



Paper 1/2018 Minutes & MA

Minutes of the Meeting of Affric and Kintail Deer Management Group

at NTS Balnain House, 40 Huntly Street, Inverness IV3 5HR

on Tuesday 6th March at 10.30am

Present

Willie Fraser
Angus Hughes
Chris Macleod
Mark Macleod
John Hay
Iain Reynard
Dominic Driver
Russell Cooper
Sinclair Coghill
Alan McDonnell
Linzi Seivwright

Estates/Agency

Chair/NTS
East Benula South
North Affric
North Affric
Mullardoch
Wester Guisachan
NTS
FES
SNH
Trees for Life
Secretary

1. Welcome and Apologies.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meetings and attendees introduced themselves.

Apologies were received from:

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| David Matthews | North Affric |
| Steve Micklewright | Trees for Life |
| Peter Urquhart | East Benula South |

2. Draft Minutes of Meeting held on 6th November 2017.

Paper: 2017/8a

These were approved by JH and seconded by MM.

2. Matters Arising from Meeting held on 6th November 2017

Paper: 2017/8b

| AP | Action | Who |
|----|--|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Group members to undertake Training on April 16 th and undertake Habitat Monitoring for Blanket Bog and Dwarf Shrub Heath. LS to collate HIA once done. Training Day arranged for April 18th. To be covered under Item 7. | DMG members & LS |
| 2 | LS to put together a proposal for a woodland consultant to pull together a one-stop-shop document on all woodland information – current and potential as well as peatland restoration. Proposal to be circulated to the Group. LS to look for possible sources of funding through FCS for collaborative planning. Covered under Item 6. | LS |
| 3 | A&K to liaise with Lochalsh DMG to arrange a meeting of South Ross Group. Date to be arranged for South Ross Liaison Group. | WF & LS |
| 4 | DMG members to carry out a recruitment count by end of April and email results to LS/WF. LS/WFDMG members to carry out a recruitment count by end of April and email results to LS/WF. Action for Group to complete Counts and Questionnaire by | DMG Members |

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| May 4 th . | | |
|-----------------------|---|-------|
| 5 | SNH to circulate Assessments of DMG Group meetings. Has been circulated for previous meetings and will continue to be provided after meetings. | SNH |
| 6 | LS to explore Peatland Feasibility Study. Covered under Item 5. | |
| 7 | LS to update population model. Population model updated and circulated. | LS |
| 8 | JH to get quotes for Mullardoch path restoration and NTS to investigate support. JH had been in touch with Bob Aitken – they are awaiting better weather to allow a site visit and photos to be taken. WF had circulated an email from SNH carrying out an audit of paths. There was strict criteria for “upland” paths only including pony paths and footpaths but not argo tracks. A map with information on description and grid references had to be sent by 9th. DMG members to get information to WF. It is possible this information could be useful in accessing future funding at a later date. NTS and possibly FCS had already submitted information. NTS were also considering the funding of an audit of wider countryside access paths. | JH/WF |

4. Presentation by Trees for Life

The Group were introduced to Alan McDonnell from Trees for Life who had been invited to give a presentation to the Group on a potential future project involving Glen Affric. WF stressed the importance of seeking opportunities to work with other stakeholders out with the immediate Group.

AM explained that a proposal called East West Wild was being developed to gauge interest with landowners and land managers. AM explained that there had been a change in approach within TFL to operate in a wider scale and scope which was ongoing. The organisation was not only looking at a landscape scale but was also recognising the importance of socio-economics. It was also recognised that there are any different views represented across and a landscape and that it was important that differences were respected in order to try and seek a middle ground. AM emphasised the importance of working with people and communities and described a number of projects they had been involved in recently including red squirrel reintroductions, economic impacts of beavers, Caledonian Pine remnants and how they fit into current land management objectives and a skills/careers development programme based at Dundreggan. A further project at Dundreggan was looking at economic/business viability. All of these projects had big budgets and TFL as an organisation were growing in confidence about what they might be able to deliver in future.

In relation to Affric, there was recognition that there had been a long-time vision of a landscape scale project connecting East to West. However, it was also recognised that historically this had attracted concerns/conflict over the possible implications for deer management. TFL has recognised that in light of the Scottish Government's continued interest land management issues, particularly with regards to public benefit and ecosystem services that there is a opportunity to set the agenda and to be proactive.

AM then provided some detail on the proposal. It would centre on Glen Affric and seek ways of preparing for the future. In particular it would be exploring opportunities where income generated in the area could be kept locally – including opportunities for the likes of nature based tourism and supporting existing livelihoods over a larger area – with the principle of nature as a keystone for a stronger economy. The proposal would look to build on existing strengths and to learn from other European examples with a view to building a Brand for local business to tap into.

The key principle of the proposal was about habitat restoration of woodlands, riparian woodlands, peatlands etc and building connectivity. It was recognised that climate change may have an influence on this – by favouring certain species. Deer would also be an important factor - but views on deer management have developed within the organisation. There was recognition rather than focussing on deer reductions, it was important to better understand deer movements.

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AM emphasised that although this was a potentially long-term project, at this stage, TFL were simply looking to open up a conversation with all the various stakeholders, including the local community and that hopefully in time, a shared vision could be developed in time to form the basis of a 3-5 year project which could attract funding.

AM indicated that he or Steve Micklewright would welcome the opportunity for further discussion and could be contacted on alanm@treesforlife and steve@treesforlife – telephone 01309691292.

Following comments and questions from the Group, WF thanked AM for the presentation and encouraged all to keep the conversation open.

It was asked whether there might be an opportunity for the DMG to organise a site visit to Dundreggan. AM said that in principle that could be possible as there was facilities for the Group to meet in the morning with a site visit in the afternoon. WF agreed to liaise with TFL about possible opportunities. **Action 1: WF/TFL**

5. Updated Working Plan

5.1 Cull Updates, Winter Mortality & Recruitment Counts. Cull updates were circulated to Group. Following reports that winter mortality was likely to be significant this year, it was agreed that LS will send out a questionnaire and DMG in order to get information back. **Action 2: DMG Members**

| | 2017/18 | | | | | | 2016/17 | | | | | |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| | Stags Target | Stags Actual | Hinds Target | Hinds Actual | Calves Target | Calves Actual | Stags Target | Stags Actual | Hinds Target | Hinds Actual | Calves Target | Calves Actual |
| NFE Fasnakyle | 30 | 31 | 35 | 30 | 0 | 4 | 30 | 25 | 24 | 24 | 10 | 7 |
| NFE South Affric | 75 | 75 | 80 | 84 | 0 | 37 | 100 | 100 | 80 | 80 | 40 | 23 |
| NFE Strathglass | 130 | 168 | | 50 | 0 | 30 | 130 | 130 | 100 | 84 | 50 | 47 |
| NFE Glen na C | 0 | 11 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| NFE Affric Enclosures | 0 | 22 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| North Affric | 25 | 25 | 25 | 32 | 0 | 14 | 25 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 0 | 7 |
| NTS West Affric | 55 | 51 | 107 | 114 | 0 | 20 | 50 | 54 | 80 | 53 | 0 | 9 |
| NTS Kintail | 100 | 104 | 114 | 126 | 0 | 37 | 100 | 101 | 100 | 86 | 0 | 14 |
| East Benula South | 15 | 17 | 25 | 36 | 0 | 19 | 20 | 12 | 25 | 25 | 0 | 14 |
| Mullardoch | 12 | 12 | 5 | 12 | 0 | 5 | 12 | 12 | 6 | 6 | 0 | 2 |
| Corrielaire | 18 | 18 | 50 | 63 | | 28 | | 18 | | 45 | | 9 |
| Inverinate Forest | 150 | | 400 | | | | | 40 | | 105 | | 43 |
| Inverinate West Benula | 0 | | 0 | | | | | 51 | | 140 | | 61 |
| Wester Guisachan | | 23 | | 37 | | 25 | | | | | | |
| Total Affric and Kintail (Open Range) | 312 | 348 | 391 | 434 | 0 | 136 | 337 | 328 | 340 | 300 | 50 | 76 |
| Total Affric and Kintail (All) | 442 | 516 | 391 | 484 | 0 | 166 | 467 | 462 | 440 | 384 | 100 | 123 |
| Total Open Range (including Corrielaire and Inverinate) | 480 | 366 | 841 | 497 | | 164 | | 437 | | 590 | | 189 |

5.2 Updated Population Model: this will be updated once the mortality/recruitment counts have been collated. This will allow the Group to discuss culls for 2018/19. LS emphasised the importance of good information coming from stalkers, as the population models didn't account for changes in deer movements.

5.3 South Ross Count 2019. Given the reduction culls happening on DMGs across South Ross, it was agreed that the proposed helicopter count for 2019 was extremely important in order to fully understand the impact on the deer population across a wider area and to help inform future culls. SNH were unable to confirm whether finances would be available to carry out the count at this stage. WF confirmed that the Group had already contributed half the cost in any case. Possible timings of the count were discussed and

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although it was recognised that it would be useful to count earlier in the season, the Group agreed that a white-ground count in early spring was preferable being more accurate and cost –effective. It was agreed that this should be a priority for discussion at the South Ross Liaison Group Meeting so that all DMGs were counting at the same time. It was agreed that LS would try and organise a date for a meeting of S Ross.

Action 3: LS

5.4 Peatland Restoration Update. To date half of the Group (NTS, FCS and part of NA) had conducted a peatland restoration survey – with further work required on the remaining area. LS agreed to look into funding opportunities.

Action 4: LS

5.5 Native woodland condition Update. This was covered under Item 7.

5.6 DMG Assessment 2019: The Group was informed that a repeat DMG assessment would be carried out in 2019. This would be an exact repeat of the 2016 assessment based on 101 ADMG Benchmark and Public Interest criteria. In particular, SNH would be looking to assess Groups on progress in implementing actions in deer management plans.

5.7 Designated Sites: As part of the discussion key actions, the Group discussed designated Sites. There were two features currently considered to be in Unfavourable Condition. SNH to provide information on the status on Montane Willow and the status of Mullardoch Pinewoods to be confirmed following management actions to secure 2 further fenced areas within the SSSI.

Action 5: SNH

6. Woodland Expansion Project

WF updated the Group on discussions about a possible Woodland Project for the DMG that would look at the current state of native woodlands, the potential for woodland creation to contribute to Government targets and also the availability of/potential for shelter for deer across the Group area .There could also be an opportunity to see what funding might be available (or constraints to funding) – particularly in remote areas.

WF proposed to the Group an independent woodland advisor be sought to undertake the project. Given the amount of work already undertaken by some members in the Group, it was suggested that this was likely to be largely a desk-based exercise. WF and LS had met with a Malcolm Morrison (woodland consultant) to discuss a possible project and he had identified that funding might be available through a Collaborative Forestry Grant Scheme for the Group to carry out this project.

WF indicated that this project would have several stages:

- To put together a tender spec for consultant
- Identify what funding might be available
- Gather existing information and carry out desk-based initial survey
- Ground-truthing of possible opportunities with site visits
- Gather information relating to fences and deer shelter
- Assess potential funding opportunities (and identify any constraints to funding).

The Group agreed to progress with the project as outlined. LS/WF to prepare a tender specification. DMG members agreed to share existing information. TFL emphasised that they may be able to assist in accessing funding to implement any potential collaborative work arising from the project.

Action 6: LS/WF

7. DMG Habitat Training & Funding Update

The Group were due to receive funding (£1800) from SNH to support the implementation of Habitat Impact Assessments across the area. It was agreed that the Habitat Training day be moved to the 18th April to coincide with a visit by the SNH Chief Executive. It was proposed that the Group meet at Affric Lodge in the



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morning and training would take place in the afternoon with Cathy Mayne. Proposal and details to be circulated to the Group.

Those confirmed: CM, MM (North Affric), JH (Mullardoch), AH (East Benula South), WF (West Affric and Kintail) with Forest Enterprise to confirm.

Action 7: LS

8. SNH Chief Executive Visit

The Group agreed to host a visit from the SNH Chief Executive Fransesca Oswoska on 18th April (details to be confirmed). David Matthews had kindly agreed to host the visit. It was proposed that the Group meet at 9.30am at North Affric Lodge. There would be a round of presentations with WF/LS covering the DMG and the Collaborative Land Management Plan and DM providing an introduction to the Estate. Weather permitting a site visit would follow (ideally with a picnic lunch). Habitat training to follow in the afternoon.

9. DMG Educational Day

LS tabled a note of the meeting held at the end of February with NTS, FE, TFL to scope a possible Education Day at Glen Affric. The Group considered the proposals and agreed that a possible day for schools be considered – subject to interest from schools. It was likely that schools may have constraints with regards to funding for transport so the Group agreed that they would investigate either the provision of a minibus through TFL or possibly finding an alternative to funding. IR mentioned that there may be local funding available and agreed to send details to LS.

Action 8: IR

All Group members agreed in principle to the day and to assisting in running stations. The Group will be kept informed with progress and a provisional date for a site visit was set for 29th March at North Affric Lodge – timings to be confirmed.

10. Culling of deer in enclosures (FES Update)

There was concern raised by AH regrading communication from FE about the timings of a notification of a break-in of stags into an enclosure following a damaged fence and the subsequent reporting of details of numbers of stags actually culled. RC agreed to circulate a timeline of events relating to stags in the Glen Na Ciche enclosures and provide the location, dates and details of actual numbers of deer shot to the Group. RC also agreed to provide the Group with the Grid References for all deer shot on excel spreadsheet as well as a map of FCS deer units. LS to amend population model with updated figures and amend maps etc. LS to circulate excel spreadsheet to W Guisachan.

Action 9: RC & LS

11. Deer Welfare

The Group discussed the gathering of larder data to provide a baseline for measuring welfare over time. It was agreed that the Group would provide stag and hind weights where possible as well as figures for winter mortality through a questionnaire to be circulated to the Group at the end of April.

Action 10: LS

12. Fence Damage Protocols

The Chair explained that it was understood the continual checking of fences was a resource issue but asked the Group whether a set of protocols could be agreed for those inspecting fences to notify FE or land-owners when this was going to be done to make the process more efficient through working together and identifying opportunities for collaboration in inspecting and reporting. It was raised by a Group member that they had received a report of the Glen Cannich/Affric fence having been flattened but hadn't had a chance to verify this. RC indicated that he would investigate this claim and report back to the Group.

Action 11: RC

RC also explained that anyone with information about damaged fences should call him immediately and provide details of a grid reference so that FE could investigate as soon as possible. It was discussed that if the repairs to mutual boundary fences were considered to be simple – FE could provide the materials straight away to enable fences between properties to be repaired straight away. There was however an issue with others repairing FE fences on FE land, as Health and Safety requirements would not permit this. RC emphasised that most fencing issues were mostly as a result of issues that could not be predicted – such as adverse weather.

It was emphasised that FE did have protocols for incursions of deer into enclosures and would alert neighbours to the issue. It was discussed that as well as neighbours, this should involve the whole Group as particularly stags could gather in areas from across the whole DMG area.

13. Access Issues

The issue about a locked gate on the track down from Curran Mhor was raised. FE indicated that it was now policy not to lock gates as access had to be provided at all times. CM also raised a point about a gate at the west end of the fence having been put in a place that they couldn't now get argo access. RC agreed to look into the practicality of getting the gate moved to a more appropriate place for access.

Action 12: RC

14. Training Update

The Group was scheduled to carry out HIA training on 18th April. It was proposed to use Dr Cathy Mayne (ex SNH Botanist/Ecologist) to carry out the training and LS to provide maps, random points and collate data into a report at the end. LS to provide quote for HIA Training which would enable the Group to access £1800 available to the Group to assist in training and in collation of DMG Habitat Impact Assessment Data.

Action 13: LS

15. Out of Season Authorisations

FE reported that they had applied for a Night Shooting and OOS for S. Affric and Fasnakyle but hadn't used either.

NTS reported 20 stags within an enclosure fence (which didn't affect the Group). They would be trying to drive them out in the next week but it was possible some would need shot.

16. Treasurer's Report

WF reported that there was currently £3066.06 balance with a couple of people still due to pay subscriptions. There was a subscription due to ADMG of £2855.

17. SNH Update

SNH reported on the Deer Working Group (Chaired by Simon Pepper, Dr Andrew Barbour, Dr Jayne Glass and Robin Callender with external advisors Richard Cooke from ADMG and a lawyer). This Group had been tasked by Cabinet Secretary to look at Deer Management but had a very wide remit. Group due to report back to CS in April 2019. In 2019 SNH would also be carrying out a repeat review of all DMGs and would be looking to assess Groups on progress with delivery of plans. SC emphasised that the DMG was progressing the plan well and was addressing all the important issues that SNH would expect.

18. ADMG Update

The ADMG AGM had been postponed due to weather and was now to be held on 22nd March at Aviemore Highland Resort. Members were advised to let Helen Polley at ADMG know if they wished to attend. Speaker to be Dr Pete Mayhew on Natural Capital, Dr Linzi Seivwright on Deer Management Planning and Winston Churchill on Sporting Rates.

19. Any Other Business

The Group discussed mapping and the availability of a whole range of open source shape files relevant to land/deer management that anyone could access via web.

20. Date of Next Meeting – WF thanked the Group for attending and closed the meeting. Date for meeting will be **4th June** (location TBC).

Planning Dates for 2018

The following is a note of dates for DMG members:

- **29th March** – Site visit for Educational Day
- **18th April 2018** Site Visit by SNH and Habitat Training Day – to be held at North Affric
- **April/May** – members to conduct HIA data collection
- **4th May** – deadline for return of Member Questionnaire (to be circulated) – recruitment/mortality counts, average larder weights etc.
- **14th May 2018** DMG Educational Open Days – details to be agreed.
- **4th June** – **DMG Meeting** –venue and times TBA
- **6th August 2018 proposed meeting** – venue and times TBA.
- **5th November 2018- Autumn Meeting** – venue and times TBA.

8b. Matters Arising/ Summary of Actions

| AP | Action | Who |
|----|---|--------------------|
| 1 | <i>Possible opportunities for a site visit to Dundreggan to be explored</i> | WF/TFL |
| 2 | <i>DMG members to carry out a recruitment count by end of April and email results to LS/WFDMG members to carry out a recruitment count by end of April and email results to LS/WF</i> | DMG Members |
| 3 | <i>LS to put together a proposal for a woodland consultant to pull together a one-stop-shop document on all woodland information – current and potential as well as peatland restoration. Proposal to be circulated to the Group. LS to look for possible sources of funding through FCS for collaborative planning.</i> | LS |
| 3 | <i>LS to arrange a date for a meeting of South Ross Group.</i> | LS |
| 4 | <i>LS to explore Peatland Feasibility Study</i> | LS |
| 5 | <i>SNH provide an update on current status of designated features</i> | SNH |
| 6 | <i>Woodland Project to be progressed and tender spec to be drawn up.</i> | LS/WF |
| 7 | <i>Proposal for HIA work and details of HIA training day circulated to Group.</i> | LS |
| 8 | <i>IR to forward details of possible local community funding to LS</i> | IR |
| 9 | <i>RC to circulate a timeline of events relating to stags in the Glen Na Ciche enclosures and provide the location, dates and details of actual numbers of deer shot to the Group. RC to provide the Group with the Grid References for all deer shot as well as a map of FCS deer units. LS to update population models and maps showing enclosures etc.</i> | RC &LS |
| 10 | <i>Group members to provide larder weights of stags, hinds and calves and any mortality in Questionnaire to be circulated at the end of April</i> | DMG Members |
| 11 | <i>RC to investigate reports of a flattened fence (Glen Cannich/Affric fence) and report back.</i> | RC |
| 12 | <i>RC to investigate practicality of moving a gate between N Affric and W Affric to allow access by argo.</i> | RC |
| 13 | <i>LS to provide a quote for HIA training.</i> | LS |
| | | |