

MINUTES

**of the MID TERM MEETING of the
NORTH ROSS DEER MANAGEMENT
GROUP held on
Thursday 16th June 2016 at 1pm at
OYKEL BRIDGE HOTEL**

Present:	Mr P Creasey Mr C Cook	Strathvaich (Chairman) Bell Ingram (Secretary)
	Mr I MacNeill Mr R Munro Mr A Mackenzie Mr A Sutherland Mr A Sutherland Mr A McGillivray Mrs J Whitteridge Mr I Duncan Mr W Mackay Mr A Campbell Mr M Mackenzie Mrs J Scobie Ms I Scobie Mr J Legrand Mr D MacRae Mr J Chalmers Mr W Grant	Alladale Alladale Corriemulzie/Loubcroy Croick Glencalvie Inverlael Deer Forest Inverlael Estate Kildermorie Kildermorie Ledmore Ledmore W Rhidorroch E Rhidorroch E Rhidorroch Strathvaich Wyvis Wyvis
In Attendance:	Mr S Coghill	SNH (part meeting)
Apologies:	Mr F McCulloch Mr W Lamont Mr D Macaskill Mr N Forman Hardy Mr J Mason Mr H van Beuningen Mr I MacDonald Mr I MacFadyen Bulmer Family Miss H Hamilton Mr P Duncan Mr H O'Donnell Mr R Wilson	Braelangwell FCS FCS Glencalvie Glencalvie, C'mulzie Inverlael Deer Forest Kildermorie Langwell Ledmore Loch Droma SNH – Ben Wyvis Wyvis & Clach Liath NRDMG

1. WELCOME

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

The Land Reform Act has strengthened obligations on private owners of land in the Highlands to manage it in such a way as to preserve the fragile and nationally important habitats under their stewardship. They now have to demonstrate even more clearly to the people and Government of Scotland that they are on top of this. The present system of self-regulation, whereby the crucial decisions on deer management and welfare continue to be taken by competent and experienced people on the ground, rather than by government officials at a distance; will only continue if Proprietors, through collective Deer Management Groups, demonstrate proper stewardship through the preparation and implementation of Deer Management Plans.

The Act also includes provisions for the reintroduction of sporting rates, which will be an additional cost burden on already stretched businesses which are needed to sustain employment in our rural area.

He said that land owners irrespective of size have no choice but to work together and make the case for the continuation of the voluntary principle of land management by their actions and show that we have the enthusiasm and tools for the job. He paid tribute to the ADMG who have been tireless in their support.

He said the groups Deer Management Plan had been re-assessed and that there were still improvements to make. In the past deer culls have been set at an estate level. This must change to a group level decision making process of deer population modelling linked in to habitat condition, a process that S.7 group members will be familiar with. The group needs to agree a process for doing this work.

From the AGM in November onwards the group will need to engage with the public, in particular by inviting elected representatives to attend future meetings.

The development of the voluntary principle and new management plans have brought additional collective responsibilities for example in the restoration of designated sites, the surveying of native woodlands and their restoration, assisting government meet its woodland expansion target and in part linked to this and peatland restoration carbon storage. A further example is to tackle invasive species, flora as well as fauna.

In short, the work of the group will be more extensive, from next year and it is going to cost more in the future, something that will need to be discussed over the coming months ahead of the AGM.

2. APOLOGIES

The apologies are as listed above.

3. **MINUTES OF MEETING ON 10th NOVEMBER 2015**

After a short discussion Members considered and unanimously approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting on the 10th November 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 most actions had been completed but would be in touch with members who he had not heard from regarding:

The competency register:
Leckmelm Deer Forest

Updated Estate Statements:
Braelangwell
Braemore
Croick
Glencalvie
Inverlael Deer Forest
Inverlael Estate
Langwell
Leckmelm Deer Forest
Leckmelm Estate
Ledmore
Loubcroy
Rhidorroch East
Rhidorroch West
SNH – Ben Wyvis

The Secretary confirmed that the Heading for the Scottish Hills Website has been uploaded with estate details of those that include Munros. He asked Proprietors to satisfy themselves of the details and to make any changes direct with SNH.

The Chairman said that he had not managed to progress the Access leaflet. The Secretary said that he would draft one up.

5. **FINANCIAL UPDATE**

The Secretary talked to his financial report and there were no questions.

He commented that the group bank account was an old treasurers style account and that paper statements were received roughly monthly in arrears. For this reason it had meant that some estates had paid their subscriptions but were noted on the financial statement as not having done so.

The remaining subscription due at this time is from Leckmelm Estate.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION ACTION FUND

The Secretary explained that going forward it was known that SNH would no longer subsidise helicopter counts. He added that although some estates were fully engaged with habitat monitoring others were not so keen. In addition as the Chairman had outlined in his address there were things such as native woodland survey work and possibly also assessment of the economic benefit the group members businesses bring to the area that were also required of the group by SNH. The Secretary said that some of these activities were already known as group level activities but that in order to ensure consistent and reliable data he suggested Habitat Monitoring, which is to become a vital part of population modelling might be best done as a group activity. E.C.A.F was, for group level activities, the main route by which some grant assistance will be achieved to assist with these sorts of jobs.

He explained he has spoken with Linzi Seivwright, recently of SNH and now working freelance on Deer Management Plans and on ADMG matters. Linzi had expressed interest in assisting the NRDMG to scope out the possible opportunities and costs of an application to ECAF in 2017. The Secretary said that her help would be appreciated and asked the group for permission to engage her in this work in order that a 2017 proposal was available for approval by the group at its AGM. The Chairman said it was reasonable to expect her costs to be covered. The Group unanimously approved the Secretaries request.

7. 2016 DEER COUNT

The Secretary thanked those who had taken part in the survey and confirmed that he had now received returns from everyone concerned. Members discussed that the count was very late in the year but the coordinators had been in touch with one another over the early part of the year and had felt that it was the one day when conditions across the group area had been most settled and suitable for counting.

8. 2016 RECRUITMENT SURVEY

The Secretary thanked members who had supplied recruitment data. However, given the lateness of the count Members felt that the hind to calf ratio in the 2016 foot count would be as accurate as anything available now and agreed that it would suffice as the recruitment survey for 2016.

The group counted a total of 4182 hinds and 1131 calves or 1 calf for every 3.7 hinds.

9. TARGET POPULATION AND PROJECTED CULLS

As explained by the Chairman in his opening address the Secretary repeated the expectation upon the group that it takes up as a part of its regular business the setting of population targets and corresponding cull programmes. He said that from SNH's perspective the primary objective was sustainable land use and the maintenance of the open range in a good condition.

The group of course needs to add to this the maintenance of a healthy deer herd capable of meeting the demands of the businesses run by the estate members. The development of a clear picture of the health of primary habitats such as dwarf shrub heath and blanket bog was vital through regular monitoring, ideally by respected specialist surveyors. He said that there is a general tone from SNH that there are simply too many deer but what the group needs to do is to develop a detailed understanding of its own. The group agreed with the approach and the Chairman and Secretary took an action to review existing data held by the group and prepare a proposal for the group's approval at the AGM in November.

10. WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2016

The Secretary gave a review of the work programme. 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

He said that all local councillors and the MSP had been advised of the plan and invited to comment.

He was pleased to confirm the proprietors of Little Wyvis has agreed to join the group. They have little or no deer on their ground but fully appreciate the need for collaboration at this important time. Their details have been added to the contact database.

He understood that some members were carrying out their 2016 habitat monitoring work and the Chairman encouraged Members to keep up with this notwithstanding the earlier comments under item 6.

On the matter of the Competency Register he was pleased to be able to report that only two members are still to respond, two do not need a DSC1 qualification given the lack of deer on their properties and that the remainder either had DSC1 or 2. 58% of members who need personnel with a deer qualification have DSC 2.

The Secretary reminded Members that 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 – he added that this is important as to sell any deer you shoot to a Game Handling Establishment (Game Dealer) you must be a Trained Hunter. He advised Members to check with their staff the date of their DSC1 qualification and react accordingly.

The Secretary thanked Members who had responded with information regarding Sheep and Cattle in the group area. 12 reported no livestock, 13 reported in hand livestock operations or seasonal lets, 4 reported either agricultural tenancies, common grazings and crofting rights. One reported a rabbit problem and none reported goats.

11. HABITAT MONITORING

This item was discussed throughout the meeting.

12. HEADING FOR THE SCOTTISH HILLS

The Secretary confirmed that the Heading for the Scottish Hills Website has been uploaded with estate details of those that include Munros. He asked Proprietors to satisfy themselves of the details and to make any changes direct with SNH.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

14. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

Members discussed and agreed that the Annual General Meeting will be held at Great Glen House, Inverness on the Friday 11th November 2016 at 10am.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 3.30 pm.

ACTION PLAN

Collect Subscription arrears	CRWC
Complete Competency Register	CRWC/Members
Complete Estate Statements	CRWC/Members
Contact L Seivwright ref ECAF scoping exercise	CRWC
Prepare draft deer population target for 2016	CRWC/PC
Update Access leaflet	CRWC
Organise venue for the AGM	CRWC/SNH

Bell Ingram
Chartered Surveyors
Estate Office
Bonar Bridge
IV24 3EA

CRWC/NRDMG/2
July 2016