

MINUTES

of the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of
the NORTH ROSS DEER
MANAGEMENT GROUP held on
TUESDAY 11th NOVEMBER 2016 at
10.00am at GREAT GLEN HOUSE,
INVERNESS

Present:	Mr P Creasey Mr C Cook	Strathvaich (Chairman) Bell Ingram (Secretary)
	Mr I MacNeill Mr F Welstead Mr A Mackenzie Mr N Forman Hardy Mr J Mason Mr A McGillivray Mr J Whitteridge The Duncan Family Ms L Beattie Mr A Campbell Mr M Mackenzie Mr B Dumughn Mr N Scobie Mrs J Scobie Mr D MacRae Mr H O'Donnell Mr G Beattie	Alladale Alladale Corriemulzie/Loubcroy Glencalvie Glencalvie Inverlael Deer Forest Inverlael Estate Kildermorie Leckmelm Estate Ledmore Ledmore Morefield E Rhidorroch W Rhidorroch Strathvaich Wyvis & Clach Liath Wyvis
In Attendance:	Mr S Coghill	SNH
Apologies:	Mr C Thomsen Mr S Colvin Mr J Hall Mr A Sutherland Mr D MacAskill Mr H Munro Mr A Sutherland Mr H van Beuningen Mr T Hodgkiss Mr & Mrs R Bulmer Miss H Hamilton Mr J Legrand Mr R Wilson	Braemore Corriemulzie Croick Croick FCS Foulis Glencalvie Inverlael Deer Forest Leckmelm Deer Forest Ledmore Loch Droma East Rhidorroch NRDMG

1. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed the group to the Annual General Meeting, thanked them for their attendance and briefed them on the scope of the days meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

The apologies were as listed above.

3. MINUTES OF MEETING ON 16th JUNE 2016

After a short discussion Members considered and approved the Minutes as an accurate record of the meeting on the 16th June.

4. MATTERS ARISING

The Secretary ran through the Action Plan from the Minutes of the last meeting and confirmed all points had been addressed as far as he could take them.

Sinclair Coghill updated Members to the effect that all DMG Deer Management Plans had been reviewed and a report submitted to Scottish Ministers by SNH, which will be in the public domain in the next couple of weeks. It is expected that the Rural Affairs committee (RACCE) will be tasked with taking evidence and an announcement will be issued by the government on its findings in the New Year.

He added that a part of the Land Reform Act gave a duty to SNH to review deer management every three years – making the next review 2019.

5. ECAF APPLICATION 2017

The Chairman opened a discussion on a proposed application in early 2017 to the Environmental Cooperation Action Fund, based on the paper sent to Members by email a few days ahead of the meeting. He explained that the paper was the product of liaison between Lindsay Seivwright and the Secretary to identify specific 'public interest' projects that were directly related to the groups Deer Management Plan and the deliverables set for DMG's by the Scottish Government. The projects were advisedly to be done as projects under contract by specialists FOR the group rather than BY group Members.

The proposed projects are:

- A. On-going administration/facilitation of the group
- B. baseline and repeat Habitat Impact Assessments
- C. a review of native woodland and peatland condition
- D. a review of potential woodland expansion opportunities
- E. a repeat helicopter count.

The Chairman went through each project in turn taking the views of each Member - the process was lengthy. The proposed projects, background detail, and Members comments were:

A. A budget for ongoing administration / facilitation of the group including maintenance of our Deer Management Plan.

The groups' public responsibilities have been increased substantially with the Land Reform process, as has the cost of discharging the responsibilities. Presently the group Members bear the whole cost through their annual subscriptions.

ECAF funding at 50% is available and might as well be taken up - the group is required to carry out the work and government has made funding available.

One Member warned Members about the undesirability, in her thinking, of "chasing grants", but the general feeling was that this aspect should be included in the application.

B. Transferring the responsibility for taking site measurements for the Group's Habitat Impact Assessments to professional ecologists.

The groups' habitat monitoring has been undertaken by a mixture of estate stalkers and professional consultants, all paid directly by estates. This individual estate data will be invaluable in informing individual estates as to their culling decisions.

The disadvantage of a fragmented approach is that it is difficult to ensure that there is complete uniformity across the group on a number of somewhat subjective measurements. Without a wholly professional survey with a single team covering the whole area group data might carry less weight with the authorities than their own commissioned surveys.

ECAF funding reduces the cost of employing professional consultants to a relatively moderate sum, and the overall view was that habitat monitoring should be included in the ECAF application.

C. A review of native woodland and peatland condition

Deer Management Groups are now required to have, and share with the public, an understanding of the condition of habitats such as native woodland and deep peat. The suggestion, which was agreed, was that consultants should be engaged to collate "high level" information without conducting detailed on-site surveys.

D. A review of woodland expansion possibilities

The periodic appraisal by Government of Deer Management Groups includes assessing their contribution to helping promote awareness of national targets for increasing woodland cover and carbon capture and this is echoed in the process for scoring ECAF applications which have a greater chance of success if this aspect is included. It was agreed our ECAF application would include a group wide desktop survey exercise.

E. Periodic helicopter counts

There was disquiet at the recent helicopter counts, with an undercurrent of feeling amongst Members that in some way the numbers reported might have been distorted through deer movement on days when poor weather interrupted flying during the count. Many Members viewed their own counts, particularly when there was snow on the ground, as more reliable, although there was an acceptance that some deer might be hidden and so not seen during foot counts.

A Member expressed hope that the costs of aerial photographic counts might be reduced by using drones, but made it clear that this would involve almost military grade drones and camera technology and so was not in any way an "amateur" project.

The meeting agreed to include an application for funding of a helicopter based count, on the clear understanding that it gave no obligation to implement it if in time the group decides that the estimated £60k gross cost of a count was not value for money.

6. TARGET POPULATION AND CULLS FOR 2016/7

The Secretary presented a spreadsheet, distributed at the meeting, showing a sample population model for 2016/17 and went through it line by line.

Members raised significant concern about the employment of the 2015 Helicopter Count as the base data for determining future cull figures. Instead they agreed that Mr Duncan and the Secretary would collaborate to produce an alternative approach based on historic foot count figures and trends.

Members accepted that the model would require an allowance for mortality and agreed that 2% each for Hinds and Stags and 6% for calves would be a default position but subject to change according to the realities of the season.

Similarly, they accepted 25% as the default figure for calf recruitment (2016 recruitment was 27% based on the results from the foot count - illustrating that it does vary). Members also accepted that the model should assume that calving produced a 50:50 split of male and female calves as a default position.

Members accepted the probability that there was leakage from the open range population into neighbouring woodland and that the model should allow for an increase in annual cull figures of 10% to allow for this.

To start with the Secretary suggested that the groups annual Stag cull should remain unchanged and that the groups job at the mid-term meeting next year would be to use the new model to determine the size of the 2017/8 Hind cull.

7. DEER COUNT 2017

It was agreed that a count should take place any time after Christmas and that rather than set a date it would be the responsibility of the count coordinators to be in regular contact with one another to ensure the best conditions were used. The Secretary said that he was available to assist coordinators if they were struggling to make contact with the Members in their areas but reminded Members that if they had not heard from the coordinator of their area they should contact them for an update.

The three sub group count coordinators that Members will liaise with are:

West: Arron Matheson

Central: Alan McGillivray

East: Andrew Sutherland

All their contact details are on the contact sheet

8. FINANCIAL STATEMENT YEAR TO 30th SEPTEMBER 2016

The Secretary presented the statement and there were no questions from the group.

The Leckmelm Estate 2015/6 subscription remained un-paid at the year end. A discussion with Lucy Beattie then ensued regarding membership which concluded in her decision to withdraw from the group being accepted.

9. BUDGET FOR THE YEAR TO 30th SEPTEMBER 2017

The Secretary presented the budget for the year ahead, sought and received approval for it from the group. The Secretary cautioned Members that in the event the ECAF application is accepted the budget would need to be reviewed.

In recognition that, increasingly the work of the group was moving away from the original purposes of the group which validated the use of 5 year deer cull averages to calculate the subscription, Members agreed that the subscription would henceforth be assessed on the basis of the acreage of the Member property.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman highlighted to Members that an extension of both the Ben Wyvis and Beinn Dearg S.7 agreements was under consideration between SNH and the Member estates.

The Secretary shared with Members the draft updated Hill Walking and Deer Stalking leaflet. He would circulate it along with the Minutes and seek assistance with any details that need to be updated.

11. NEXT MEETING

Members discussed and agreed that the next meeting would be held at the Oykel Bridge Hotel June 2017 with the Secretary to suggest a range of dates.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 1.15 pm.

ACTION PLAN

Issue ADMG/NRDMG 2016/7 subscriptions	CRWC
2017 Foot Count	ALL
ECAF application	CRWC/LS
Circulate draft updated Access leaflet	CRWC
Organise venue for the mid-term meeting	CRWC

Bell Ingram
Chartered Surveyors
Estate Office
Bonar Bridge
IV24 3EA

CRWC/NRDMG/2
December 2016