

# West Lochaber Deer Management Group

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**WEST LOCHABER DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP**  
**AGM**  
**Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2025**  
**10.00am– 12.30pm**

## Minute

### **Attendees:**

#### **In person:**

Richard Cooke – Interim Chair  
Bruce Taylor – (DMG Secretary & Treasurer)  
Lorna Stewart – Minutes sec/ Fassfern  
Pete McLaren – 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  
Alex MacDonald - Achnacarry south  
Alan Currie – Fassfern/Achdalieu  
Michael Rhoden - Fassfern/Achdalieu  
John Jackson – FLS  
Andrew MacMaster, NatureScot  
James Colston – Arisaig  
Liam Wright – Loch Arkaig  
Jared Child– Ops manager Arkaig Forest

#### **Online:**

Robert Spence - Scamadale  
Peter Stewart-Sandiman – Ardnish  
Niall Rowantree – Ardnish

### **Apologies:**

Alistair Gibson – (retired stalker)  
Graham Nairn – Annat/Achanellan/Glen Fada  
Ian Collier – Scottish Forestry  
James Morrison – Network Rail- Senior Asset Engineer  
(Lineside East)  
Ian Leith and Jane Mitchell – Glenfinnan

### **Non- attendance:**

No	Summary	Action																																																																																																						
1	<p><b>Apologies and Introductions</b> As recorded above.</p> <p>Richard Cooke, interim Chair provided by ADGM, 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><b>Members reports hind cull, condition and assessment review</b></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Hill Deer Cull</th> <th>2024/25</th> <th>Stag Oct'24</th> <th>Hind Feb'25</th> <th>Calf</th> <th>Roe/Sika</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Achnacarry South</td> <td>108</td> <td></td> <td>160</td> <td>62</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fassfern -Achdalieu</td> <td>43</td> <td></td> <td>96</td> <td>50</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fassfern - Forestry</td> <td>41</td> <td></td> <td>31</td> <td>13</td> <td>43</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Glenfinnan</td> <td>40</td> <td></td> <td>50</td> <td>10</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Meoble</td> <td>46</td> <td></td> <td>69</td> <td>15</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Glenmama</td> <td>28</td> <td></td> <td>32</td> <td>8</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ranachan</td> <td>15</td> <td></td> <td>30</td> <td>11</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Scamadale</td> <td>10</td> <td></td> <td>12</td> <td>5</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Muirshearlich_Druim Fada</td> <td>58</td> <td></td> <td>81</td> <td>38</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Arisaig</td> <td>28</td> <td></td> <td>59</td> <td>24</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ardnish</td> <td>12</td> <td></td> <td>16</td> <td>6</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Loch Arkaig ACF</td> <td>0</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Loch Arkaig WTS</td> <td>22 adult</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>2 calves</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>FE - Glen Loy</td> <td>22</td> <td></td> <td>10</td> <td>6</td> <td>14</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Road and Rail Collisions (Estimate at 15% of Fassfern, Glenfinnan, Glenmama, Ranachan,Scamadale Arisaig, Ardnish culls).</td> <td>32</td> <td></td> <td>49</td> <td>19</td> <td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Totals</b></td> <td><b>505</b></td> <td></td> <td><b>695</b></td> <td><b>269</b></td> <td><b>72</b></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Overall conditions were good at the start of the season before declining towards the end.</p> <p>Cull figures show an increase this year and NatureScot feels that the group is making progress.</p> <p>Figures are to be returned on the NatureScot website. Noted most members have done this already.</p> <p>Cull returns to include road traffic and rail collisions together with natural mortality.</p> <p>Roe and Sika to be reported separately to allow for population trends to be accurately monitored and reported.</p>	Hill Deer Cull	2024/25	Stag Oct'24	Hind Feb'25	Calf	Roe/Sika	Achnacarry South	108		160	62	6	Fassfern -Achdalieu	43		96	50		Fassfern - Forestry	41		31	13	43	Glenfinnan	40		50	10	1	Meoble	46		69	15		Glenmama	28		32	8		Ranachan	15		30	11		Scamadale	10		12	5	2	Muirshearlich_Druim Fada	58		81	38		Arisaig	28		59	24		Ardnish	12		16	6		Loch Arkaig ACF	0					Loch Arkaig WTS	22 adult			2 calves		FE - Glen Loy	22		10	6	14	Road and Rail Collisions (Estimate at 15% of Fassfern, Glenfinnan, Glenmama, Ranachan,Scamadale Arisaig, Ardnish culls).	32		49	19	7	<b>Totals</b>	<b>505</b>		<b>695</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>72</b>	
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3	<p><b>Count results and discussions</b></p> <p>Counts were undertaken within a week during a period of settled weather working east to west. Meoble and Ardnish were unable to participate due to availability. Meoble will try to be available for the foot count next year. Richard Cooke highlighted the importance of carrying out annual foot counts and that they are the single most important thing members should commit to. It is essential that all members count together at</p>	BT																																																																																																						

the same time to ensure confidence in the results. A poor foot count is worse than no foot count. Despite some members not taking part it was felt across the group that confidence in this year's foot count is very high.

Deer count figures were produced in a graph that was sent together with the meeting agenda and show an overall slight reduction in numbers with a downward trend predicted over the next 5 years.

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#### **Herbivore habitat impacts and assessment review**

NatureScot noted that whilst 10 deer/km<sup>2</sup> is the upper deer density the objectives of the group should be steered by the HIA's and that the data gathered from HIA's should be used to build new Deer Management Plan to include a HIA monitoring plan. NatureScot has requested to be involved in the HIA steering group.

Bruce Taylor to form subgroup to determine how to develop a detailed action plan for reviewing the current Deer Management Plan (DMP). This plan will include costings and focus on achieving a balance between landowner objectives, cull targets, and HIA outcomes and is to be put forward for discussion at the AGM in December.

NatureScot said that funding may be available for fencing around designated sites through the Nature Restoration Fund.

In regard to Glen Beasdale being in unfavourable condition, Arisaig Estate have requested that NatureScot undertake a condition review to take into account changes over the last few years.

It was noted that despite an increased cull habitat changes are not instant. Challenges to maintaining premium habitat is additional fire load (due to reduced grazing) and also increased presence of deer on premium habitat as deer naturally seek out the best habitat.

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#### **Wild fires and fires associated with the steam train. Habitat impacts, risk assessment process and addressing this increasingly serious issue**

Paolo highlighted the ongoing issue with fires caused as a direct result of the steam train. With the most recent being on 22 April 2025 that burnt 27km<sup>2</sup>. Paolo noted a disappointment that no one had been out to see the damage from NatureScot or Network Rail.

A meeting was had in 2021 between NatureScot and Network Rail (NWR). It was noted that no senior figures from NWR attended as it fell on the date of Storm Arwen so no action was taken and no follow up was made by NWR.

A meeting was in January 2025 between Bruce Taylor and NWR where it was determined that the risk assessment methodology needs to be updated to be more applicable to the area that the steam train operates in. the risk assessment doesn't take into account the risk of *Molinia*. This needs to be agreed without delay.

Bruce Taylor to draft a letter to NWR cc'ing NatureScot, MP & MSP on the matter.

BT

	<p>Network Rail are considering updating their trackside fences in the area in the next 2-3 years reducing the height from 1.35m to 1m to reduce the number of deer getting caught in the fence.</p>	
6	<p><b>Deer population health &amp; condition reporting</b></p> <p>Notes across the group that animal condition was good at the start of the season before falling away towards the end.</p> <p>Discussion had on monitoring of kidney fat and agreed to <a href="#">add kidney fat column to annual cull returns together with the sex of calves</a>. It was mentioned that deer health should be included for monitoring as part of the Deer Management Plan. <span style="float: right;">BT</span></p> <p>Use of drone for deer counts discussed and considered more cost effective than a helicopter at c. £0.85/ha compared to £1.50/ha. However with over 45,000ha within the group, drone counts are still costly.</p>	
7	<p><b>ADMG report and update</b></p> <p>ADMG Spring Report contained within the pack at the meeting.</p> <p>Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill now at stage 2. Noted it provides increased powers to NatureScot to intervene although don't take into account landowner objectives and it's not clear on how this will work in practice.</p> <p>The Common Ground Forum was discussed, and members were urged to consider joining. It is free and provides events, social opportunities and useful support to stalkers which can be important particularly as many stalkers work in isolation.</p> <p>There is currently a huge interest in venison however the price is the lowers it's been. A major development is the amalgamation of the trade organisation representing venison producers and processors, wild and farmed, public and private sector, with the quality scheme Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV). This is expected to complete by June 2025 and both will operate under the same banner Scottish Venison Ltd. ADMG supports Scottish Venison through a £40K annual grant representing the interests of upland wild producers.</p> <p>Discussion was had on the promotion of local venison and deer management in general, especially in school classrooms but that there is a difficulty in getting it onto school meal menus.</p>	
8	<p><b>NatureScot update</b></p> <p>Highlighted the action being taken at Loch Choire – NatureScot failed to reach agreement on s.7 so moved to a s.8 which is now being appealed in the Land Court. Highlights that NatureScot will take action against individual estates, even if they are part of a wider DMG, if they are not doing what is required of them.</p>	

The Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill was discussed. This will give NatureScot the power to act where there is a presumption of damage and enable enforcement of cooperation between neighbouring landowners to secure habitat conservation.

Naturescot acknowledged the time and effort that has been put into WLDMG's Deer Management Plan and the significant steps forward that have been taken. There remain a few areas where further clarification or action are still be required, as outlined below. This summary should help structure a clear way forward—whether used as an appendix to the Deer Management Plan or as a working document. The draft summary table at the end of the document, once populated, could offer a useful framework for strategic oversight and help facilitate more collaborative land management across the group. Any feedback welcomed.

### **NatureScot progress update to West Lochaber Deer Management Group**

Following our previous correspondence and the meeting of 5th December 2024, we would like to provide an update on progress regarding the designated sites of Loch Arkaig SSSI, Glen Beasdale SSSI/SAC, the situation at Muirshearlich Crofts, and plans relating to Herbivore Impact Assessment (HIA), as well as strategic considerations for habitat condition aligned with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.

#### **Designated Sites**

At present, it is our understanding that both sites will require deer-proof enclosures to achieve sufficiently low herbivore impacts, given the current background deer densities.

While both sites remain in unfavourable condition, we acknowledge recent progress and await the completion of management plans to confirm their effectiveness in restoring the qualifying features.

**Loch Arkaig SSSI:** A Designated Site Management Plan has been submitted and is currently under evaluation.

The plan sets out measures intended to reduce herbivore impacts and improve the site's condition.

We are reviewing this to assess whether it will be sufficient to move the site toward favourable condition.

#### **Glen Beasdale SSSI/SAC:**

The site has secured funding through a Woodland Cooperation Grant, with the objective of implementing landscape-scale deer reduction to support native woodland regeneration.

This includes collaboration with stakeholders and the potential for further public investment through FGS.

#### **Muirshearlich Crofts:**

We are aware that a significant deer reduction has been carried out across the Muirshearlich area in recent months, and we wish to recognise this progress.

However, reports indicate that herbivore impacts continue, including damage to arable crops and loss of grazing.

It may therefore be necessary to consider a further targeted reduction in deer numbers to fully address ongoing impacts.

#### **Herbivore Impact Assessment (HIA)**

NatureScot wishes to ensure that HIA is undertaken uniformly across the DMG, and that cull planning through population modelling is aligned to herbivore impacts and land management objectives.

The DMG already holds a substantial catalogue of HIA data, which provides a strong basis for understanding spatial and temporal patterns of impact.

Moving forward, NatureScot has requested to be involved in the HIA steering group.

In addition, we believe it may be prudent to revisit and utilise existing HIA data to establish a clear baseline and detect changes over time.

This approach would support more targeted and evidence-led deer management across the group area.

### **Deer Management Plan Update: Habitat Condition, Cull Planning, and Scottish Biodiversity Strategy**

A key target of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy is to halt biodiversity loss by 2030.

For the group, this means ensuring that the habitats are in a positive environmental condition and that their extent is not declining.

This includes woodland extent and condition, as well as other open ground habitats.

The table below is intended to help land managers understand the current environmental condition and trajectory of these habitats, while also providing a strategic overview.

Other information should also be provided, such as proposed projects that support or lead to ecosystem recovery (including increasing woodland extent).

Estat e	Area	Objectives	Sporting requiremen t	Current Blanket bog impact s and target	Current DSH Impact s and target	Current Woodland impacts and target	Current Deer density	Target deer densit y	Additional information
		Ecosystem restoration / All habitats to be in positive environmental condition.	10 Stags 10 Hinds			NWSS could be used as a baseline if other woodland data is not available			
		Sporting							

### **9 Health & safety vigilance**

Importance of robust health and safety practices highlighted. Group members happy that their health & safety policies and training are up to date.

Agreed that health and safety is a priority matter that should be on each meeting agenda

### **10 AOCB**

Bruce Taylor has had accounts audited, copy to be produced at AGM in December.

Fassfern reported an increase in wild boar.

An increase in Sika noted across the group.

Richard Cooke commended the group on their attendance, over all contribution and productive discussions.

**11**

**Date of next meeting**

AGM Friday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2025