

SOUTH WEST ROSS DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Friday, 23 September 2016 – Lochcarron Village Hall, Ross-shire, 10:30

MINUTES

Present:

Shaun McDonald (Chairman), Andrew Adamson and James Fergusson (CKD Galbraith), Roddy Butcher, Archie MacLellan, Terry Doe, Chris Mackenzie, Neil Morrison, Simon Stewart, Mark Adams, Richard Curzon, Philip and Mary Smith, Sinclair Coghill, Mary Gibson, Mark Pattinson, Tom Chetwynd

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed those in attendance. A separate meeting was scheduled to occur at the end of the main meeting regarding the SSSI at Kinloch Damph following RC's comment regarding the creation of a sub-group relating to this.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from: Gillian Pattinson, Alison and Mark Raeside, Jim Alexander, Tom Wills, Nicholas Wills, Russell Cooper, Hugh Palmer, Duncan Gray, Richard Munday, Diana Jordan.

3. Minutes of the Spring Meeting held on Friday, 20 May 2016

The Chairman asked if there were any issues in connection with the previous minutes. There were no comments, and as such they will be signed off with DJ.

4. Finance

a. General Update

MP stated that the bank balance was currently down, with the current balance sitting at £53.71 after the deduction of £45 for the days meeting. ADMG fees were also stated to be going up, and as such, all members were urged to get their payment in as soon as possible so that the fees to ADMG could be paid in on time. Applecross were thanked in particular for their recent donation.

Kirkland Woodland were noted in particular as not wanting to join the DMG. Their failure to put up fencing was also leading to many uncounted deer coming onto land where counts had taken place, subsequently causing a disruption to exiting plans.

MP continued further, stating that North Strome forest, which had recently been sold by the Forestry Commission to a red deer farm, remains unfenced. It is unknown whether they have a deer management plan in place, but at present it is clear that they do not want to be members.

This has led to counting difficulties for members when the number of deer within North Strome remains unknown.

SC made it clear that SNH are still in support of Estates joining the group on a voluntary basis, and would be happy to speak to both parties, but that it should be the DMG who must act to bring in new members to the group. SM was of the opinion that there is currently not enough pressure on those who are opting out, and it is those who are counting and partaking within the group that are losing out as a result.

b. New Financial Subscription Arrangement

SM noted that low funds were acting as a limiting factor on what can be achieved by the group. Members were asked by SM whether the new financial arrangements in place were agreeable, to which no comments were received and it was taken that everyone was in unanimous agreement that they were acceptable. SM also pointed out that DJ would be able to provide a template for costs and management purposes relating to this.

5. Deer Management Plan

a. Bench Assessment/Delivering Public Interest

SC stated that the plan is making progress, with improvements in public interest being made. With regard to benchmarking, later assessments from 2014 onward were deemed to be showing improvements. On being asked by SM whether the plan could be circulated to the group, SC replied that this was fine.

SC recommended that certain priority areas should be focussed on, rather than attempting to tackle everything at once. Picking out some priorities and addressing them over a fixed timescale of five years is considered to be the way forward for management purposes.

SM followed by recommending that everyone should be keeping a management diary. The issue of habitat monitoring was also raised, and the use of an external person to do this for a fee was put forward as a possibility.

SM also suggested that the circulation of the management plan by DJ once the stag season has ended would be useful, so that members can 'self-assess' themselves to a certain degree.

SC stated that a helicopter count in all areas is planned for January or February in order to model deer populations for the group. For this to be successful, SNH would need to know what woods contain a high number of deer, and whether they would need to be pushed out for counting purposes. Two or three individuals would most likely be needed to assist with the winter counts, primarily to act as coordinators, to prepare maps with forestry areas on, and to identify where fences are in a poor state of repair. NM, CM, and perhaps an individual from Applecross, were deemed to be suitable for these roles by the group.

SC went on to tell the group that the full report of all deer management activities to the Scottish Government will be going for consultation in October, with the next assessment potentially due in 2019. SM expressed that he would be happy to continue open dialogue with the government representatives.

b. DMG constitution

SM stated that the DMG constitution template on the ADMG website will be filled in and submitted by DJ.

6. Summer Deer Count

SM noted that the summer deer count was carried out in July, but bad weather had hindered it to an extent. SC suggested that winter counts would be easier, due to deer being located on the lower ground. This should be carried out every five years, and spring counts to determine the numbers of calves that have made it through winter should also be conducted to back up the previous counts.

SM stated that DJ would circulate the count numbers to all members of the group again.

Achnashellach Estate reported that their summer counts from the end of August/beginning September amounted to 143 hinds, 55 calves, and 42 stags.

7. Any Other Business

According to SC, SNH have pulled together authorisations and recommendations sent to ADMG. This would allow a more transparent process and issuing of night licenses and out of season permits.

8. Date of Next Meeting

After a brief discussion with the group in order to come to a settlement, SM proposed that the evening of the 18th May 2017 would be the date of the next meeting. This would follow on from the habitat training event which has been scheduled to take place during the day.