

Minutes of the North Ross Deer Management Group Annual General Meeting  
Held at Croick Estate, Ardgay on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2022 at 9.30am

**In Attendance:**

James Hall – NRDMG Chair, David Campbell – NRDMG Director, Helen Watson – NRDMG Secretary, Sinclair Coghill - - NatureScot, Colin Morrison – Angus Davidson Limited, Charlotte Gilfillan & Jamie Bain – Ledmore, Wayne Grant – Braemore & Droma, Robin Irvine – Morefield, Rob Franklin – East Ross DMG Chair, Ross Watson – South East Sutherland DMG Chair, Tom Chetwynd – North West DMG Chair, Stephen Young – Head of Policy, Scottish Land & Estates, Tony Stephenson – Head of Business, Scottish Land & Estates, Alex Moore, Ryan Munro & Innes Macneill – Alladale, Charles Harrison – Rhidorroch, Julien Legrand – East Rhidorroch, Hubert Colvin & Ali Mackenzie – Corriemulzie, Ali Sutherland – Croick, Patrick Creasey – Strathvaich, David Gladwin – Inverlael Farm, Andrew Sutherland & Alastair Harington – Glencalvie, Sam Thompson – Kildermorie, Rob Cooper – Langwell, Finlay McCulloch – Braelangwell, Hugh O’Donnell - Wyvis, Megan Bregazzi – Forestry & Land Scotland, Sam Tedcastle – Centre for Good Relations.

**Apologies:**

Ian Duncan – Kildermorie, Donald Macrae – Strathvaich, Nigel Fraser – Novar, Jake Buckthorpe – Inverlael Deer Forest, Jamie Stone MP, Paul Dacre – Langwell, Nicholas Foreman Hardy – Glencalvie, Simon Scott – Loubcroy, Christopher Kiaer Thomsen – Braemore & Droma, Ian Collier – Clath Liath, Bulmer Family – Ledmore, Tom Turnbull – ADMG, Derick Macaskill – FLS, Maree Todd MSP, Sir Michael Wigan – East Sutherland DMG Chair.

No.	Item	Action
1.	<p><b>Chairman’s Welcome</b></p> <p>The chair welcomed the group to the Annual General Meeting and thanked them for the good turnout. As per the agenda we will deal with our core business first and then we are delighted to welcome Chairs of local DMG groups to join us along with Stephen Young from Scottish Land and Estates. Unfortunately, Tom Turnbull’s wife has contracted Covid so he sends his apologies, but Tom Chetwynd will read out his report on his behalf.</p>	
2.	<p><b>Apologies</b></p> <p>Apologies were read out as above and James went on to say that although Maree Todd MSP could not make the meeting today, she was offering a meeting at some time during the winter months on a Friday. James thought this would be a good opportunity to give our perspective and problems facing land management in the highlands to our local MSP. He will organise a plan to meet and let the group know in the coming weeks.</p>	JH Nov.22
3.	<p><b>Minutes of previous meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2022</b></p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on the 18<sup>th</sup> February were approved and considered to be an accurate account of the meeting.</p>	
4.	<p><b>Matters arising from previous meeting:</b></p> <p><b>6) Financial Statements for year to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021</b></p>	

	<p>After several months of contact between ourselves, Bell Ingram and the bank we now have access to the bank account and are able to operate the account fully.</p> <p><b>7) Budget 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022</b> The draft budget was accepted, and subscriptions were issued and collected from estates as intimated.</p> <p><b>Financial Protocol</b> A financial protocol was compiled during April and distributed to members for approval on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022. Having no objections from members the protocol was approved and these standing orders now define our financial processes.</p> <p><b>9) Recruitment Count</b> Most estates carried out a recruitment count in April. Generally, there was low mortality and beasts were in good condition.</p> <p><b>10) HIA</b> The majority of estates have carried out HIA and Colin Morrison from Angus Davidson Limited will give an overview of outcomes and findings and the use of HIA going forward.</p> <p><b>13) Next Meetings</b> All Sub-Groups have held meetings in the summer months and have winter meetings booked in.</p>	
5.	<p><b>Financial Statements for year to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022</b> The financial statement balance as of 30<sup>th</sup> September was verified to be aligned with the bank statement. The income and expenditure streams were read out by David Campbell and there were no comments from members. The group has a healthy bank balance due to little activity during covid and two years subscriptions being collected. It was explained that the 5-year average cull subscription is collected on behalf of the ADMG and forwarded on to them, so the operating monies of the group is only the Ha subscriptions.</p>	
6.	<p><b>Budget for Year to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023</b> A draft budget was submitted for approval. It is based on taking subscriptions of a 5-year average cull per estate, which is then forwarded to the ADMG and a Ha charge of 0.05p per Ha of owned land. The reduced Ha charge for this coming year (last years was 0.195p per Ha) was thought to be the fairest way to compensate landowners for their Habitat Impact Assessment fees. Most estates are VAT registered and can reclaim the 20%. It is not viable for the NRDMG to become registered as we have few transactions to meet the threshold. This also allows each member to decide on the extent of HIA they wish to undertake.</p> <p>James told the group that FLS pay their cull fees direct to the ADMG and currently there is discussions being held with FLS as they do not feel they get value for money from their Ha subscription to the group. They do not feel</p>	

	<p>they should pay towards Deer Plans or HIA . James felt that given the large area FLS operate within the group it would be unfortunate if they decided to withdraw their support for the group given the importance the Scottish government are placing on land management and engagement with all stakeholders. We will update group members on any further developments and discussions.</p> <p>James asked the group if they had any other comments or objections for the draft budget? On no objections, the budget is approved for the year up to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023.</p>	
7.	<p><b>Any Other Business</b> There were no other business matters to discuss.</p>	
8.	<p><b>Date and venue of next meeting</b> The next meeting will be arranged for March 2023. James asked if any other estate was willing to host the next meeting as it would be nice to visit other estates within the group? Anyone who would like to host our March meeting please contact either James (<a href="mailto:jdeh@mac.com">jdeh@mac.com</a>) or Helen (<a href="mailto:helen@hils.ltd">helen@hils.ltd</a>).</p>	All Feb 2023
9.	<p><b>HIA Summer 2022 Report by Colin Morrison from ADL</b> Colin Morrison gave a presentation on findings while carrying out HIA on some group estates during the summer. HIA is used by NatureScot to assess designated sites and Colin emphasised it is an assessment of trampling and grazing impact on your habitat not biodiversity and health of your habitat. The tools used in 2019 and 2022 for assessment have changed and therefore there is no direct comparison between the two years. Improving the condition of your habitat is not a quick fix and, in many instances, can take a generation for improvement. Habitat assessments should be seen as an essential tool within land management which allows a pro-active stance rather than reactive stance in land maintenance and where necessary, improvement. It should be seen as the start of the process not an exercise to be carried out and then stored. As a group we are moving in the right direction and taking seriously the need to evidence the impacts of various factors affecting our habitat. The evidence should add to our existing knowledge of what are the main inhibitors to improving habitat be that weather, walkers, accessibility, deer or other herbivores which can all affect what condition our habitat is in. It provides greater credibility to other stakeholders that you know exactly what is going on within your landholding and have evidence to prove your judgements. This is very important with the new Land Reforms in a Net Zero Nation consultation which is ongoing and open for comments until 31<sup>st</sup> October 2022. Following Colin’s presentation there was the opportunity for members to ask questions. Innes from Alladale said they would be carrying out a full assessment next year and while he could see lots of improvements in lower areas the high tops, which are much more inaccessible were still unchanged and he was sceptical that the Section 7 would every end. Patrick Creasey, Strathvaich suggested perhaps we need to change the approach we are taking. A general discussion took place regarding the fragility of the designated site, is it so fragile it cannot cope with trampling or are we pushing the deer on to that ground as it is mostly inaccessible and therefore</p>	

	<p>a safe haven which then suffers from trampling and grazing? There are also increased numbers on the high tops in Summer as deer go higher to get a breeze to keep flies at bay.</p> <p>Sinclair from NatureScot said that it would be collaboratively working that would see improvement and a collective solution would need to be sought through cull targets and working across land boundaries as a team.</p> <p>Attached please find Colin Morrison's full information.</p>	
10.	<p><b>Stag Season Update</b></p> <p>David Campbell gave the updated cull figures. We have not, as a group, met our cull targets for red deer. This may be partly due to figures not being sent to David and Helen or individual estates not meeting their targets. Below please find the group reported figures as at 23<sup>rd</sup> October.</p> <p>As a group we have culled 88% of our target - 520 culled from a 592 target. West Sub-Group have culled 76% of their target - 94 culled of a 125 target. Central Sub-Group have culled 93% of their target - 339 culled of a 365 target.</p> <p>East Sub-Group have culled 88% of their target - 205 culled of a 240 target. The Sub-Group targets are slightly skewed as Glencalvie and Strathvaich appear in both Central and East Sub-Groups.</p> <p>David emphasized that in order to produce accurate data estates must report their cull figures either weekly or fortnightly either by email or by WhatsApp so that the tables could be updated and distributed in a timely manner.</p> <p>James asked whether estates who did not meet their target were going to ask for an extension licence to continue the cull to try and meet their target or were accepting of falling short?</p> <p>There was a discussion regarding the forthcoming helicopter count which is due to take place in January, it has been agreed that it will be a black ground count which gives a better idea of where deer congregate when there is no snow. James wondered if the count might take place before Christmas so that if deer numbers exceeded estate estimates that the cull could be upped within the season to reduce numbers. Ledmore who have a much-increased cull in force were not in favour of the earlier count as it would mean the deer would be fleeing from the helicopter while they were out on the hill undertaking their cull. Also, the days will be at their shortest in the lead up to Christmas.</p> <p>David Campbell will be contacting Sub-Groups to get count coordinators organised.</p>	<p>All Ongoing</p> <p>DC Nov.22</p>
	<p>Following on from a coffee break we welcomed some guest speakers and neighbouring DMG Chairs to join us.</p> <p>In the absence of Tom Turnbull, we had Tom Chetwynd read out the Autumn Report from the ADMG. (see attached)</p>	

	<p>This was followed by a presentation from Stephen Young from Scottish Land and Estates. Attached please find their full response to the land reform consultation, and the summary points which were covered in his presentation.</p> <p>Neighbouring chairs who joined us stood up and gave us a brief overview of what was happening in their group, how their cull targets were being met and factors involved in their land management.</p> <p>The meeting closed at 1pm, followed by lunch and tours of Croick Estate for those who wished to see around the estate.</p>	
--	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--