**West Lochaber Deer Management Group**

**EAST SIDE SUGGESTED DEER CULL PLAN**

**July 2023**



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**Background**

This short report has been prepared for the properties on the eastern side of WLDMG, and summarizes what a suitable cull regime might look like that accommodates the significant woodland creation and restoration efforts on Achnacarry Estate. Some background to this paper has been set out previously in **Achnacarry Estate Deer Options- June 2023.**

Within the West Lochaber DMG area, it is likely that only areas 1 & 2 marked on the **Achnacarry Phasing Map** will go forwards in the first five year period, with other areas as yet unallocated. Areas 3 & 4 lie within the Knoydart DMG area. A deer plan will be drawn up to cover areas 1 & 2. Ie The five year period ahead.

Areas 5-6 are to be taken forwards on a 6- 10 year timeline, and additional compensatory deer culls will be required at that time. In addition, the Arkaig Pinewoods SSSI site is likely to come forwards on a 6-10 year timescale, but possibly sooner than this.

From my discussions with other WLDMG members on the eastern side of the DMG, there is no indication of anyone wanting to plant significant new woodland areas outwith existing fenced boundaries, so the Achnacarry proposals are the only ones that need to be accommodated on the eastern side of the group at the moment.

**Basis of Plan**

All the information available suggests that Achnacarry winter deer from other parts of the DMG area, but the deer are mobile, and it is very likely that at count times a significant number of animals are hidden in forestry and are not counted.

Over and above this, Scottish Forestry are requiring in many areas that entry to the Forestry Grant Scheme will require a deer plan that reduces deer population to 10 deer per sq km or less.

After much analysis and discussion of the data available, it is concluded that the best way to progress is for (1) Achnacarry to carry out a compensation cull for the areas of ground to be excluded from and main range, and (2) That the eastern side of the DMG reduce deer numbers to 10 per sq km overall. This is the only way of accounting for the movement between Achnacarry and neighbours.

So the proposal here is that deer be reduced to 10 per sq km across the eastern part of the DMG within the first five year period, with a helicopter check to verify population in 2024. An important factor in this decision is that additional areas of woodland creation and restoration are going to come forwards in the 6- 10 year time period, so the pressure on numbers is only going to increase. It would be best therefore if adjustments to numbers began now so that the task is more manageable at that stage.

The problem is that while the deer population density in 2018 was 11.8 per sq km, that density has now risen to 14.4 per sq km in the 2023 foot count, so a reduction from this higher level is very much more significant.

This plan envisages an increase in hind cull of 30% over 2021-22 level for five years, across each of the main properties on the eastern side of the DMG.

**2023 Foot Count Results**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **STAGS** | **2023** | **2018** | **CHANGE** |  |
|  |   |   |  |  |
| Achdalieu (Fassfern) & Glen Fionnligh | 300 | 203 | **97**  |  |
| Achnacarry South & Moy Crofts | 445 | 624 | **-179**  |  |
| Glen Loy | 237 | 163 | **74**  |  |
| Glenfinnan | 113 | 100 | **13**  |  |
| **TOTALS** | **1095** | **1090** |  |  |
| **HINDS** | **2023** | **2018** | **CHANGE** |  |
|  |   |   |  |  |
| Achdalieu (Fassfern) & Glen Fionnligh | 549 | 459 | **90**  |  |
| Achnacarry South & Moy Crofts | 920 | 739 | **181**  |  |
| Glen Loy | 325 | 198 | **127**  |  |
| Glenfinnan | 241 | 235 | **6**  |  |
| **TOTALS** | **2035** | **1631** |  |  |

The above data shows that stag numbers have been very stable between 2018 and 2023, but there was a significant change in distribution, away from Achnacarry and on to neighbouring estates. This might just be a temporary movement, there is no way of knowing.

The hinds have increased in numbers by c 25%, which is very significant. This implies that the stags may well have increased as well, but are perhaps hidden in trees, or are somewhere else that they cannot be counted. However, we cant be sure about that.

The following table summarizes the 2018 & 2023 counts on a property basis. Achnacarry has the highest density, with the other properties being fairly similar to one another.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Property** | **2018 Total deer density** | **2023 total deer density** |
| South Achnacarry & Moy Crofts | 16.1 | 17.1 |
| Fassfern | 10.1 | 13.2 |
| Glen Loy | 6.6 | 12.2 |
| Glenfinnan | 11.7 | 12.7 |
| **TOTAL:** | **11.8** | **14.4** |

There is no count information available for the wooded areas as a whole, but the following information is available for woodland culls, covering Fassfern, WTS/ACF, and the FLS Glen Loy area:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Stags** | **Hinds** | **Calves** | **Total deer culled** |
| **2018/19** | 178 | 91 | 42 | 311 |
| **2019/20** | 99 | 96 | 31 | 226 |
| **2020/21** | 40 | 90 | 37 | 167 |
| **2021/22** | 53 | 98 | 11 | 162 |
| **Total:** | **370** | **375** | **121** | **866** |

These culls imply significant deer numbers in the woodland areas, at least at certain times of year.

The woodland stag cull is clearly coming down, but the hind cull is very stable at 90-100 animals. The proportion of calves with culled hinds (121/375 = 32%) suggests that most of these may well be open hill deer, and therefore, the woodland areas should be included in overall cull calculations.

**SUGGESTED CULLS**

Had the deer density of 11.8 per sq km from 2018 been present in 2023, as was originally assumed, a hind cull of c 360 animals a year for 3 X years would have been enough o bring the density down relatively quickly to 10 per sq km. This is just 11% above the 2021-22 hind cull of 319 animals, and would clearly have been very manageable.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Stags** | **Hinds** | **Calves** | **Total** | **Density** |
| ***2023 foot count*** | 1082 | 1613 | 484 | 3179 | *11.8* |
| ***2023 Summer Population*** | 1324 | 1855 | 612 | 3791 | *14.1* |
| ***2023/24 cull*** | 140 | 360 | 120 | 620 |   |
| ***2024 Mortality*** | 26 | 37 | 37 | 100 |   |
| ***2024 Spring Population*** | 1158 | 1458 | 455 | 3071 | *11.4* |
| ***2024 Summer Population*** | 1385 | 1686 | 556 | 3627 | *13.5* |
| ***2024/25 cull*** | 140 | 360 | 120 | 620 |   |
| ***2025 Mortality*** | 28 | 34 | 33 | 95 |   |
| ***2025 Spring Population*** | 1218 | 1292 | 403 | 2912 | *10.8* |
| ***2025 Summer Population*** | 1419 | 1493 | 493 | 3405 | *12.7* |
| ***2025/26 cull*** | 140 | 360 | 120 | 620 |   |
| ***2026 Mortality*** | 28 | 30 | 30 | 88 |   |
| ***2026 Spring Population*** | 1251 | 1103 | 343 | 2697 | *10.0* |

However, by 2023, the hind count had increased by c 25%, and although the stag cull appears stable, there is a good chance that if the hinds have went up, then the stags have too. It is just that some have not appeared in the count.

The fact that a foot count shows more deer than a helicopter count should give reasonable assurance that the population has indeed went up.

Reducing the population from 14.4 per sq km over a three year period would require annual hind culls of 550 animals, which is likely to be too much for the DMG members to take on.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Stags** | **Hinds** | **Calves** | **Total** | **Density** |
| ***2023 foot count*** | 1095 | 2035 | 743 | 3873 | *14.4* |
| ***2023 Summer Population*** | 1467 | 2407 | 794 | 4667 | *17.4* |
| ***2023/24 cull*** | 250 | 550 | 183 | 983 |   |
| ***2024 Mortality*** | 29 | 48 | 48 | 125 |   |
| ***2024 Spring Population*** | 1187 | 1808 | 563 | 3559 | *13.2* |
| ***2024 Summer Population*** | 1469 | 2090 | 690 | 4249 | *15.8* |
| ***2024/25 cull*** | 250 | 550 | 183 | 983 |   |
| ***2025 Mortality*** | 29 | 42 | 41 | 113 |   |
| ***2025 Spring Population*** | 1190 | 1498 | 465 | 3153 | *11.7* |
| ***2025 Summer Population*** | 1422 | 1731 | 571 | 3724 | *13.9* |
| ***2025/26 cull*** | 200 | 550 | 183 | 933 |   |
| ***2026 Mortality*** | 28 | 35 | 34 | 97 |   |
| ***2026 Spring Population*** | 1194 | 1146 | 354 | 2694 | *10.0* |

Achieving the same reduction over 5 years would require an annual hind cull of 420 animals. This is a 30% increase over the 2021-22 hind cull, a significant rise, but one that is likely to be possible among DMG members.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Stags** | **Hinds** | **Calves** | **Total** | **Density** |
| ***2023 foot count*** | 1095 | 2035 | 743 | 3873 | *14.4* |
| ***2023 Summer Population*** | 1467 | 2407 | 794 | 4667 | *17.4* |
| ***2023/24 cull*** | 200 | 420 | 150 | 770 |   |
| ***2024 Mortality*** | 29 | 48 | 48 | 125 |   |
| ***2024 Spring Population*** | 1237 | 1938 | 596 | 3772 | *14.0* |
| ***2024 Summer Population*** | 1535 | 2237 | 738 | 4510 | *16.8* |
| ***2024/25 cull*** | 225 | 420 | 150 | 795 |   |
| ***2025 Mortality*** | 31 | 45 | 44 | 120 |   |
| ***2025 Spring Population*** | 1280 | 1772 | 544 | 3595 | *13.4* |
| ***2025 Summer Population*** | 1552 | 2044 | 674 | 4270 | *15.9* |
| ***2025/26 cull*** | 225 | 420 | 150 | 795 |   |
| ***2026 Mortality*** | 31 | 41 | 40 | 112 |   |
| ***2026 Spring Population*** | 1296 | 1583 | 484 | 3362 | *12.5* |
| ***2026 Summer Population*** | 1538 | 1825 | 602 | 3965 | *14.8* |
| ***2026/27 cull*** | 225 | 420 | 150 | 795 |   |
| ***2027 Mortality*** | 31 | 36 | 36 | 103 |   |
| ***2027 Spring Population*** | 1282 | 1368 | 416 | 3066 | *11.4* |
| ***2027 Summer Population*** | 1490 | 1576 | 520 | 3587 | *13.4* |
| ***2027/28 cull*** | 225 | 420 | 150 | 795 |   |
| ***2028 Mortality*** | 30 | 32 | 31 | 93 |   |
| ***2028 Spring Population*** | 1235 | 1125 | 339 | 2699 | *10.0* |

**Provisional Hind Culls figures for 5 X years from 2023-24**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Property** | **2021-22 Hind Cull** | **Suggested forward hind cull for 5 X years** |
| South Achnacarry & Moy Crofts | 82 | 130 |
| Fassfern | 66 | 90 |
| Fassfern woodlands | 24 | 35 |
| Muirshearlich | 28 | 45 |
| Glenfinnan | 45 | 70 |
| WTS\* | 67 | 35 |
| FLS\*\* | 7 | 15 |
| **TOTAL:** | **319** | **420** |

*\*The 2021-22 hind cull figure for WTS was much higher than normal. While they are likely to now be fenced out of main deer range, it is possible that occasional ingress will still be possible, and therefore, their culls may play a role in reducing hill population,*

*\*\*FLS Glen Loy is believed to be relatively secure to deer, but as with WTS, occasional ingress may be possible.*

**Provisional Stag Culls figures for 5 X years from 2023-24**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Property** | **2021-22 Stag Cull** | **Suggested forward stag cull for 5 X years** |
| South Achnacarry & Moy Crofts | 43 | 60 |
| Fassfern | 35 | 45 |
| Fassfern woodlands & OOS | 39 | 42 |
| Muirshearlich | 18 | 28 |
| Glenfinnan | 26 | 36 |
| WTS | 4 | 4 |
| FLS | 10 | 10 |
| **TOTAL:** | **175** | **225** |

*Notes*

1. *There may well be greater numbers of stags present than counted in 2023, but these should fall away over time as hind cull increases.*
2. *At 10 deer per sq km, the likely sustainable stag cull will be c 100 animals annually, as compared to the c 125 open ground stag culls above. Reducing ingress to woodlands will be very important therefore if 10 deer per sq km is to sustain the approx. number of sporting stags that people want.*
3. **It is important to note that at this stage, the above numbers are driven more by the 2018- 23 increase in numbers, rather than by the Achnacarry planting proposals.**

**Accommodating additional planting areas**

If the 10 deer per sq km can be achieved across the area, then any additional woodland creation or restoration areas (be these on Achnacarry or elsewhere) will simply need a compensation cull of any animals in and around the planting/ restoration site. Such numbers could then be determined most accurately by a drone count in the previous spring, or whenever it is deemed that deer using the area might be at their maximum.