

SOUTH WEST ROSS DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

SPRING MEETING

Thursday, 18 May 2017 – 17:00

Lochcarron Village Hall

MINUTES

Present:

Shaun McDonald (Chairman), James Fergusson (Galbraith), Mark Pattinson (Treasurer), Gillian Pattinson, Charlie Hill, Richard Curzon, Tom Chetwynd, Mary Gibson, Sinclair Coghill, David Abraham, Archie McLellan, Terry Doe, Kurt Larson, Simon Stewart, Neil Morrison, Chris Mackenzie and Richard Munday

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed those in attendance. It was checked to see whether Habitat Survey Checks had commenced on any of the member estates in attendance. Not everyone had started the checks, and the Chairman said that a finished survey would be circulated to be used as an example to aid in completion.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mark Adams, Jim Alexander, Russell Cooper, Duncan Gray, Diana Jordan, Willie Lamont, Mark & Alison Raeside, Philip Smith, Jeremy Stephenson, Hugh & Rosie Tollemache, Richard Wills and Nicholas Wills.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2016

The Chairman asked if there were any issues in connection with the previous minutes from the meeting held on 23 September 2016. There were no comments or changes to be made, and as such they will be signed off with DJ.

4. Spring deer count figures

SC stated that the weather for the helicopter count had been good and that the maps produced from the count had been sent to all member Estates. SM asked that those in the helicopter, including CH, check the maps for accuracy to ensure that they correlate with what they saw.

SC stated that the overall count was up by 0.5% from the previous count and that numbers had increased, mostly in the Lochcarron area, due to the loss of the cattle grid and some fencing. In terms of deer location, the majority were observed on the sunny faces, although some were seen lower down, including in the village. Counting those in the woods is not possible, although the good weather on the day had brought the majority out.

SC went on to say that SNH were happy with the count, and that it will give the group good scope to model the deer population and objectives.

SM noted that calf population was higher this year, by roughly 40-50%. SC stated that the existing population model should be updated with these actual calving numbers, as accuracy is key to understanding how the population is changing.

SC stressed the need for individual estates, especially the smaller ones, to work together due to the difficulties arising from deer moving between them. AM stated that there were hotspots where this was occurring, and that these should be focussed on.

SM followed this up, noting that the lack of cold winters in recent years had pushed deer further onto the hill. Open access and habitat changes also contributing to deer displacement also needs to be taken into account. This will be looked at in November.

TC introduced his calving benchmarking exercise that has been carried out across five estates. SM confirmed that the information from this will be circulated to the sub-group, and could form the basis of further population modelling. Hind culling would perhaps have to increase as a result.

5. Annual cull returns

SM stated that cull returns are due to be sent out shortly. SC asked that cull returns between all member Estates be collated and sent to him directly, and SM would send an email to remind members to do so.

6. Financial report

MP stated that high costs had been incurred recently, primarily due to the helicopter count. Income was at £7,330, whilst expenditure was at £7,700. It was stressed that the invoices coming out in the summer need to be paid as soon as possible. Applecross were noted for their recent contribution.

7. AOCB

7.1 Deer in Lochcarron

SM stated that deer are becoming an increasing problem in the village, especially around the golf course and the shinty pitch. A community woodland committee has been formed to see how the deer can be prevented coming in. The removal of the cattle grid has been partly responsible for the deer coming in from the west, as has a 20m gap in the fence surrounding Kirkton woodland.

MP noted that the deer in the wider area cannot be counted sufficiently if it is not known how many are in Kirkton woods. This is the woodland landowners' responsibility, and they need to join the group.

SM explained that Biz Campbell, the local councillor, is looking into the matter. The tick burden is likely to increase, bringing with it an increasing risk of Lyme Disease, which means that there is a real health risk. The Kirkton Woodland Community are refusing to join the DMG, stating lack of money as the reason for not doing so. It was mentioned that they could perhaps ask SNH to carry out the count on their behalf.

SM made it clear that the door to the DMG cannot remain open forever, and that the Kirkton Woodland Community need to pay the fee and take responsibility, given that the removal of the cattle grid and the gap in the fence is their responsibility. If the community is having queries over the control of the population in the village, then they need to speak to SC. SM made it clear that the DMG will take some responsibility as far as is reasonable, and that the Community will need to have the various issues explained to them, including night shooting, venison sale proceeds, and cull costs. A future plan is necessary for ongoing management.

SC pointed out that the community group is quite political, but SM noted that the DMG has done everything in its power to assist them. A response from Biz Campbell regarding the cattle grid is currently being awaited.

RC advised that the Forest Access & Enterprise Project Officer for the Lochcarron Community Development Company was Chris Marsh, email address chrisachnaclloch@aol.com.

MP noted that the community needs to use its common grazing grants and funding to fix the deer related issues.

SM stated that following a community meeting with Kristine MacKenzie, suggestions of how to proceed and deal with the various issues are being awaited from Kenny MacKenzie. Maintenance of the fence is a continuing issue, and its needs to be worked out how the costs are to be split between neighbours. Ultimately, SM stated that the DMG is prepared to assist, but the Community needs to be the one who approaches in the first instance.

7.2 Peatland Restoration Scheme

As a closing topic, MG explained to the group that SNH are rolling out a Peatland Restoration Scheme, and that further information would be made available in due course.

8. Date of next meeting

A provisional date of 16 November 2017 was agreed for the next meeting to take place, with further details and timings to be confirmed in due course.