

West Lochaber Deer Management Group

WEST LOCHABER DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP AGM

Friday 6th December 2024
10.00am– 12.30pm

Minute

Attendees:**In person:**

Richard Cooke – Interim Chair
Bruce Taylor – (DMG Secretary & Treasurer)
Lorna Stewart – Minutes sec/ Fassfern
Robert Spence - Scamadale
Hamish Spence- Scamadale
Pete MacLaren – Ranachan,
Colin MacDonald– Ranachan,
James de Ferranti, Meoble
Raymond Fraser – Meoble
Craig Higgins – Glenfinnan
Ewan MacKelvie - Glenfinnan
Paolo Berardelli - Glen Mamie
Simon Laird - Achnacarry Sporting
John Morrison - Achnacarry Sporting
Alan Currie – Fassfern/Achdaliu
Harry Nicholson - Fassfern/Achdaliu
John Jackson – FLS
Henry Dobson – WTS Loch Arkaig
Gary Servant – Arkaig Community Forest
Andrew MacMaster, NatureScot
Graham Nairn – Annat/Achanellan/Glen Fada
James Colston – Arisaig
Peter Stewart-Sandiman – Ardnish
Niall Rowantree – Ardnish
Alistair Gibson – (ADMG rep)
Mark Hurst – keeper
Graeme Taylor – NatureScot
Liam Wright – Loch Arkaig

Apologies:

Sandra de Ferranti, Meoble
Alex MacDonald - Achnacarry south
Michael Rhoden - Fassfern/Achdaliu
Richard Tulloch - Fassfern/Achdaliu
Oscar Stewart-Sandiman – Ardnish
Cathy Mayne – Ecologist/Ardnish
Victor Clements – DMP consultant
Ian Leith and Jane Mitchell – Glenfinnan
John MacDonald – Scamadale

Non- attendance:

Ian Collier – Scottish Forestry
James Morrison – Network Rail- Senior Asset Engineer
(Lineside East)
PC Hugo Martin (Mallaig) Wildlife Crime Officer

No.	Summary	Action																																																
1	<p>Apologies and Introductions</p> <p>As recorded above.</p> <p>Richard Cooke, interim Chair provided by ADMG, introduced the meeting. ADMG provides interim support to local DMG's to allow them to find a suitable Chair. Looking to find suitable Chair within the next year.</p>																																																	
2	<p>Election of Office Bearers</p> <p>No change.</p>																																																	
3	<p>Wildlife Crime Reports</p> <p>Nothing to report.</p>																																																	
4	<p>Minutes of last AGM & Matters Arising</p> <p>Bruce provided quick run through of previous minutes. Focus on NatureScot's proposal for s.6 agreement.</p> <p>Proposer – Alistair Gibson Second – Paolo Berardelli</p>																																																	
5	<p>Members Reports</p> <p>Members Reports.</p> <p>i) 2024 Stag Culls and Target for hinds 2024/25 ii) Condition and mortality.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Estate</th> <th colspan="3">Stags – open</th> <th>Calves</th> <th>Stags (forestry)</th> <th>Hind cull target</th> <th>Comments</th> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <th>hill No.</th> <th>Av Wt(kg)</th> <th>Av Age</th> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Glenfinnan</td> <td>36</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>50-60</td> <td>Shot 15 hinds and 6 calves so far. Snow making it easier. Heavy 134kg heaviest and older. Rut was fine, cold start but warmer in October.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>FLS</td> <td>5</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>All forestry, 4 roe bucks and 1 sika stag Hind, just what's seen.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>WTS Loch Arkaig</td> <td>6</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>28</td> <td>May- today 10 females. 28 individuals before end January regardless of sex. 5.5km deer fence replaced this year.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Graham Nairn</td> <td>47</td> <td>91kg</td> <td>8</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>70</td> <td>Achnacarry Sporting Lease – very good condition</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Estate	Stags – open			Calves	Stags (forestry)	Hind cull target	Comments		hill No.	Av Wt(kg)	Av Age					Glenfinnan	36					50-60	Shot 15 hinds and 6 calves so far. Snow making it easier. Heavy 134kg heaviest and older. Rut was fine, cold start but warmer in October.	FLS	5						All forestry, 4 roe bucks and 1 sika stag Hind, just what's seen.	WTS Loch Arkaig	6					28	May- today 10 females. 28 individuals before end January regardless of sex. 5.5km deer fence replaced this year.	Graham Nairn	47	91kg	8			70	Achnacarry Sporting Lease – very good condition	
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							40 hinds 18 calves shot so far. Target 70 plus followers.
Ranachan	15	88kg	10.6			25-30+ 5s	Great condition – early rut. 7 hinds and 3 calves shot already. Condition ok so far. Looking to double hind culls and focus on hefted beasts, then push onto tops and shoot on high up march ground.
Meoble	46	89kg	9			80	Great conditions during the rut. 40 hinds shot already. Condition generally good.
Achdaliu	42	89.7kg	9.2			100	100 hinds plus calves 35 hinds & 19 calves to date. Condition is variable. Some hinds very poor.
Fassfern Forest	31						15 out of season, 16 in season. Rut started and finished on time. Good conditions all the way through.
Achnacarry South Hill	102	84 kg	9.6			250	64 stags on hill and rest shot around the Estate early on. Also a good year. 70 hinds shot so far. Condition variable, some hinds poor.
Glen Mamie	24					35-40	Concentrate hinds on Glen Beasdale 15+ calves already shot and working in collaboration with James.
Ardnish	12	77kg	6			15	15 hinds + 4 calves from start of year Will increase cull if hinds seen in January in the oak woods. Population here static.
Scamadale	10	80kg				20	1 sika, 1 roe + one feral pig 4 hinds & 1 calf to date.
Arisaig	23					50	To date = 17 hinds and 8 calves. The ratio of stag : hind calf is 6:2 in favour of stags. If it continues like this it will be the third year in a row with a heavy bias towards stag calves which must have implications for recruitment. Rut started early (10 days ish), good condition throughout. 26 hinds & 12 calves so far. Condition mixed.

6 Consideration of regulatory matters

Achnacarry – old forest currently being fenced. Fence at South Forest also being constructed. Invermallie on north side FGS application being submitted in December but processing time through Scottish Forestry (SF) 3-9 months so no fencing here until end 2025. Culls in line with cull figures proposed by Victor Clements. Fences are expected to enclose deer and any that remain post deer drive will need to be shot.

Glen Beasdale - Forestry cooperation proposed by Arisaig, Glen Mamie and Ardnish and supported by other neighbours. Looking to control rhododendron and deer to facilitate regeneration of the oak wood. Fencing proposed over next 3-4 years to protect designated interest. Looking to enclose c.400ha. Network Rail (NWR) are supporting the project by providing a 'fire proof fence' by way of a metal clipex fence. West Coast Rail (WCR) are not included.

Two fires in May – Glenfinnan & Glen Beasdale and need meeting with WCR. NatureScot (NS) have requested meeting with NWR and WCR w/c 20th January. Invite to this meeting to be extended to WLDMG members. NS looking into potential options to mitigate fire outbreak's. Conflict of tourism v nature conservation. NS discussing potential for weather station on Glen Beasdale which will provide faster and more accurate information to identify when to use coal v diesel.

Desire for monitoring on Glen Beasdale designated area to review extend of designation and updated condition of the site.

NS say Land Management Order could be taken out against NWR/WCR to prevent them running the train. There are legal issues with this course of action and preference therefore for mitigation agreement.

FOI on fire started on the Ft William – Mallaig and Ft William – Edinburgh/Glasgow received by Paolo but data still to be interpreted.

DMP in place and there is a model for the East and also the West respectively. East following original proposals, but West has had updated figures. Need to maintain culls and focus on HIA's to assess deer impacts.

NS asking for review on whether hind culls meet models and targets set out in DMP. Happy for local information to feed into population model reviews. There are many variables within the model that could be recorded and analysed so DMG need to decide on what is achievable and timescales for reporting. Better that the population models are live documents owned by the DMG members rather imposed by external consultants or NS. **Richard Cooke suggests development of questionnaire to feed into these models.**

Paolo asked about 10 deer/km² figure and NS confirmed not particularly helpful but has been quoted as maximum open range figure, but this varies depending on area of land type. NS looking for deer density that facilitates healthy habitats which feed back into requirement for good HIA information. No mechanism for saying whether grassland is under grazed grassland

BT

	<p>or overgrazed moorland. NS keen to know how the groups HIA feeds in to cull figures. Paulo suggests that any available funding be used to fund HIA's. HIA's required on dwarf shrub heath and native woodland. NS could hold a workshop on HIA's.</p> <p>Raised that SF won't accept a light HIA methodology for FGS scheme applications on designated ground. HIA's most meaningful if they're done using same methodology at the same time. Requirement for joined up thinking between SF and NS.</p> <p>Agreed that S.6a to be sisted for the time being due to the efforts of the WLDMG to act on DMP that is currently in place. It is however unlikely that s6a will be offered again as an option as regulation is more likely to move onto s7. NS will offer support to the DMG via input of time by AMcM although his time will not be as formalised as it would have been if s6a was in place.</p> <p>Agreed that there would be a review of existing the open range HIA data held by the DMG to relate this information to the deer population and modelling.</p> <p>Action Point - NS to set up HIA training day.</p> <p>Action Point – Mechanism required to agree appropriate HIA process for the DMG and to figure out the relationship between this information and the trend in cull/count data.</p> <p>Nature Environment (Scotland) Bill – undergone consultation and feedback collated. Provisions for draft Bill are now being sent to NS to contribute to 1st draft and that is happening shortly. Stage 1 draft Bill is due early 2025 which will then go to committee. There are still opportunities to feed into this. Deer management and nature restoration main areas of interest during consultation.</p> <p>Deer incentive schemes in the Cairngorms National Park and south Loch Ness-side looking to pay to cull additional deer. Need to satisfy additionality test. Concerns that process is paperwork heavy but it is not prohibitive. Uptake seems to have been slow.</p>	<p>AMcM</p> <p>BT/Sub Grp</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>Count Planning 2025</p> <p>Foot counts to be organised by Craig Higgins and are to take place in early April. Craig is to be assisted by James from Arisaig.</p>	<p>CH/JC</p>
<p>8</p>	<p>Venison</p> <p>Scottish Venison, due to an historically low level of funding, has not been able to promote and market venison to the extent necessary. However it is now restructuring, merging with Scottish Quality Wild Venison which runs the QA scheme, and has made new funding arrangements. The producer levy has been terminated and instead ADMG will make an annual grant of £40,000 on behalf of its members with additional income to be raised from the increasing number of processor members by way of a levy per carcass of throughput; also a contribution from deer farmers. With these changes SV will be able to do more to develop and promote the industry,</p>	

	<p>albeit venison is still produced at net cost and this may not change until deer management attracts ScotGov support as for domestic red meat production.</p>	
9	<p>Non Invasive Species – feral pigs, sika deer, rhododendrons</p> <p>Rhododendron – Arisaig achieved 185ha in Glen Beasdale woodlands so most of woodland now free of Rhododendron.</p> <p>Achnacarry has ongoing Rhododendron control program.</p>	
10	<p>ADMG – Autumn 2024 Report</p> <p>Report distributed to members.</p>	
11	<p>Administrative matters</p> <p>Bank statement to be attached to the minutes.</p>	
12	<p>AOCB & correspondence</p> <p>Impact of high deer pressure within Muirshearlich written report to NatureScot/WLDMG attached to minutes.</p>	
13	<p>Date of next meeting</p> <p>Date of next meeting – Spring early June</p> <p>AGM Friday 2nd December</p>	