

MINUTES of the MID TERM MEETING of the NORTH ROSS DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP held on Friday 30th June 2017 at 1pm at OYKEL BRIDGE HOTEL

Present:	Mr P Creasey	Strathvaich (Chairman)
	Mr C Cook	Bell Ingram (Secretary)
	Mr N Sutherland	Alladale
	Mr R Munro	Alladale
	Mr A McDiarmid	Braemore
	Mr A Mackenzie	Corriemulzie/Loubcroy
	Mr A Sutherland	Croick
	Mr A Sutherland	Glencalvie
	Mr A McGillivray	Inverlael Deer Forest
	Mrs J Whitteridge	Inverlael Estate
	Mr I Duncan	Kildermorie
	Mrs C Duncan	Kildermorie
	Mr A Duncan	Kildermorie
	Ms H Duncan	Kildermorie
	Mr T Briggs	Kildermorie
	Mr D Campbell	Langwell
	Mr H Bulmer	Ledmore
	Mr M Mackenzie	Ledmore
	Mrs J Scobie	W Rhidorroch
	Ms I Scobie	E Rhidorroch
	Mr J Legrand	E Rhidorroch
In Attendance:	Mr S Coghill	SNH
	Mr A Harington	Bell Ingram/ERDMG
Apologies:	Mr I McNeill	Alladale
	Mr C Kaier Thomson	Braemore
	Mr S Colvin	Corriemulzie
	Mr J Hall	Croick
	Mr W Lamont	FCS
	Mr H Munro	Foulis
	Mr N Forman Hardy	Glencalvie
	Mr J Mason	Glencalvie, C'mulzie
	Mr H van Beuningen	Inverlael Deer Forest
	Mr I MacDonald	Kildermorie
	Mr I MacFadyen	Langwell
	Mr A Campbell	Ledmore
	Miss H Hamilton	Loch Droma
	Mr R Munro Ferguson	Novar Estate
	Mr N Fraser	Novar Estate
	Ms S Agnew	SNH – Knockancrag
	Mr N Scobie	E Rhidorroch

1. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed the group to the Mid Term Meeting and thanked them for their attendance.

The Chairman made reference to the announcement by Roseanna Cunningham, Environment Secretary, on the 29th June when she introduced improvements to be made to the way wild deer are managed.

He said the Scottish Government will take steps to protect habitats and help biodiversity, including:

- Urging the deer sector and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to do more to improve deer management planning, with progress to be reviewed in 2019 to consider if a fundamental change is needed
- Ensuring SNH take a tougher approach to dealing with non-cooperative landowners, using the full range of enforcement powers at its disposal
- Setting up an independent group to look at deer management issues, including a separate panel to look at lowland deer management
- Testing current intervention powers before making further legislative changes

The Chairman reported that Ms Cunningham had said some progress has been made in the management of wild deer following recent changes to legislation and through the work of the Association of Deer Management Groups, but that further improvements are needed to minimise the costs of deer road vehicle collisions and replacing fencing, as well as reducing the environmental impact.

The Chairman further commented that the SNH Board minutes of their meeting dated the 29th June highlighted that SNH have been asked to increase their use of the regulatory powers they have under Sections 7 and 8 of the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 together with an increase in the pace, ambition and scope of their approach to deer management. He pointed out that the North Ross Area was mentioned in the Minute, essentially because SNH had accepted that the size of the two S.7 Control Areas (Ben Wyvis and Beinn Dearg) are too small.

A brief discussion took place about just how voluntary a Section 7 agreement was when not participating would result in a Section 8 action by SNH.

The Chairman touched on Peatland restoration work (discussed elsewhere in the meeting too) and the £8m available for project work. Mrs Whitteridge said she found it hard to imagine that such sums could be available for peatland projects given the social problems faced in the country.

2. APOLOGIES

The apologies are as listed above.

3. **MINUTES OF MEETING ON 11th NOVEMBER 2016**

After a short discussion Members considered and approved the minutes, Mr I Duncan proposed and Mrs J Whitteridge seconded, as an accurate record of the meeting on the 11th November 2016 and the Chairman signed them.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

The Secretary ran through the Action Plan from the minutes of the last meeting. He said that all actions had been completed with the exception of the ECAF application as the 2017 round had not opened for applications as expected at the start of the year.

The Secretary said that a pdf of the Access leaflet would be uploaded onto the group's website.

5. **FINANCIAL UPDATE**

The Secretary talked to his financial report. He explained that the subscriptions had been issued later than normal due to the ADMG invoice being delayed. He thanked members for the subscriptions that had been received so far. There were no questions.

6. **ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION ACTION FUND**

The Secretary explained that an application to ECAF had not been made in January 2017 as agreed at the November AGM as the scheme had not opened for applications. SNH think that applications might be possible, for the last time, in the Autumn but could not confirm this.

The Secretary expressed his disappointment with the resulting set back to the groups agreed programme of action and noted the frustration of at least three estates who had held off habitat monitoring work in the belief that a group wide monitoring programme would be put in place per the ECAF discussions at the November AGM.

7. **2017 DEER COUNT AND RECRUITMENT**

The Secretary thanked the coordinators and those who had taken part in the survey and confirmed that he had now received returns from everyone concerned and the results had been circulated.

The coordinators reported that they had been on the look out for a suitable white count day from Christmas but one did not materialise. The conditions were not great with restricted visibility but the count took place over the 8th and 9th March 2017.

The group counted a total of 4008 hinds and 1458 calves or 1 calf for every 2.75 hinds. It represents a reduction in hind numbers and an improvement in calf mortality against the 2016 count where the ratio was 1:3.7.

8. TARGET POPULATION AND PROJECTED CULLS

Mr Alex Duncan made a presentation to the group entitled 'Count and Cull Analysis'. Mr Duncan had been sent all the cull and count data held by the Secretary for the group which he used as the basis of his study.

Mr Duncan said that the purpose of the exercise was an attempt to use the group data to demonstrate good governance of the deer population by creating a balanced stocking density proposal.

Mr Duncan summed up the data held by the group as a 'mixed bag' because of missing years, questionable years and extreme outliers (e.g special culls or helicopter counts). Mr Duncan produced slides to illustrate examples of data held for Members with good data and those with patchy data and explained the difficulties of making reliable conclusions and formulating actions from patchy data.

He urged all Members to take part in future counts and fully report their cull records. In addition he asked that Members send to the Secretary their complete cull and count records so as to allow him to fill in any gaps in the data he holds.

Mr Duncan supplied the Secretary with graphs of the cull and count data for most Members for circulation (*now done*).

9. WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2017

The Secretary said that the Deer Management Plan had been updated to remove Leckmelm Estate. He said that a redacted version of the Deer Management Plan was lodged with the Bonar Bridge Library and that others could be supplied if Members asked. He also said that a copy was now on the group website: www.nrossdmg.deer-management.co.uk

The Secretary did a quick survey of those Members in attendance and was pleased to report the substantial majority were either carrying out habitat monitoring in 2017 or had done it last year. He asked that Members submit their results to him when completed.

On the matter of the Competency Register he was pleased to be able to report that all Members who need a DSC1 qualification now have it.

Please Note: Members that have DSC1's secured after May 2006 have Trained Hunter recognition. Prior to 2006 and the recipient should convert the qualification to Trained Hunter status by sitting a Game Meat Hygiene assessment –this is important as to sell any deer you shoot to a Game Handling Establishment (Game Dealer) you must be a Trained Hunter. Members should check with their staff the date of their DSC1 qualification and react accordingly.

After a short discussion, the group agreed that the SNH Peatland Action team should be contacted by the Secretary to see if they could develop an initial study at a group level of the location and condition of peatland within the group area for presentation at the AGM.

Building on the discussions at the AGM in 2016 and the work by Alex Duncan it was imperative that the 2017 AGM should be used as the forum for agreeing a group wide deer population model.

Finally, the Secretary said that as soon as the next ECAF application date was known an application would be made on behalf of the group along the lines agreed at the AGM last year.

10. HABITAT MONITORING

See above.

11. EAST RHIDORROCH – INNIS DHONNCHAI WOODLAND PROJECT

Julien Legrand gave a presentation on the proposal at East Rhidorroch to establish a new deer fence to enclose about 300ha of the Rhidorroch Woodland. A meeting paper on the subject was supplied to the group. He explained that the principally Sika deer hefted to the wood would be culled and that compensatory culls would also be needed in collaboration with neighbours as the woodland provide winter shelter. The woodland is designated as a Special Area of Conservation, which described by SNH as ‘at risk’, the whole area of which extends across both East and West Rhidorroch estates.

Mr Legrand explained that no application for woodland or other grants had yet been made to the Forestry Commission or SNH but that early discussions with those agencies had begun.

Mrs Scobie of West Rhidorroch said East Rhidorroch appear to be channelling the deer onto the West Rhidorroch SAC/SSSI through an area marked on the map supplied by Mr Legrand in blue which is also partly a SAC/SSSI. Mrs Scobie supplied her own maps of the proposed area to the meeting.

Mrs Scobie said that she was not aware of the proposals and had not been included in the discussions to date. She said it was clear to her that the West Rhidorroch element of the SAC had not been taken into account by FCS and SNH and that this seemed strange when there was only one SAC.

Mrs Scobie stated that it looked like SNH purely wished to kill deer, and that it was inevitable deer would be funnelled into the SAC by the proposal. Sinclair Coghill did not agree.

Mrs Scobie asked why a series of smaller areas could not be fenced incorporating water gates where needed as on West Rhidorroch.

Mrs Scobie said that West Rhidorroch had worked with FC and SNH for over 20 years to improve the SAC/SSSI. Why would the agencies who had invested in it allow it to be deteriorated by this new out of balance proposal, she said?

She continued by asking how the West Rhidorroch deer were to gain access to the ground they use on East Rhidorroch particularly in an East wind with the fencing in the way? In an East wind, virtually the whole of West Rhidorroch's deer can move onto East Rhidorroch and sometimes for weeks on end.

To assist with some of the queries the Secretary agreed to write to Mr Donald MacLeod of FCS, Dingwall Office, to seek clarity on the procedure that will be followed by the agencies in response to the proposal and any subsequent grant application given the evident need for neighbour involvement and the impact on the SAC.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

13. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

Members discussed and agreed that the Annual General Meeting will be held in October at Great Glen House, Inverness. The Secretary agreed to circulate to Members a list of possible dates.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 4.15 pm.

ACTION PLAN

Collect Subscription arrears	CRWC
Complete Estate Statements (Braemore, Inverlael Deer Forest and Loubcroy)	CRWC/Members
Prepare draft deer population target for 2017/8	CRWC/PC
Upload Access leaflet to Website	CRWC
Organise date for AGM	Members/SNH
All Members to send cull and count records to Secretary	Members
All Members to send Habitat monitoring survey results from 2017 to Secretary	Members
Contact SNH Peatland Action team re initial study for group area for AGM	CRWC
ECAF application on behalf of the group as per AGM last year	CRWC

Bell Ingram
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CRWC/NRDMG/2
July 2017