

Minutes of the North Ross Deer Management Group Annual General Meeting
Held via Zoom on Friday 18th February 2022 at 11am

In Attendance:

James Hall – Chairman NRDMG, David Campbell - Director, Helen Watson – Secretary, Tom Turnbull – Chair of the ADMG, Sinclair Coghill - - NatureScot, Patrick Creasey – Strathvaich, Innes MacNeil – Alladale, Wayne Grant – Braemore & Droma, Ian Duncan – Kildermorie, Angus Davidson – Inverlael & Angus Davidson Limited, Colin Morrison – Angus Davidson Limited, Shane Colvin – Corriemulzie, Henry Bulmer – Ledmore, Finlay McCulloch – Braelangwell, Robert Cooper – Langwell, Fred Drion – Loubcroy, Alastair Harington – Glencalvie, Ben McKeown – NatureScot.

Apologies:

Mr Charles Harrison – West Rhiddoroch, Jake Buckthorp – Inverlael Deer Farm, Hugh O’Donnell - Wyvis, Ian Collier – Clath Liath, Derick Macaskill – Forestry Land Scotland, Hendrik Jan Van Beuningen - Inverlael Deer Forest, Andrew Sutherland – Glencalvie, Donald Macrae – Strathvaich, Ali Mackenzie – Corrimulzie, Nocholas Foreman Hardy – Glencalvie, Nigel Fraser - Novar

No.	Item	Action
1.	<p>Chairman’s Welcome</p> <p>The chair welcomed the group to the Annual General Meeting and thanked them for joining the call. He introduced David Campbell and Helen Watson who have been appointed as Director and Secretary to the group.</p> <p>While the Situation Report will be covered during the agenda, we must be aware of the changes that deer management is impacted by Scottish Government legislation and we must accept the common strand of opinion that a land management plan including conservation and habitat recovery will lead how deer are managed. We must arm ourselves with the necessary information to endorse our findings – groups have never been more important.</p> <p>James welcomed Tom Turnbull and thanked him for joining us and we looked forward to hearing his perspective of Deer Management in Scotland.</p>	
2.	<p>Tom Turnbull – Chair of The Association on Deer Management Groups</p> <p>Tom thanked James for the invitation to the meeting. He has not visited our area but hopes to do so in the future. The Association of Deer Management Group last met in November and the next AGM meeting will be held in The Kingsmills Hotel, Inverness on 23rd March at 10am.</p> <p>Tom updated the group on many of the current activities of the ADMG. These included details of the many strands of legislative change required to implement the recent ScotGov deer review recommendations. He further highlighted discussions between ADMG and NatureScot regarding the implementation of many aspects of the review.</p> <p>Tom spoke of the impact of climate change in relation to wild deer and their habitat, and a discussion surrounded various aspects and impacts including increasing public access, the carbon footprint of deer, recording and</p>	

	<p>reducing these as part of the wider climate change works that will undoubtedly be required to be undertaken by all land managers. The political landscape has changed markedly and is continuing to evolve and the DMG will need to continue to adapt to these pressures to maintain control of your own affairs. Habitat conditions needs to be central to management and HIA is a critical part of this.</p>	
3.	<p>Apologies Apologies were intimated to the meeting.</p>	
4.	<p>Minutes of previous meeting held on 28th January 2021 The minutes of the previous meeting which was held on 28th January 2021 were approved and considered to be an accurate record of the meeting.</p>	
5.	<p>Matters Arising There were no matters raised from the previous minutes.</p>	
6.	<p>Financial Statements for year to 30th September 2021 The bank balance as of 30th September was verified to be aligned with the bank statement. However, we are still awaiting direct access to the bank, and this will be pursued. We also will contact Bell Ingram to ascertain whether there are matching accounts, which were historically available.</p>	DC/HS Mar 31st
7.	<p>Budget for Year to 30th September 2022 A draft budget has been produced which considers the known expenditure in the coming months. Subscriptions will be issued to estates just after 31st May. Subscriptions will be made up of area of estate x 0195p per hectare and the areas will be taken from mapping produced in 2019 count. The Group subscriptions will be made up of 5-year average cull with stags @ £4.22 and Hinds @ £2.16. James Hall reported that there are no financial standing orders in place to ensure a clear process is approved to process income, expenditure and what reserves are required. Financial Standing Orders will be drafted and sent out to members for approval, and these will be put in place for future use.</p>	HW June 22 JH May 22
8.	<p>Sub-Group Reports including 21/22 Cul & Census</p> <p>East Sub Group Ian Duncan reported that overall, the period has been quiet. A sub group meeting was held on 12th November but was sparsely attended. We have, as a group, culled 25% more than our stag cull target. Our next meeting will be held at The Storehouse on Friday 11th March at 10am. We would hope that representatives from both NatureScot and Forestry Land Scotland will be able to physically attend.</p> <p>West Sub Group In Charles Harrison's absence David Campbell reported that again, a quiet period. It is almost a year since we last met which reduces contact, but we will also be arranging a meeting for March. The Section 7 reduction cull in</p>	ID/HW Mar 22

	<p>2019 and 2020 has meant deer have been less visible and an agreement was reached with NatureScot to reduce the cull targets for West Rhiddoroch, East Rhiddoroch and Langwell. Next meeting will be held in the coming weeks with date and time to follow.</p> <p>Central Sub Group James Hall reported that the group had met last summer and will be planning the next meeting in the coming weeks. Having taken on the commitment of group chair James requested that a volunteer come forward to take on the role of Central Sub Group Chair. It would be good to get some younger perspective to drive forward the sub group. Focus has been on the cull with a section 7 in place. We have a licence to extend shooting until the end of the month so hopefully that time will be used to get the hind numbers up to target where possible. Weekly reporting of culls did drop between the handover from Bell Ingram to David and Helen. What has not been shot this year will still need to be shot next year. Next meeting will be held at Croick Estate with date and time to follow.</p>	<p>CH Mar 22</p> <p>JH Mar 22</p>
9.	<p>NatureScot update including Section 7 status Sinclair Coghill reported that the key messages to DMG's from NatureScot were</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of the deer working group recommendations • CivTech and remote census deer counting • WDNA strategic priorities including deer and the green recovery, deer and carbon rich soils, deer public safety and deer densities and impacts • Habitat impact assessments • Non-Lead ammunition <p>Sinclair was asked by Shane Colvin how NatureScot felt the North Ross group were performing in relation to other groups. He reported that there was great progress since section 7 in place although Covid has impacted the progress. He felt that the group are going to take on deer management in a professional manner. While Covid and mild winters have made it difficult to meet cull targets he is confident that levels can be maintained at levels required. Can members undertake a recruitment count in April as normal please. The political landscape has changed and will continue to change. We must accept that and help to drive change to have habitat as a priority. Deer are an output from having habitat in good order. The group needs to consider restoration of peatland at a strategic and individual estate level. Peat land Action can help with this. The group also need to consider Woodland Creation and Native Woodland management, again at a strategic as well as individual estate level – Forestry Co-operation grant from Scottish Forestry can help with this. NatureScot will be delivering 5 regionally based training events on Woodland Monitoring, and these will be announced shortly.</p>	<p>All Apr 22</p>

	<p>NatureScot hope to agree hind cull with properties for the coming year. Stags are not a priority, hind cull is where the emphasis should be to stop population rise.</p> <p>A helicopter Deer Census (which will be fully funded by NatureScot) is programmed for 2022/23 for the whole of North Ross and a Herbivore Impact Assessment on the Section 7 designated site will also be undertaken and results available by October 2023 for use in subsequent cull planning.</p> <p>Sinclair gave an overview on the works being carried out by NatureScot in terms of the deer review. These included research works on population recording by drone and satellite imagery, the use of image intensification equipment in deer management and focused on the need for the group to demonstrate good practice in habitat monitoring work to be undertaken and the strong need to tie population to habitat.</p> <p>A discussion around the merits of count conditions, specifically the benefits of identifying deer placement during black ground conditions.</p>	
10.	<p>HIA – 2022 work schedule & climate change impacts</p> <p>Colin from Angus Davidson Limited took everyone through a power point presentation showing the equipment used to create accurate information for a habitat impact assessment. As deer planning and culls are moving towards being led by these assessments it is important that estates have detailed information to base their management decisions on. It was agreed that Angus Davidson Ltd (Colin) would discuss further with the Chair the needs of the group in terms of habitat impact assessments in 2022.</p>	CM/JH Apr 22
11.	<p>Appointment of Office Bearers</p> <p>Apart for the request for a Central Sub Chair position there were no other appointments to report.</p>	
12.	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>Innes MacNeil reported that the HIA works undertaken on Alladale is set at a different measure than those carried out on Beinn Dearg, and despite their cull achievements over the past 5 years, they are confident that the habitat has not improved, and he believes, they have higher cull figures over the period than most other group members.</p> <p>In the snow of recent days, they have been unable to get near hinds for stags on the ground. They now find themselves shooting more stags out of season than in season and he was conscious of the impact that this might have on some of his neighbours.</p> <p>Innes further suggested that having been in the S7 for 12 years with many years of high culls, there is little evidence of improving habitat on their area. He felt another solution was needed to be sought.</p> <p>Over the last 5 years on Alladale, on a good day, density can be 5 deer p Sq Km and on a bad day it can be 8. Despite these densities they are seeing no improvement in the habitat condition.</p> <p>Sinclair Coghill offered some sympathy to the situation, noting that blanket bog and some other habitats can be notoriously slow to recover.</p> <p>He further stated that it is clear from evidence at Alladale, that if you reduce hind numbers and the ground is clear, then stags will be attracted to the clean ground.</p>	Ongoing Proprietors

	<p>He encouraged neighbouring properties who are worried about stags being shot by Alladale to reduce their hind numbers, to encourage stags to their own landholding. It was suggested that this might be the best solution to this issue going forward.</p> <p>The chair emphasised the importance of proprietors attending meetings. There are big decisions with challenges to be faced and these should be driven by proprietors. Unfortunately, without their input proprietors may find that decisions have been taken by others that they are not happy with. Please try to attend.</p>	
13.	<p>Date & Venue for next meeting The next meeting will be held in June and a date, time and venue will be advised soon. The meeting closed at 1.15pm.</p> <p>Sub Groups are also reminded to inform the secretary and director of dates of Spring 2022 sub group meetings for attendance by them.</p>	<p>JH/DC Mar 22</p> <p>Sub Group Chairs Spring 22</p>