

South West Ross Deer Management Group Annual General Meeting

**Lohcarron Community Hall, Lochcarron
Friday, 7 December 2018**

Attendees:

Shaun Macdonald (Chair)	- <i>New Kelso</i>	Sinclair Coghill	- <i>SNH</i>
Mark Pattinson (Treasurer)	- <i>Lohcarron</i>	Georgie Brown	- <i>Trees for Life</i>
Tom Chetwynd (Secretary)	- <i>Tulich</i>	David Abraham	- <i>Applecross</i>
Richard Curzon	- <i>Tulich</i>	Alison Hewitt	- <i>Kinlochdamph</i>
Richard Munday	- <i>Kinloch</i>	Troels Bavnhoej	- <i>Ledgowan</i>
Gillian Pattinson	- <i>Lohcarron</i>	Colin Murdoch	- <i>Reraig Forest</i>
Charlie Hill	- <i>Glen Mhor</i>	Neil Morrison	- <i>Coulin</i>
Kurt Larson	- <i>Ardoch</i>	Danny Mackie	- <i>Ledgowan</i>
Archie MacLellan	- <i>Applecross</i>	Chris Macdonald	- <i>Kirkton Plantation</i>
Chris Mackenzie	- <i>Achnashellach</i>	Kenny Mackenzie	- <i>Lohcarron Deer AG</i>

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed those present and, in particular, Georgie Brown (Trees for Life) and Chris Macdonald (Kirkton Plantation).

2. Apologies

Philip Smith	- <i>Coulin</i>	Duncan Gray	- <i>Ben Damph</i>
Mark Raeside	- <i>Couldoran</i>	Mark Adams	- <i>Kinlochdamph</i>
Alison Raeside	- <i>Couldoran</i>	Russell Cooper	- <i>FES</i>
David Mackenzie	- <i>Couldoran</i>	Bill Stalker	- <i>Lohcarron</i>
Nick Wills	- <i>Achnashellach</i>	David Bertie	- <i>Applecross</i>

3. Minutes

3.1 Spring Meeting – 7 May 2018: minutes were approved with no changes

3.2 Stalkers Meeting – 22 October 2018: minutes were approved with no changes

4. Finance Update

The Treasurer referred to the financial summary circulated to all members prior to the meeting and confirmed that subscriptions from 6 members had been received to date. Only one query had been raised by a member in connection with the subscription invoices issued on 16 November 2018 and the Treasurer expected all subscriptions to be settled by the end of December 2018.

Discussion followed on the ADMG levy which would be delayed, and the burden of additional costs incurred by members in meeting the requirements of the ADMG Benchmark and Public Interest Actions. The Chair agreed to investigate these costs and to look at ways of reducing the burden to members, wherever possible (**Action Point: 1**).

5. Deer Management Plan

5.1 Deer Counts

The Secretary confirmed that data had been received from a Spring 2018 count undertaken by the East Sub-Group and a Summer 2018 count undertaken by the southern part of the Central Sub-Group.

Discussion followed on the importance of and co-ordination of a Spring count for 2019 and it was agreed to appoint Sub-Group co-ordinators to put this in place as follows:

East	– Neil Morrison
Central	– Tom Chetwynd
West	– Archie MacLellan

It was agreed that the 2019 Spring Count will be undertaken within the same time frame, weather conditions allowing, and the focus will be on numbers, recruitment and mortality. The timings of the count will be agreed between the three co-ordinators and the information collected from these counts will be fed back to the DMG (**Action Point: 2**).

5.2 Stag Cull – 2018 Season

The Secretary confirmed that the 2018 stag cull information had now been submitted by all members and this showed an overall cull of 158 stags, comprising the following:

East	- 52 stags
Central	- 45 stags
West	- 61 stags

This figure was compared against the previous 5-year average of 218 stags and last year's cull of 248 stags. Those present agreed it had been a late rut with stags holding hinds still evident in mid / late November and overall, mature stags appeared to be in short supply. Those culled were however in good condition compared to the hinds currently being culled.

Some discussion was held on planning for the stag cull and whether a reduction in numbers culled would be favourable for the DMG deer population. It was agreed that this would be discussed in more detail at the May meeting.

5.3 Hind Cull

Members offered comments on the hinds culled to date and it was generally agreed that they were not in great condition and were lighter in weight than in recent years. Most

members were intending to avoid culling over the Christmas period given the disturbance from walkers and other recreational visitors.

The Chair mentioned that the sheep were in good condition on New Kelso and that the incidence of fluke was low, probably due to the dry summer conditions.

5.4 Population Model

The Secretary referred to the updated population model circulated prior to the meeting and reminder members that it is only as good as the information supplied by the group members. The DMG is expected to use the population model as one of the tools for determining the annual cull and the importance of this was also emphasised.

The current version (updated on 5 December 2018) shows the actual cull data for the 2017-18 season as well as the actual stag cull data for the 2018-19 season. The members were commended for supplying this information when requested which in turn enabled the population model to be updated prior to the AGM. Adjustments have also been made to the 2018 Spring and Summer populations to show some further count data provided in Autumn 2018. The Secretary pointed out that the section that was lacking in detailed information was Mortality and confirmed that the figures included are still based on the original figure of 3%.

5.5 Habitat Monitoring

The Secretary referred to the Habitat Impact Assessment (HIA) work undertaken by the group and mentioned that he was aware that data was now being collected by most estates.

The data collected to date will be collected and analysed by DMG early in 2019 and it was confirmed that a further HIA training course will be available to members in May 2019 (**Action Point: 3**).

5.6 Public Interest

The Secretary reminded members that they are also expected to deliver, where applicable, the 14 public interest action points in addition to effective deer management under the Deer Management Plan and that the DMG will be assessed on the delivery of these actions by SNH in April / May 2019. In particular, the Secretary highlighted that the DMG will need to demonstrate progress on 12 priority Action Points which can be summarised as follows:

5.6.1 Actions to develop mechanisms to manage deer:

- **Production of a Working Plan**

The Secretary has been instructed by the DMG to produce a Working Plan based on the current DMP and this is work in progress. It is proposed that the first draft of this Working Plan with plans will be available for the Stalkers Meeting in March 2019.

- **Develop a series of actions to be implemented and assign roles**

Given that the DMG is now split in to sub-groups with regional co-ordinators and minutes of all meetings are produced with action points included this action is now being addressed. The roles of the Committee and co-ordinators will be detailed in the Working Plan.

5.6.2 Actions for the delivery of designated features into Favourable Condition:

- **Monitor progress and review actions to manage herbivore impacts affecting favourable condition**

The key priority is that DMG will be required to monitor progress with SSSIs located within the DMG, most of which are in favourable condition and this will be articulated further in the Working Plan.

5.6.3 Actions to manage deer to retain existing native woodland cover and improve woodland condition in the medium to long term:

- **Identify actions to retain and improve woodland condition and deliver DMG woodland management objectives**

The woodland areas within the DMG are predominantly showing low to medium impacts which is a strong point for the group, but this will be articulated in more detail within the Working Plan with the aid of plans.

5.6.4 Actions to demonstrate DMG contribution to the Scottish Government woodland expansion target of 25% woodland cover:

- **Consider at population level the implications of increased woodland on deer densities and distribution across the DMG**

Various members are in the process of scoping and implementing new woodland schemes within the DMG and information on two such schemes was discussed at the AGM. The process of analysing these schemes and the implications they may have on the deer will be articulated within the Working Plan.

- **Implement actions to deliver the DMG woodland expansion proposal and review progress**

The Secretary referred to the Forestry Co-operation Option currently available from FCS and confirmed that details would be circulated to members following the meeting.

5.6.5 Actions to monitor and manage deer impacts in the wider countryside:

- **Identify required impact targets for habitat types**

This will be articulated in greater detail within the Working Plan.

5.6.6 Actions to improve Scotland's ability to store carbon by maintain or improving ecosystem health:

- **Identify opportunities for the creation / restoration of peatlands**

Some members have already embarked on peatland restoration schemes and this action will be articulated in more detail within the Working Plan.

5.6.7 Actions to identify and promote opportunities contributing to public health and wellbeing:

- **Identify actions with landowners, local authority, DMG to reduce or mitigate public safety risk and monitor effectiveness of actions**

Actions such as fencing to avoid DVCs and train collisions is mentioned in the DMP and the approaches made will be articulated in the Working Plan.

5.6.8 Actions to maximise economic benefits associated with deer:

- **Identify and quantify the main sources of revenue related to deer (sport, tourism etc)**

The Working Plan will lay out the mechanism to collect and collate economic data from the DMG.

5.6.8 Actions to ensure effective communication on deer management issues:

- **Support and promote wider opportunities for further education on deer**

Some properties have previously taken out school children to see deer and opportunities, particularly in Lochcarron and Kinlochewe will be articulated in Working Plan.

5.6.9 Actions to ensure deer welfare is taken fully into account at individual animal and population level:

- **Agree, collate and review data available within the DMG which might be used as a proxy for deer health/welfare ie recruitment, winter mortality, larder weights etc**

Larder records have been discussed within the group as has recruitment and mortality and their relevance to the population count and modelling process and this will be articulated further within the Working Plan (**Action Point: 4**).

5.7 Training Requirements

The Secretary confirmed that a further survey will be undertaken shortly to ensure that the training requirements of the DMP are up to date.

6. ADMG Health Check

The Secretary confirmed that details of the ADMG Health Check had been recirculated to all members on 28 November 2018. The importance of considering the feedback was reiterated and the action points identified by Victor Clements during the health check have been laid out Section 5 above.

7. Venison Update

Discussion was held on venison sales and the likelihood of stricter grading by game-dealers this season. In particular, one game-dealer had raised the issue of warbles in carcasses early in the season.

Note: Following the meeting, one member from SWRDMG reported that they had received notification of a carcass rejected due to warbles. In general follow-up discussions with game-dealers it was confirmed that although warbles were identifiable on a small number of skinned carcasses earlier than normally this season, the primary reason for rejection was normally emaciation given that the warble had buried in to the flesh of the animal rather than lying under the skin. All game-dealers approached emphasised that the number of animals rejected for this reason were low but earlier than normal and made it clear that warbles, although unsightly were of no risk to human health.

8. New Woodland Proposals & Peatland Restoration Schemes

Three estates updated the members on woodland proposals, details as follows:

- **Ben Damph Estate**
Preparing an application for a scheme extending to 500ha of fenced enclosure of which 150ha will be planted with new native woodland
- **Ledgowan Estate**
Preparing an application for a phased programme of 3 woodland enclosures extending to 250ha overall.
- **Applecross Estate**
Preparing an application for 10ha Oak/native woodland ay Toscaig.

Reference was also made to a crofter woodland scheme currently being planted at Achnashellach.

Ledgowan Estate also made members aware that they are entering in to a peatland restoration scheme and the Chair confirmed that New Kelso had also completed a small peatland scheme.

9. Sporting Rates

The Secretary made members aware that the hearings for deer forests was held on 4 December in Inverness and that all appeals are either now agreed or moving forward to continuation with a deadline of 15 February 2019. End allowances agreed with the DV have so far resulted in 40 – 60% discounts on basic NAV proposed by DV, sometimes more and the presence of both designated sites and inaccessible areas can help in such negotiations.

Some members mentioned that the Assessors had been helpful in discussing appeals and some confirmed that Small Business Bonus Scheme was being used to mitigate rates demands whilst it is available

8. Public Access

The Secretary made the DMG aware that Duncan Gray had made contact prior to the meeting to report that there are ongoing issues with mountain bikes on hill paths at Ben Damph. The paths had been upgraded 20 years ago on the understanding that they were to be used for pedestrian and pony use only and not by wheeled vehicles.

Archie Maclellan mentioned that Applecross have a fund in place to maintain footpaths and Chris Mackenzie mentioned that Achnashellach are affected by the Coulags Path which is also a public right of way.

Discussion was held on "Going to the Hills" run by SNH and Gillian Pattinson confirmed that she continues to hold the walker information signs at Brynaport.

6. SNH Report

Sinclair Coghill reported that the Assessment would be undertaken in Spring 2019 and a date was agreed for Tuesday 7 May. This would be undertaken with both the Chair and Secretary of the group present (**Action Point: 5**).

7. ADMG Report

The Secretary reported that the Regional Meeting for ADMG had been held in Inverness on 21 November and had been well attended. The focus had been on the 2019 review and the DMG health checks.

The Secretary made members aware that the FCS had delivered a presentation on the Forestry Co-operation Option which is intended to provide grant funding for the scoping of landscape scale woodland management projects. It was agreed that details of this scheme would be forwarded to members following the meeting (**Action Point: 6**).

The AGM for ADMG will be held in Aviemore on Thursday 28 February 2019.

8. Deer Issues in Local Communities

Discussion followed on the issues with deer both in Lochcarron and Kishorn. Kenny Mackenzie made members aware that a community action group had been formed in May 2017 with various meetings held to discuss deer related issues. These meetings had also been attended by SWRDMG representatives.

Since May 2017 the cattle grid on the A896 has been reinstated by Highland Council with input from Biz Campbell and Lochcarron Community Development Company have repaired the eastern fence of Kirkton Plantation.

Despite these measures being put in place, deer have continued to be seen on the Shinty pitch in Lochcarron and at the Stalkers Meeting held on 22 October 2018, discussion between Kenny Mackenzie as Community Rep and SWRDMG led to agreement on several action points, including a targeted reduction cull of hinds on Lochcarron South.

At a Community Meeting held in Lochcarron on 9 November 2018 a further set of action Points were agreed with the priority being a reduction cull of hinds with local estates, community woodland owners and crofters all taking part. SNH agreed to provide support with night licences issued to those on fit and competent register.

The Secretary confirmed that this reduction cull had resulted in an overall cull of 48 red deer within the immediate vicinity of Lochcarron and that effort will continue up until the end of the hind season on to 15 February 2019.

Kenny Mackenzie confirmed that there had been a big improvement with a maximum of 4 – 6 now seen at any one time on the Shinty pitch.

Chris Mackenzie raised the point that there are still members of the Lochcarron community who do not want to see deer shot and that the issue should continue to be handled sensitively.

The Secretary confirmed that a Community Meeting had also been held in Kishorn on 9 November 2018 where similar action points had been agreed. These meetings had provided an opportunity for joint working between the DMG, local estates and community to achieve mutual objectives and a Community Deer Rep had now been appointed for each settlement.

The Secretary proposed that thanks should be given to both Willie Fraser (ADMG) and Sinclair Coghill (SNH) for their assistance, particularly with Community Meetings on 9 November 2018.

7. AOCB

Mark Pattinson raised his involvement as Treasurer to SWRDMG, confirmed that he had held the post for 10 years and that he now wished to stand down. The Chair proposed that Kurt Larson take over the position and this was agreed.

The Chair thanked Mark Pattinson for all he had done for SWRDMG over the years.

8. Dates of Meetings in 2019

Stalkers Meeting
Friday 1 March 2019

Spring Meeting
Friday 3 May 2019

Stalkers Meeting
Mon 21 October 2019

Autumn Meeting - AGM
Friday 15 November 2019

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9.0 Action List

Ref:	Detail	Action
1.0	Assessment of DMG costs in meeting requirements of ADMG Benchmark and Public Interest Actions – February 2019	Chair / Secretary
2.0	Organise Spring Count through Sub-Group Co-ordinators – April 2019	Facilitator
3.0	Collect and analyse HIA data collected to date from all DMG Members - February 2019	Facilitator
4.0	Prepare draft Working Plan with maps and detail on Public Interest Actions – March 2019	Facilitator
5.0	SNH 2019 Assessment – Tuesday 7 May 2019	Chair / Secretary
6.0	Circulate details of the Forestry Co-operation Option – December 2018	Facilitator