

North Ross Deer Management Group Annual General Meeting
Held at Kyle of Sutherland Hub, Bonar Bridge on Thursday 6th November 2025 at 10am

In attendance:

James Hall (Chair)	JH
David Campbell (Director)	DC
Helen Watson (Secretary)	HW
Graeme Taylor - NatureScot	GT
Innes Macneil - Alladale	IM
Finlay McCulloch – Braelangwell	FM
Ally Sutherland - Croick	AS
Ali Mackenzie - Corriemulzie	AM
Rob Cooper – Langwell	
Andrew Sutherland - Glencalvie	ASu
Alistair Harington – Glencalvie	AH
Ian Duncan - Kildermorie	ID
Hugh O'Donnell - Wyvis	HO
Niall Rowantree - Wyvis	NR
Nick Grieff - Wyvis	NG

Observer

Kate Heightman – Kyle of Sutherland River Trust	KH
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Apologies:

Wayne Grant – Braemore & Droma
Tom Turnbull – Chair of ADMG
Ian Collier – Clath Liath
Guido Lenssens – Clath Liath
Bastiaan Vandraager – Inverlael Deer Forest
Sam Thompson - Kildermorie
Jamie Bain – Ledmore
John Hetherington – Ledmore Agent
Donald Macrae – Strathvaich
Julien Le Grand – East Rhidorroch
Charles Harrison – West Rhidorroch
Paul Main – NatureScot
Nigel Fraser – Highland Rural

Item	Comments	Action
1)	Chair's Welcome JH welcomed everyone to the meeting. He asked everyone at the meeting to introduce themselves and what their role was. Everyone introduced themselves as above attendee list.	
2)	Apologies Apologies were read out as above by HW. JH noted that we are short of members from the West Sub Group with only 1 stalker attending.	
3)	Minutes of Previous meeting held on 6th November 2024 JH asked if anyone had any comments from the previous meeting and ID wanted it noted that he had not approved the previous minutes.	
4)	Financial Report for 1st September 2024 to 30th September 2025 (See Appendix 1) DC read out the income and expenditure during the above year and asked if there were any comments – none were raised.	
5)	Draft Budget for 1st October 2025 to 30th September 2026 (Proposed Spend – See Appendix 2) DC read out the estimated income and expenditure. He explained that the levies are made up of cull numbers and land areas. The cull fees go directly to the ADMG, and the land area part is kept by NRDMG to run the group and this year it has been set at 10p/Ha. DC also mentioned that we need to retain funds for possible deer counts as now that we are not in a Section 7 NatureScot will not be funding future counts, should that be the way proprietors want to go. DC asked were there any comments: JH commented that he didn't see that there was a need for any more of a surplus than £9,000 - £10,000 but there may be a collaborative approach for a group land management plan. ID said the last plan expired in 2024 and he wondered if we need to have one currently in place? JH said he is waiting for NatureScot's Section 6 letter to come through and then we will have a better idea of what needs to be included in an updated plan.	

	HO commented that although there was money left at the end of the year it was actually less than at the start and therefore the group is running at a deficit. JH said that this was deliberate as the group had quite a large surplus in previous years and the levy was reduced in order to bring down the surplus being held in the bank account, while still having a contingent for unforeseen expenditure. JH then asked if there were any other comments, nothing further was lodged and then JH approved the draft budget.	
6)	Review of Stag Season and Deer Numbers The weekly returns have been regularly distributed by HW. JH asked those who are representing an estate to tell the group how their stag season has been, overall, the group has come reasonably close to reaching their numbers. Alladale IM said that Alladale were late in getting their numbers. They are still shooting stags out of season, policy is to keep reducing, a bit more difficult due to being a man down since a quarter of the way through the season. They have a 720Ha peatland restoration project ongoing which has caused disturbance for the stags and not one stag shot on the north boundary between Alladale and Corriemulzie. Two fencing projects about to start at Glenmore which will cause further disturbance, but IM expects to meet the hind number. Wyvis NR said that Wyvis have shot 51 stags. There is quite a gap in the age structure of the population, deer in poorer condition than expected. The rut was stop/start and average kidney fat scores were between 1-2. Will start on the hinds next week and hope to achieve targets. Kildermorie ID reported that at the start of the stag season a lot of their stags were on higher grounds and on Wyvis which led to a poor start to the stag season but mid-way through September they came back and the rut was late. The red rut was up and down but there was a good sika rut. There is also a serious lack of stags in the age group of 4-5 years up to 7, which doesn't bode well for mature stags in the future. This made it difficult to reach the stag	

target. There are a lot of calves in poor condition, but ID expects to reach the hind target.

Glencalvie

ASu reported that there was a lack of stags on the ground early on but then the rut started and it was a classic rut for 10 days and then it stopped suddenly. There was a couple of weeks with no guests so that impacted the cull and the numbers were down but at the end of the season there were some guests in which helped bring up the numbers. The hinds have been started, they are in poor condition, and their calves are in a bit better condition. Will try to get the hind cull completed. JH asked AS why he thought the hinds were in poor condition. AS thought it was due to the dry summer conditions.

Croick

AS reported that the red stags were lighter than usual and there is a lack of mature stags on Croick but they managed to meet thier numbers along with 30 sika stags. They will start the hinds the week after next and hope to get the targeted number.

Corriemulzie

AM said it was a difficult season at Corriemulzie but they got there in the end. The weather was too good, but stags were in good condition until nearer the end of the season. the rut lasted two weeks and then the mature stags went away but the younger stags remained. Less sika than normal visible and they had a later rut. Just started on the hinds which are in poor condition, again with the dry summer and the current mild weather is also not helpful. Quite a lot of little calves but will try to get the numbers. JH commented that NR was telling him he is stalking at Inver Oykel and has pigs up there, has there been pigs spotted in Corriemulzie? AS said there have been no sitings of pigs.

Langwell

RC said they had a poor season due to the warm weather which resulted in a difficult season with low deer numbers in poor condition. Still some stags to shoot in plantations, have also shot sika in plantations. Have shot a few hinds and they look to be in good condition; all stock is in good condition including cattle and sheep.

	Braelangwell FM thought has only seen deer on Braelangwell a couple of times. One day there was 25 hinds with 2 stags, but they all fled East not West as usual. They haven't got one stag in Braelangwell. DC has been sent updates from Braemore and Ledmore which were read out. Braemore & Droma This season was much improved from last season, although the East wind didn't help, definitely less deer around, especially hinds. More mature stags around and in good condition with the rut lasting from the end of September until the 20th October but due to the warm weather the stags were further out than usual. Some stalking days were spoilt by coming against walkers which due to the fine weather they were going on paths not usually used. Hinds were started last week, and they are not looking in good condition. Ledmore Ledmore has been a significant contributor to the west subgroup deer cull. An English based engineering company has bought the estate and their agent Mr John Hetherington has been in contact with DC and has said they intend to continue with engagement within the group and will at least keep up the cull numbers within the group. They are looking to do some environmental enhancements on the ground. Jamie Bain has intimated that he will be undertaking the hind cull as previous, with a target of 80 hinds and calves being targeted for the season. DC reported that both East Rhidorroch and Rhidorroch have met their stag targets, but we don't have an update on their season. GT commented that although there was a bit of a shortage on the stags NatureScot's focus is on the hind season.	
7)	NatureScot Update GT said there is a lot happening and at the moment it is not clear how the land reform bill which requires each individual property over 1000Ha to have a land management plan will affect deer management and it is accepted that deer management groups are delivering certain elements of biodiversity planning and delivery within a collaborative approach across Scotland.	

	Stage 1 debate on the Natural Environment Bill which was interesting but was just introducing parts of legislation in relation to protecting and improving biodiversity, the Stage 2 debate which is regarding changes to parts of legislation and will give a better idea of what the Bill might look like at the end and something should be out by some time next year. Deer Management is under Part 4. DC asked GT if parliament will be able to deliver the Natural Environment Bill and Land Reform Bill before the next election in May 2026. GT responded that there is no indication that the timescale will not be met. GT gave Paul Main' apologies and gave a summary of North Ross's position to date. The group came out of a Section 7, having met most targets set and it was decided to let the group manage their own affairs, with Section 6A letters to those properties who were in the Section 7. Section 6A requirements are to provide a deer management plan to NatureScot. GT expects the letters to go out within the next 3 weeks. The plan needs to include deer population management, designated site biodiversity management and HIA. Probably a lot of this information is in place, and these letters are being sent out not as a threat but as collaborative working. ID asked was NatureScot planning a new policy with regard to sika. GT said that it is recognised that sika are an increasing problem, but it is not necessary to get a new policy in order to eradicate sika as much as possible to limit their spread. NR asked if there were any plans to extend the incentive scheme at Loch Ness Pilot to shoot sika? GT said that the scheme is in its second year and once the pilot is over there will need to be an overview of how successful it has been. There was a general discussion around the room about incentive schemes and how to get the best results, whether it should be deer based or habitat based as the habitat condition dictates how many herbivores can be accommodated on the land. Another consideration is the different objectives of landowners and how best to accommodate landowners with diverse objectives.	
8)	ADMG Update JH reported that unfortunately Tom Turnbull is at another Deer Management Group Meeting today, but he spoke to him earlier in the week and what the ADMG has been doing all year is	

	lobbying against various aspects of the Natural Environment Bill. A summary is attached. The Land Reform Bill has now been passed, and the main points are • Land holdings over 1000Ha must produce a land management plan and share it with local communities. It is unclear at the moment what form the land management plan needs to take. • In future, if you wish to sell your land you must inform the Scottish government of your intention to sell and they will inform local community groups to see if they want to buy. They will also review land holding to see if it needs lotting up into smaller blocks of land to try and reduce the number of landowners to smaller landowners. Tom Turnbull and Linzi Seivewright are working very closely with Scottish Land & Estates in going through this legislation line by line and have proposed a number of amendments which have mostly been unsuccessful. AH said that there is a £40,000 fine for not taking community interests into account. It is yet to be determined how to take community interests into account.	
9)	Any Other Business Sub Group Structure JH wrote around to everyone a few weeks ago highlighting the slight anomaly of Strathvaich and Glencalvie being in two subgroups which does slightly complicate the reporting and numbers across the group. JH has suggested that they only be in one subgroup and suggested the East subgroup. ID then contacted JH and suggested perhaps a more radical change to change to only two subgroups. AH speaking on behalf of Glencalvie would like to only be in one subgroup as they do attend other DMG's. JH also stated that from now on all subgroups will get one email with all subgroup charts whether that be two or three subgroups. ID said that when he was chair 10 years ago, he approached East Ross DMG to see if they would like to amalgamate with the NRDMG and then split the landholding in two. AH speaking as vice chair the East Ross Group would not be in favour of amalgamating. The East Ross Group is unique in that it is completely fenced, and it has worked for the last 40 years and there is no reason to change the structure as there is no deer on the march out with their group. JH did want to mention that there	

	are deer that will cross The Carron so a small number will travel between East Ross and North Ross boundaries. IM then mentioned Amat and that their landholding does border the group. They don't have a large landholding, but it is a significant population holder particularly in sika deer. So even if they gave cull returns it would be something. IM asked GT if they submitted cull returns. GT wasn't sure but would need to check. DC said that their agent was approached in the past but didn't engage but all agreed with them being a triple SI. DC outlined the estates in the three subgroups and if this was reduced down to two subgroups with Glencalvie and Strathvaich appearing only in the East Subgroup it would be quite evenly distributed. Unfortunately, there is not a representative here to speak on behalf of Strathvaich. two options are • To continue to operate three subgroups but Strathvaich and Glencalvie in the East Sub Group • To draw a line to cut the subgroups into two, although the West terrain is very different to other areas in the group. JH felt that it would probably be best to retain the three subgroups from a practical point of travel to meetings, but JH will speak to CH and Patrick Creasey from Strathvaich. DC asked AM what his view was. AM said it works well at present and he wouldn't change the West subgroup to join with Central. JH asked if there was any other business. IM said that he is looking for someone at Alladale, an all-rounder and a competitive salary is being offered. Contact IM if you know of anyone interested. Fire Plans DC said he is working with Wood Group/SSN who are building the Loch Buidhe to Beaulay 400kV pylon line. They will build a fire management plan as part of their construction plan. and hopefully they will fund a couple of days fire training of which the NRDMG members will be able to attend, this probably relates to East subgroup members more than any others.	
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	JH asked GT if NatureScot is doing anything about fire management. GT said NatureScot are doing a bit of work on fire plans more on the prevention side and are updating Beinn Eighe fire plans at the moment and they are happy to share the plans when complete. FLS Engagement ID also wanted to bring up that we used to have attendance at meetings from FLS and get up to date cull figures from them but there seems to be a lack of engagement since Derick MacAskill retired. GT said some funding has been reduced but to his knowledge they were still attending meetings. Megan Bregazzi is invited to attend all meetings we hold, and she has been asked to provide up-to-date cull information. Ardgay Game DC said that anyone who was interested were invited to go to look around the Ardgay Game plant.	
	Close of Meeting JH thanked everyone for coming and apologised for the poor acoustics in the room and closed the meeting.	