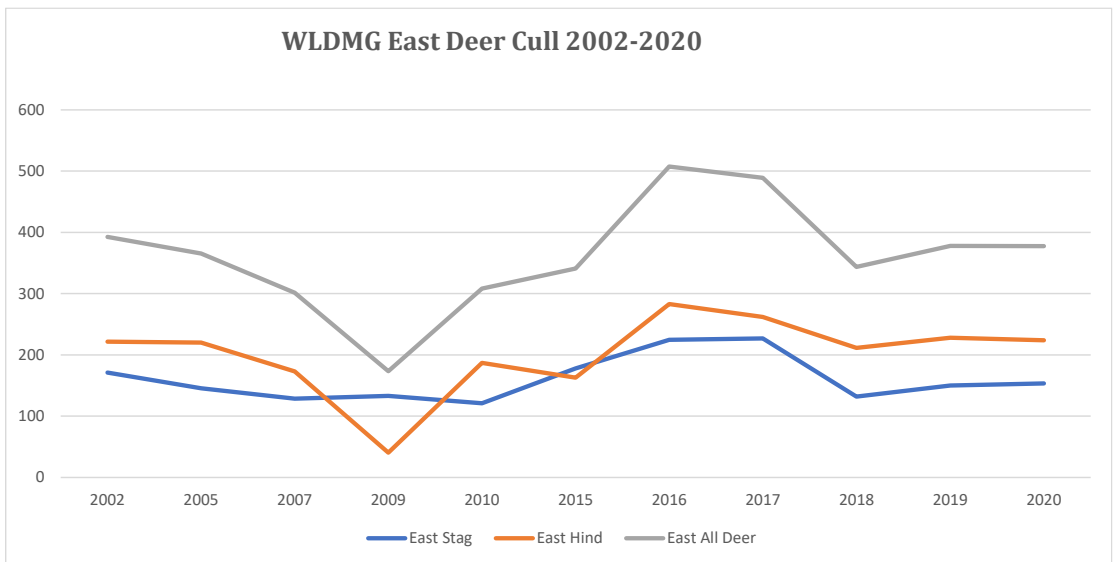
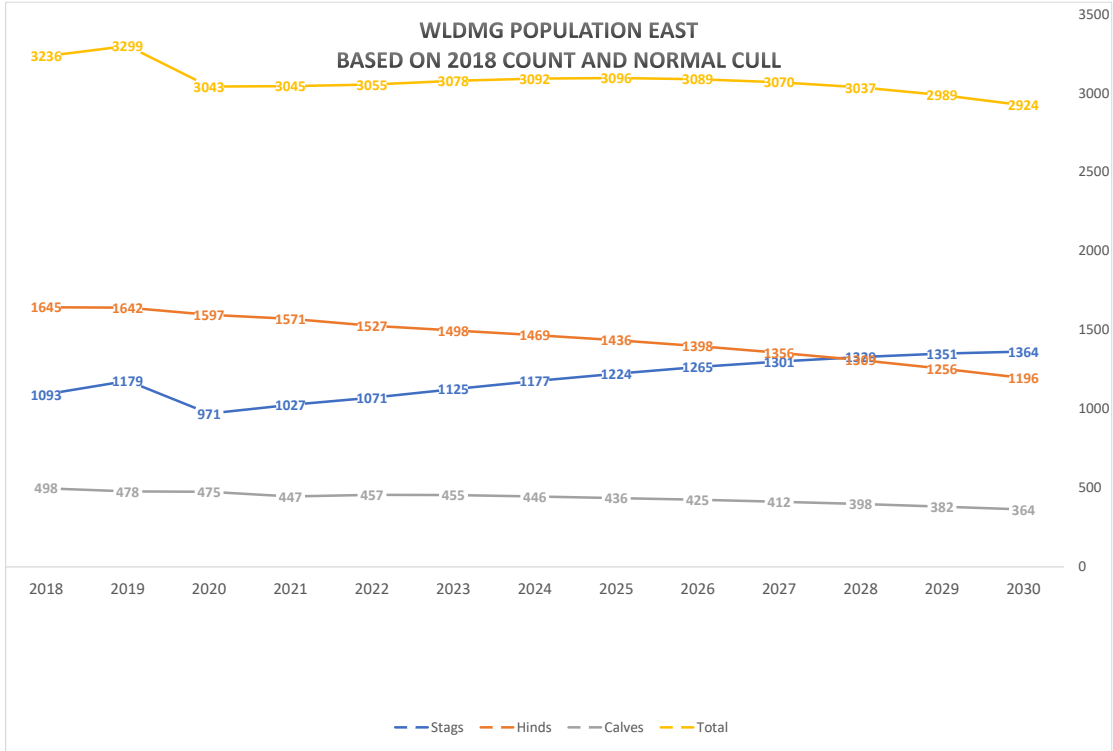
Henry Dobson highlighted Deer Working Group discussion on a new obligation to erect deer fences to protect browsing of their own native woods. The obligation is not clear as to who is to protect woods; a neighbour with many deer or the native woodland owner.

WEST MODEL



ALL

EAST MODEL



RS

Delivery of Designated Features into Favourable Condition

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

A total of 123 dwarf-shrub heath monitoring plots were installed within the majority of the West Lochaber DMG area in May and June 2021.

In areas where heather was particularly sparse or absent, in the central part of the group area, a walk-through survey method pioneered by Professor Rory Putman was used to assess current impacts.

The monitoring plots displayed a range of impacts, with low impacts the largest category, followed by medium and a few high plots in hotspots or areas where heather is particularly sparse.

The walk-through methodology returned impacts in the low, low-medium and medium categories.

Current impacts by large herbivores are low to medium across the group area, reflecting a population of wild deer well within the capacity of the habitats to support them. This was confirmed by good condition of the deer seen and low mortality.

Historic impacts within the group area are high, particularly in the central and eastern areas where sheep walks were pursued as a means of production from the mid 19th Century until relatively recently.

Deliberate and accidental fire is having a significant impact on habitat condition on a large scale.

Adverse impacts from heather beetle and other pests of heather were widely observed and considered to be a significant threat in this location.

Next year the blanket bog habitat survey will be carried out and, in 2023 the native woodlands that are accessible to deer will be assessed to quantify existing and future potential for native woodland regeneration. In total, a 5 year commitment to monitoring.

Management of Non-native Invasive Species

James Colston reported that rhododendron control work is in progress and exclosure ideas are being discussed. Any grant funded scheme creates a financial liability given the prospect of a total loss by fire within the 10 year contract period. Location(s) still to be decided to achieve the best result.

**10 SNH - Report
Glen Beasdale SSSI**

NatureScot recommend that all the Estates within and on the edge of the SSSI need to be involved; basically the entire West of the DMG but especially Arisaig, Glen Mamie and Ardnish.

Arisaig started a deer reduction policy five years ago. Anecdotal evidence is that less deer are now in the wood and evidence is of Birch regeneration (pioneer species); expecting oak later in succession. Encouraged by results to date and aim is to collaborating with others to achieve reversion to Favourable Condition.

NatureScot habitat impact report from survey in April showed that birch dominating and oak regeneration limited. The report is to be considered in ongoing discussions with the DMG and individual ownerships as detailed and not appropriate for an AGM discussion.

ALL

Government manifesto is for the restoration off Atlantic Oakwood. Successful oak regen with and without birch can be demonstrated on other estates such as Glenfinnan

NatureScot have opened their Nature Restoration Fund for 2022 (<https://www.nature.scot/funding-and-projects/scottish-government-nature-restoration-fund>) to support good projects that are not eligible for other Rural funding (eg FGS or AECS). Projects requesting a grant of £25,000 - £250,000 to be delivered over a maximum of 2 years are initially invited, although projects delivering over a single financial year are welcome. Another Competitive Fund for projects requesting a grant of over £250,000 that can be delivered over 3-5 years will be launched later in 2022. Any application would need owners to collaborate.

NatureScot aiming to organise a meeting with Network Rail before steam train starts in 2022 eg February/March.

Network Rail response email read out. Under the railway act they can erect fences as a legal requirement and burn within the railway fence to control vegetation.

Arkaig Community Forest has a budget for community engagement eg DMC for young people or if training can be offered.

11 Deer Management Plan - review

Victor Clements was successful in £11,500 tender to update or replace the DMP with expectation of cost to be offset by a Forestry Cooperation Grant via FGS of £10,000. This is a 5 year document and is in need of a significant refresh as many new issues have arisen since 2017.

The Forestry Cooperation Grant is a flexible fund open to DMGs for collaborating management. All estates were contacted for emails and letters of endorsement and all 15 members contacted have agreed to participate subject to any comments on the FGS contract now to hand.

The background work has been done and familiarisation on the ground is being started in Glen Beasdale. The population model will be analysed and trends related to the habitat survey work which has been thoroughly carried out over the last 5 years.

Habitat impacts will be more important to population management than arbitrary cull targets such as 10/km² The DMG has a good range of open habitat for deer utilisation.

The main objective of Victor's work is to update the plan and provide actions for the next five years that can be delivered by the DMG. The bigger issues in other areas arise from larger Woodland Creation schemes (driven by Carbon credit prospects) and the need for an allowance for loss of range.

Glen Beasdale is expected to need a high level of focus and involvement of all neighbouring estates associated with the SSSI and the population of deer that impact on the site (ie Meoble, Glen Mamie, Arisaig, Ardnish). A complexity of issues combine to influence the success of the oak wood regeneration within the SSSI including fire, invasive rhody, herbivore browsing, site quality and frequency of oak mast years. It is one of the most complex sites in Scotland.

Work will start in early 2022 with the aim for a draft by June. An important first step is the scoping of issues and a scoping report is intended to be issued early in 2022 for discussion; the aim being "no surprises".

Noted that the FGS contract is a very general contract and is a means of funding collaborative work between neighbouring ownerships.

Victor's line manager will be DMG Chair, Alistair Gibson, who will be relied on for guidance and steering the work in a positive and useful direction.

VC

12	<p>Administrative matters: Constitution, bank account, membership & subscriptions, Email/contact details</p> <p>The DMG bank reserves are sufficient to fund ongoing administration and the next phase of habitat monitoring. The ADMG subscription and web portal for the DMG now exceeds £2,200 pa. WLDMG subscriptions will therefore continue to reflect the ongoing costs and future expected outgoings.</p>	
13	<p>Any other business</p> <p>Alistair Gibson letter with agenda to be read and digested as an interesting commentary.</p>	
14	<p>Date of next meeting</p> <p>2nd December 2022.</p>	