

MINUTES

of the INTERIM MEETING of the NORTH ROSS DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP held on TUESDAY 8th JANUARY 2019 at 10am at SNH, GREAT GLEN HOUSE, INVERNESS

Present:	Mr P Creasey	Strathvaich (Chairman)
	Mr R Whitson	Bell Ingram (Secretary)
	Mr I Macneill	Alladale
	Mr F McCulloch	Braelangwell
	Mr C Kaier Thomsen	Braemore
	Mr W Grant	Braemore
	Mr A Mackenzie	Corriemulzie/Loubcroy
	Mr A Davidson	Corriemulzie
	Mr J Hall	Croick
	Mr A Sutherland	Croick
	Mr D MacAskill	FCS
	Mr A Harington	Glencalvie
	Mr J Buckthorp	Inverlael Deer Forest
	Mrs J Whitteridge	Inverlael Estate
	Mr T Brigg	Kildermorie
	Mr D Campbell	Langwell
	Mr H Bulmer	Ledmore
	Mr A Dunnings	Ledmore
	Mr A Campbell	Ledmore
	Mr M Mackenzie	Ledmore
	Mr C Harrison	W Rhidorroch
	Mr J Legrand	E Rhidorroch
	Mr D Macrae	Strathvaich
In Attendance:	Mr S Coghill	SNH
	Mr C Donald	SNH
	Ms T Lawton	SNH
	Ms M Allsop	FES
	Mr A Robinson	FES
By Conference call:	Mr S Colvin	Corriemulzie
By Skype:	Mrs R Bulmer	Ledmore
Apologies:	Mr F Welstead	Alladale
	Mr I Collier	Clach Liath
	Mr A Sutherland	Glencalvie
	Mr H Van Beuningen	Inverlael Deer Forest
	Mr I Duncan	Kildermorie
	Mr P Dacre	Langwell
	Mr T Hodgekiss	Leckmelm
	Mr N Fraser	Novar
	Mr H O'Donnell	Wyvis & Clach Liath

1. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed the Group to the first Interim Meeting and thanked them for their attendance.

He thanked James Hall for his ongoing contribution to our DMP revision. This has included liaison with our DMP contractor and help in chasing members for information. James' involvement will expand to include the lead role in identifying and recruiting group members to staff our three proposed subcommittees.

The Chairman introduced Christopher Kiaer Thomsen of Braemore and said that he expected the Group would benefit from the fresh perspective Christopher will bring to group discussions.

The Chairman thanked David Campbell for his first draft deer management plan. He noted that David was hampered by late returns of information leaving him no time to do any more than rough out preliminary suggestions.

In normal circumstances David should have been given more time to marshal and clarify his thoughts and then organise his report before releasing a draft to members. He sent it in its present form at the Chairman's request.

It is intended that the greater part of the meeting would be dedicated to discussing the proposed actions within the DMP. David will be asked to assume control of that part of the meeting. The Chairman suggested that he do this by giving the meeting a verbal summary and explanation of each theme within the plan before seeking comments on each point.

The second significant business on the Agenda is to receive a briefing from SNH on their plans to extend the Beinn Dearg S7 agreement. Separate discussions are under way on setting appropriate targets to measure progress, so these will not be discussed at this meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

The apologies were as listed above.

3. MINUTES OF MEETING ON 1st NOVEMBER 2018

Members considered and approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting on the 1st November.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Whilst there were no specific matters arising any issues relating to the minutes would be discussed during the course of the meeting.

All actions from the last meeting had been carried out.

5. HIND CULL UPDATE

All present were asked for their cull figures to date:

Estate	Cull Figures
Alladale	93 stags, 40 hinds and 13 calves.
Braelangwell	1 hind.
Braemore	19 stags, 14 hinds and 9 calves.
Clach Liath	2 stags, 5 hinds and 3 calves.
Corriemulzie	62 stags, 40 hinds and 14 calves.
Croick	20 hinds and 4 calves
FCS	Stag cull and hind culls are ongoing. The figures will be given at the end of March.
Glencalvie	74 stags, 55 hinds and 32 calves.
Inverlael	34 stags and 10 hinds.
Kildermorie	38 stags, 42 hinds and 18 calves.
Ledmore	24 hinds and 7 calves.
Loubcroy	24 stags (to date).
E Rhidorroch	8 stags, 35 hinds and 10 calves.
W Rhidorroch	23 stags, 15 hinds and 1 calf. Also, 9 sika stags and 3 sika calves.
SNH Wyvis	5 stags in season, 20 hinds and 10 calves.
Strathvaich	51 stags, 4 hinds and 2 calves.

6. DEER COUNT 2019 UPDATE

Sinclair Coghill updated those present. Helicopters had been booked for this week (07/01/2019). SNH have decided that the count should be delayed until snow cover gives easier visibility given the short daylight hours in January.

It is likely that the count will now take place in February, with the hope of snow on the ground by then. It may end up taking place after the end of the hind season. Sinclair asked for all estates to confirm with him whether an estate representative would be accompanying the helicopter.

Afternote: The helicopter count is now scheduled to take place during the week 28th January 2019.

7. DMP PROGRESS REPORT

As report author, David Campbell introduced the Group to the two documents that he had prepared prior to the meeting.

Firstly, the strategic overview/main body of the Group Deer Management Plan 2019 – 2024, and secondly the Working Plan, a document designed to present a structured approach to fulfilling the requirements of the Plan.

It was determined that the bulk of meeting time should be devoted to the Working Plan, and the action points contained therein.

Prior to going through the document, David thanked all present who had returned the DMP questionnaire information requested of them, however, there are 7 of the 27 questionnaires that had not been returned and those estates are strongly requested to provide the information at the earliest opportunity.

The next section of the meeting followed the Action Plan paragraph headings:

(i) Area Boundaries

Our large group area needs to be split into 3 sub-groups so that local issues such as setting estate culls can be aired and resolved at subcommittee level.

A discussion followed regarding the best and most practical way of achieving a satisfactory split, whether by geography, population, estate boundary or other mechanism. James Hall asked for feedback to the Group as to the best suggestion.

Alastair Campbell reminded the meeting of the need to take into account the Section 7 boundaries within potential sub group boundaries as there may be conflict or overlap.

Chris Donald offered SNH support in preparing terms of reference for sub groups and suggested that Groups may also take on individual responsibilities for example Habitat Impact Assessment management / Population counting, etc. Sub-groups should be empowered and should share responsibility.

(ii) Membership

David, who serves as a Crofting Commissioner, reminded the Group that crofting interests make up a significant public interest group on the western edge of the Group's area.

He will make references to crofting interests wherever appropriate within his plan.

He will obtain their views as the plan develops and suggests that their representatives be invited to attend our meetings. This was agreed by the Group.

(iii) Meetings

It is proposed that the three subgroups, when up and running, should meet between the main group meetings. Each subgroup, in addition to considering their own local issues, will also examine any group wide issues delegated by the main meeting, allowing whole Group meetings to be restricted to two a year.

Christopher Kiaer Thomsen pointed out that the plan as drafted, whilst full of detail, lacks a coherent overall direction.

He suggested that although it is all very well to list individual owner's aspirations, and although there is no harm in including a wide scattering of innovations designed to meet public expectations, the Group's priority must be identifying and then managing problems that arise when individual aspirations conflict.

The final plan must set clear overall goals for habitat condition, give greater certainty over the collaborative approach to managing deer numbers, and be clearer on the real economic spin offs for local communities.

A conflict is illustrated by the deer policy implemented by government agency the Forestry Commission in four hundred acres of mature woods below Braemore.

Last year 62 stags, almost certainly all transient, were shot there by the FC's contractor, despite no immediate tree protection need to control deer there as the wood is mature.

It would have been logical for the FC to have regard to local economic impacts before culling more heavily than the handful of deer that the woodland produces. The position might change if the wood was felled and replanted but even then, fencing should be considered as an alternative.

Had the stags been left to form part of the Braemore sporting cull then each would have had a value to the estate of a thousand pounds. Braemore invests heavily in the local community with running costs three times the sporting value of deer culled. Over and above that significant Braemore has invested significant sums in capital works, with huge benefit to the local community as local contractors are given precedence.

The value generated by the FC decision to cull so heavily is minimal in comparison, consisting of its deer contractor's charges and the value of meat from the carcasses.

Christopher asked that the FC should review and revise its policy in this area.

David Campbell suggested that to be successful, the DMP should concentrate on 3 key areas; deer welfare, the environment that the deer live in and how the deer impact on the broader or wider public. Christopher Kiaer Thomsen agreed and expanded that the 3 key areas should feed into the larger picture at the landscape level, with the potential for future government subsidies perhaps to be based on the guardianship of nature, something that SNH and other statutory bodies may be able to assist with in terms of liaising with Scottish Government.

Chris Donald commented that conservation objectives should fall out from the creation of the DMP, so all elements are linked inextricably. As part of the DMP process, Sinclair Coghill suggested mapping individual objectives as appendix to the document, which was generally supported.

David Campbell further commented that owners should have the right to run their estates or landholdings generally within their own objectives but with a

view to working collectively. James Hall commented that as an iconic species of Scotland deer are a fundamental part of why tourists and others come to Scotland and the DMP should celebrate the presence of deer and promote a sustainable population.

(iv) Constitution and Finances

In response to David Campbell's suggestion that the Group should examine whether there might be a better basis than a headage levy on deer shot for allocating costs, Patrick Creasey explained that DMG contributions are already partly based on the acreage of open hill ground managed by each estate.

(v) Deer Management Plan

During this part of the meeting, the emphasis moved on to designated sites and how they fit in to the larger plan.

The importance of recognising sika and species other than red deer as part of the overall deer population was noted. Sika contribute a significant cost to forest owners due to the difficulty in controlling them and the damage they inflict.

(vi) Code of Practice on Deer Management

All Group members have an obligation to comply with the Code.

(vii) ADMG Principles of Collaboration

The Group recognises the need for members to collaborate with one another and with other neighbouring groups, the community and other stakeholders.

(viii) Best Practice

As with section (vi) above.

(ix) Data and evidence gathering

The Group already recognises that in order for the Plan to be effective, there is a need to understand the deer population as is. Further, in order to maintain an accurate and comprehensive deer population model, information being fed in to the Group must be accurate and timely, as a failure to understand the population will lead to a failure in delivering the Plan.

James Hall questioned David Campbell's requirement in the draft Plan, for a 3 yearly helicopter count.

This was felt by the Group to be ambitious and very costly, and so should be changed to 5 yearly interval, with a caveat that exceptional circumstances may necessitate a more frequent count.

David Campbell explained that his experience of one estate, which led him to distrust Group counts, decided him on stipulating three year helicopter count intervals.

The Chairman questioned whether the DMP plan writer should give greater emphasis on balancing the benefits of his suggestions against their cost.

Good high quality annual counting on foot should give a clear indication of mortality and recruitment and when combined with accurate cull records should enable the Group to maintain an accurate assessment of the deer population in between helicopter counts.

Chris Donald mentioned that annual foot counts don't necessarily need to account for every deer on the ground and could be sample based within each ownership, and could be titled "an estimate of annual variables" rather than retaining the present title of "foot count". The assessment would necessitate taking a sample of the population in an area, looking at the recruitment and mortality and extrapolating that sample across the population on the assumption that much of the individual estate populations will be affected similarly.

(x) Data and evidence gathering culls

In simple terms having agreed a model and agreeing a population it should be straight forward to agree a cull target and thereafter to carry out the cull in accordance with the plan.

Christopher Kiaer Thomsen suggested that outwith the count windows, indicators on the ground will give a steer on populations with indicators such as grazing, trampling, etc. and keepers will be able year on year maintain a feel for the general health of the herd on their ground utilising these indicators.

The Chairman stressed the importance of the plan recognising existing work such as population modelling before the engagement of David Campbell as plan writer. He suggested it would be wrong for David to approach his task with the assumption that anything achieved before him was of little value.

The DMP must give credit for past achievements.

Two instances are progress towards the Government target of a 25% increase in Scotland's tree cover, and the very extensive peatland restoration work already carried out.

(xi) Habitat Monitoring

It was agreed that accurate and consistent habitat monitoring is a critical contributory factor in determining culls.

The Chairman emphasised the need for regular professional habitat monitoring across the Group to ensure that our data and conclusions are consistent. He also reminded individual members of the importance of carrying out their separate

“amateur” monitoring to allow them to check warnings that might arise in the professional process.

He requested an email from all proprietors on any concerns that they have regarding habitat monitoring, copied to David Campbell and himself.

(xii) Competence and training

All deer managers should possess the relevant training qualifications – preferably DMQ 2.

David Campbell drew the Group’s attention to the Fountain Forestry policy of requiring every sporting tenant to have DSC1, suggesting this might be an appropriate aspiration for the whole group.

Fountain’s holdings differ from group estates, in that elsewhere rifles are under the continual supervision of qualified and experienced stalkers, whereas on Fountain land, stalking tenants are not accompanied.

There was a brief discussion as to whether guests stalking on the hill should be required to undertake DMQ 1. However, it was agreed that this was unrealistic, and that stalking should take place under the supervision of the highly skilled and highly professional stalkers on Member estates.

(xiii) Carcass handling facilities and venison marketing

Given the stringent standards being applied by Food Standards Scotland, there is a real requirement to continue to review their carcass handling facilities.

(xiv) Communications

David Campbell emphasised the need to have all information pertinent to the Group available on the website, and that Minutes are posted and updated where appropriate action points have been fulfilled.

The second section of the Action Plan covered the Public Interest Outcomes set by Scottish Government.

After Alastair Campbell drew the meeting’s attention to the long time already taken up by the presentation of just part of the draft EDMP, and the need to free up time to hear SNH’s S7 plans. Patrick Creasey asked all present to email their thoughts and responses on the second half of the plan to himself, David Campbell and James Hall.

Angus Davidson emphasised that we need to demonstrate delivery of the actions within the new Plan and that there is an urgent need to get information to David to fill in any information gaps that may exist, particularly where we have partially achieved a target set previously; for example, native woodland impact reduction, or woodland creation. To ensure that the Plan re-write takes into account all of the successes that are a result of the old plan and accurately reflect the hard work of all the Members of the Group.

8. HABITAT MONITORING 2019

The Secretary explained the situation with regard to the 2018 HIA work and the family problems encountered by the contractor. He explained that the HIA contractor was not replying to messages. The Secretary was instructed to engage another contractor to complete the survey and report.

9. DETAILED DISCUSSION REGARDING SNH PROPOSALS FOR EXTENDING THE BEINN DEARG SECTION 7 AGREEMENT

Sinclair Coghill gave an update on the thought process behind the Section 7 expansion. The slides relating to which are appended to this document.

Chris Donald emphasised that one of the potential benefits of expanding the Section 7 area would be to guarantee the delivery of a large number of the public interest outcomes that form part of the Spring Assessment.

As part of the setting of palatable management objectives, Christopher Kaier Thomsen highlighted the importance of the relationship between private owners and Government bodies and that the Government bodies should be mandated to lead by good example. He gave the example of a situation where neighbouring owners, one public and one private were able to implement different management standards, which he felt was inappropriate.

There followed a discussion on the relative merits of fences and controlling deer impacts, and the possibility that the Forestry Commission for example spend more money on fences and less on contractors employed to shoot deer. The emphasis of the discussion was on the lost financial benefit to the community as a result of deer being shot out of season and in woodland and other areas by contractors, when the stalking might be let to paying guests and the venison sold locally.

Derick Macaskill highlighted that the Forestry Commission spent £1m on deer fencing in the last 10 years in the north and will continue to do so where appropriate.

At that point a discussion ensued on the correlation between deer population size and the amount of movement of that population, with an emphasis on the damage that can be created by a small population undertaking large numbers of movements, potentially causing more damage than a large population undertaking a small number of movements.

There are issues whereby the interaction of deer with human beings creates damage. The question was asked of SNH as to how they intend to deal with conflicts when populations that have been reduced to the required number create impacts as a result of movements caused by other access takers. This response was inconclusive.

Innes Macneill reiterated that Alladale was now seven years into the Section 7 agreement and they are still having issues regarding the impacts caused by their reduced deer population being moved excessively by walkers. He requested that no HIA is undertaken this year. Sinclair Coghill agreed that the issue of low densities

and high impacts still exists at Alladale and they are quite understandably frustrated that no solution has been found to the dilemma.

Expanding the point, Chris Donald gave a good explanation of the browsing versus trampling issue; whereby, low browsing but some trampling may be acceptable – or vice versa and may lead to a case being made, particularly in the case of Alladale, which could form the solution.

The Chairman asked SNH to provide a justification for the target written into the S7 plan, which will result in triggering an overall “fail” if just a single impact out of possibly hundreds measured is judged to be high medium or above.

This target appears impossible, as indications are that any survey of a highland habitat of similar size to Beinn Dearg anywhere in Scotland that is judged to be in favourable condition is likely to record at least one and probably more high medium impacts.

Chris Donald drew this section of the discussion to a close and requested that notwithstanding the need to complete various elements of population and habitat work, that he is keen to progress the planning of the potential expansion of the Section 7 area, on the basis that any element of it can be altered, and that estates may change their status prior to signing.

David Campbell advised those present that they shouldn't be scared of a Section 7 agreement, as it is a voluntary agreement, but emphasised the need for helicopter count before sign off. It was confirmed that the habitat monitoring would be paid for on designated sites, on the basis of the Section 7 going ahead.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Tom Chetwynd joined the meeting and gave a presentation on forestry cooperation and ability of the Group to benefit from grant funding to undertake a cooperative forestry review with an emphasis there is no obligation for estates to subsequently proceed with planting.

It was noted that undertaking this work would benefit the Group at the Spring Assessment.

The slides pertaining to this part of the meeting are appended to this document.

The Secretary then emphasised the need for the estates who had not returned the information gathering form to David Campbell to do so as soon as possible as completing the DMP re-write will be impossible without that information.

11. NEXT MEETING

The date and venue of the next meeting remains 7th June 2019 with an aspiration to agree the major sections of the DMP by email before then. That notwithstanding,

there may be a need for smaller executive Group or other meeting in the interim. Should that be required the Secretary will promulgate details in due course.

The Chairman drew the meeting to a close and thanked everybody for their attendance. He looks forward to continuing the high levels of collaboration and good work towards the rewrite of the Deer Management Plan and its subsequent delivery.

ACTION PLAN

Confirm with Sinclair Coghill if estate representative will assist helicopter count	Members
All DMP questionnaires to be returned to David Campbell	Members
Suggestions to James Hall regarding sub group area split	Members
Proprietors to email Patrick Creasey and David Campbell with comments on habitat monitoring	Members
All to email points relating to the public interest section of the report to Patrick Creasey and to David Campbell.	Members

Bell Ingram
Chartered Surveyors
Estate Office
Bonar Bridge
IV24 3EA

RSMW/NRDMG/2
February 2019