

Morvern Deer Management Group

Minutes from Meeting Held at Lochaline Village Hall 23 April 2019

Attendees:

Peter Lawson (Kinlochteacuis)

Hugh Raven (Ardtornish)

Simon Boulton (Ardtornish)

Ian Collier (Forestry Commission Scotland)

Torquil Kennedy (Forest Enterprise Scotland)

Mark Foxwell (Scottish Wildlife Trust)

Susan Larson (Kingairloch)

Iain Thornber (Glensanda)

Neil Roberts (Laudale)

John MacDonald (Drimnin/Killundine)

Lorraine Servant (Scottish Natural Heritage)

Donald Fraser (Scottish Natural Heritage)

Stephen Fox (Carnoch)

Rory Putman (Consultant)

Angus Davidson (Consultant)

Alasdair Firth (Morvern Community Woodland)

Apologies

Matthew Wilson (Oronsay) and **Alan Kennedy** (Ardtornish), **Andy Jackson** (Carna), **John Jackson** (Forest Enterprise Scotland), **Jonathan Turner** (Laudale), **Derek Lewis** (Drimnin), **Lynda Campbell** (ADMG).

1.	Chairman's Opening Remarks	Actions
<i>1.1.</i>	Peter Lawson (PL) discussed the actions and progress since the previous meeting, including the production of a population model, the significant updating of the web page which now also includes an educational section. PL has contacted Lochaline Primary School for an educational visit to Kinlochteacuis, to learn about what goes on in a typical year of deer management. Having spoken to Susan Larson (SL) a similar thing may be planned for Strontian school. PL has also informed the headmaster of the educational part of the website.	
<i>1.2.</i>	The new Deer Management Plan for 2020 going forward was discussed in the respect that planning will need to start soon, PL has asked that the group forms a list of stakeholders that should be contacted with regards to the new DMP.	Whole Group
<i>1.3.</i>	Member objectives on the website have been updated, PL has asked that members notify if this changes at all. There will be a new audit form to return this summer, in which it is hoped that members will note what audit actions have been addressed.	Whole Group
<i>1.4.</i>	The draft group working plan has been circulated and there has been a small amount of feedback, but little changes required. Going forward, draft minutes will be posted on the website in a shorter timeframe, once they have been circulated.	
<i>1.5.</i>	PL asked if there have been any notifiable diseases recognised in the 2018/2019 stalking season, members confirmed there has not. PL asked if there have been any cases of Lymes disease reported in workers since the last meeting, it was confirmed there has not – PL informed the group of the Lymes disease action leaflet on the website.	
<i>1.6.</i>	There has been one road traffic accident since the last meeting, Simon Boulton (SB) confirmed a minor Deer Vehicle Collision (DVC) on Ardtornish.	
<i>1.7.</i>	PL asked members about any deer impact they might be aware of on archaeological sites on their properties, a letter from a local archaeologist was read out which detailed that, if anything, more grazing would benefit the archaeological features, particularly the house and barn at Barr and the FC forest at Loch Teacuis.	
<i>1.8.</i>	PL has contacted several farming interests in an attempt to expand the group, though unfortunately none were represented for the meeting (one apology received), these will be potential consultees/stakeholders going forward. PL thanked the chairman of the community council for his presence at the meeting and PL hopes to attend a community council meeting soon.	
<i>1.9.</i>	PL expressed his disappointment that Rahoy have opted to cease membership from MDMG on the basis of ongoing costs though this was out with the groups control.	
<i>1.10.</i>	PL highlighted the increased fire risk in the present time.	
<i>1.11.</i>	MDMG maps have been updated and circulated, PL has given feedback to Angus Davidson (AD), Lorraine Servant (LS) has not yet had a chance to look through them all though what she has seen so far looks great.	
<i>1.12.</i>	A document has been circulated regarding the effects of new woodland and fences across the deer group on deer densities, the group confirmed they are happy with the document.	
2.	Minutes of Last Meeting	Actions
<i>2.1.</i>	Neil Roberts (NR) noted an amendment that Laudale had shot 34 stags rather than 47 as written in the minutes.	
<i>2.2.</i>	With that amendment, minutes were proposed by Steve Fox (SF) and seconded by Hugh Raven (HR).	
3.	EGM Adopt the Updated Constitution	Actions

3.1.	<p>SF noted there has been useful feedback from Derek Lewis (DL) and he has made a couple of changes since the circulated copy. The latest copy was then circulated. SF noted that the only unresolved issue is AF's suggestion that members between 5-100ha should be allowed to vote rather than just members >100ha.</p> <p>AF clarified that he understands why members with no open hill would not vote on open hill issues etc., but that it would make more sense that when issues are raised it is defined at that time who should or should not vote.</p> <p>PL noted he had spoken to Richard Cooke (ADMG Chairman) regarding the issue and he had said that >100ha is a reasonable voting cut off, though it is not a definitive cut off and may be altered for particular issues. PL suggested that this could be further discussed via email and the constitution revised accordingly if required at a later date.</p>	
3.2.	<p>Rory Putman (RP) highlighted that it is very rare that issues go to a vote, he then asked why section C2 has been removed from the constitution. SF confirmed that this is now covered in the benchmark, public interest and code of practice.</p>	
3.3.	<p>The constitution was firstly proposed by Hugh Raven (HR) and seconded by SL. AF expressed that his is not in favour of adopting the constitution, however the constitution was adopted on group consensus.</p>	
4.	Designated Sites Update	Actions
4.1.	<p>AD showed the recent designated sites maps and noted that these are available online. He noted that these are some of the most important aspects of the current review and have been marked as amber/red in the pre-assessment. AD expressed that the group have made great progress in this aspect and perhaps SNH should be liaising with individual members going forward.</p> <p>PL asked if there has been any recent action on the Drimnin/Killundine woodland, LS and Ian Collier (IC) said there has not. PL requested that SNH give any information to the group on how they could assist in the restoration of the site. LS noted that a lot of detailed information has already been given regarding the individual SSSI's and their primary and secondary reasons for failure which was distributed around all owner/occupiers. LS stated that the overall message is that the site is still in unfavourable condition.</p> <p>PL asked that when it is a group issue rather than a local issue please could this be fed back to the group. LS expressed that a lot of the issues in that stretch of woodland are invasive species which are a local issue.</p>	
4.2.	<p>PL discussed habitat impact assessment program and the importance of all using the same best practice methods. He also highlighted the need for training from SNH on woodland monitoring.</p> <p>PL discussed new habitat targets, as circulated within recent documents, and asked if the group are happy to approve the targets.</p> <p>AF questioned SNH attendees if the targets given in the program are achievable at the current level of impact, with particular reference to designated sites. PL confirmed that the program is to give a broad-brush target for the entire group and is not targeting specific sites. AF suggested that setting a target for the whole group is not necessarily productive. PL expressed it is a way to go forward for the entire group and that individual landowners should work towards their individual targets.</p> <p>LS highlighted the need to distinguish between designated site monitoring and general habitat monitoring, PL confirmed the program is relating to general habitat monitoring and sets a short to medium term goal for the group.</p>	LS

4.3.	RP suggested it would be useful for the group to set indicative targets for each habitat type out-with designated sites, but for designated sites targets may be different and this should be negotiated with SNH for these particular sites.	
4.4.	IC stated that the specific target for designated sites in the document may not be useful, RP somewhat agreed. PL said that it is more of an aim than a specific target, as it gives the group something to work towards.	
4.5.	PL suggested that addendum is attached to document stating that it is not intended to replace any additional requirements that SNH have. With that, the document was adopted – HR proposed, SF seconded.	
5.	Working Plan Update	Actions
5.1.	SF and RP highlighted importance of thinking about new 2020 DMP going forward. PL suggested at Autumn meeting to take the new plan forward. Asked Donald Fraser (DF) if there will be SNH funding to which he confirmed there will be though exact timing is unconfirmed. RP suggested that with certain updates the plan may be fit for purpose going forward. DF mentioned in addition to the current SNH review there is the review of the Government Deer Working Group which is due in autumn – these are significant so may affect DMP's etc going forward.	
5.2.	PL highlighted RP's population model. RP expressed he has reservations about SNH best practice population model, particularly as it is relevant to closed populations, which several of Morvern's estates are not. RP explained the working of the population model, it is trained around historical cull data for each of the sub-populations, taking into account unexplained losses. RP stated that if members adhere to the cull forecasts given then there should be a reasonable chance of achieving the target populations as he was told. RP concluded that Ardtornish's increased culls will be unlikely to have a negative effect on neighbouring property populations.	
5.3.	SF questioned if RP will update annually or if this is responsibility of group. RP suggests he can train a member to update his model, though if emigration rates change in response to Ardtornish culls his involvement may be useful.	
5.4.	PL thanked Rory on behalf of the group for the creation of the population model.	
5.5.	John MacDonald (JM) has created population models for Drimnin and Killundine, with a density of circa 23-24 deer/km ² JM detailed that culling will be increased on the in-bye ground which should help the woodland. JM also noted that stock has been removed and there have been three recent woodland creations in Killundine in the recent years.	
5.6.	AD detailed that habitat data which has been given has been collated; so far Ardtornish, Carnoch, Kinlochteacuis and Kingairloch. SWT and FCS have not been included in mapping yet. JM to send through Drimnin plots. AD suggested there is clarity needed on what data is seen as robust to SNH, i.e. how many plots. Going forward should aim for 30 on each habitat type for each sub-group. PL confirmed group aiming for all baseline data by 2020. RP noted that there may be some amendments to HIA best practice guidance in light of a recent meeting, though it will be minimal and mainly concerns the inclusion of grassland	JM

	habitats as they are significant, particularly in Morvern where some Dwarf Shrub Heath habitat is predominantly Molinia.	
5.7.	AD highlighted there has been a lot of work involved in collating all of the data for the working plan and hopefully this will help going forward. Though it should not be underestimated the work involved in updating it ongoing and suggests that one meeting a year should focus specifically on this, or perhaps a working group to go through the actions to keep on top of things.	
5.8.	AD spoke positively of the progress of the group, with particular reference to the points highlighted by Victor in 2018. AD suggested that robust recruitment counts will be the most important thing for the population model going forward. RP agreed this and noted that sample recruitment counts are not as beneficial and that this should be done as fully as possible.	
5.9.	PL asked if there have been any notable changes in site condition. AD noted the Sunart report is still outstanding. He noted the group has done as much as it can, there are charts etc within working plan showing current site conditions, but it hasn't been detailed what is being done at individual member level as to how it's moved on. LS expressed the importance of recognising the aspects the group can influence, particularly discussing count results, population model and densities etc at subgroup level. RP suggested that having made a general plan, it is up to the group to monitor and adjust continually – feedback from SNH would be appreciated on this. RP seconded Angus' opinion that support from SNH on how influence individual members to help in the restoration of designated sites would be helpful. AF questioned what the plan for small landholdings in the area of the designated sites is. PL confirmed they will all be consulted regarding the 2020 deer management plan. IC questioned possibility of funding to encourage smaller properties to engage with the DMG. SF fox explained that if 4 or more owners join together, they can get support for a consultant to draw up a plan with which they can then individually approach the SRDP for funding. PL asked if IC can circulate information regarding this.	IC
5.10.	HR congratulated PL for his recent efforts in the groups progress and his leadership as Chair. PL thanked and credited AD and team for recent work and action plan.	
6.	Deer Counts	Actions
6.1.	SL confirmed Kingairloch has completed mortality but not yet recruitment count, NR confirmed the same for Laudale. SB confirmed recruitment count is upcoming and highlighted the confusion with such counts last year. PL explained his understanding for RP's model the group should now be counting calves that are on the group from last year. RP confirmed this and added that adult mortality is also worth assessing. PL and SL asked if figures could be fed back by the end of May. JM confirmed he has carried out recruitment counts, these were 40% and 43% for Drimnin and Killundine, respectively.	Whole Group

6.2.	<p>DF expressed it is unlikely that there will be funding in 2020 for a helicopter count, these are usually on a 4-5-year basis.</p> <p>PL asked if there would be an option for some support from SNH given the designated sites etc within the group and the importance of seeing the impact of increased culling.</p> <p>DF will look into the possibility of SNH contributing towards a count. DF and PL to discuss this going forward.</p>	DF
7.	Member Reports and Discussion	Actions
7.1.	<p>Simon Boulton (SB) reported Ardtornish hind cull figures as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open Hill: 144 hinds, 49 calves • Woodland 31 hinds, 7 calves, 2 stags <p>Condition was described as awful with the poorest calves ever seen but this picked up toward Christmas. Planned stag cull is 30.</p> <p>HR noted no signs of poaching.</p> <p>HR explained that phase two of the woodland management plan is being reduced from 600ha to around 500ha due to archaeological features. Still working on fence line detail, due to be planted in 2019/20 and 2021.</p> <p>PL thanked HR and SB for the information that has been passed on to the group up until now.</p> <p>HR stated that SQWV certification may be soon, the reason this has not yet happened is the concrete yard in front of the larder and this must be considered carefully as the surrounding buildings are listed. Action is ongoing for a fairly significant update.</p> <p>SL has asked if there has been a pre-assessment, several members suggested HR considers this, he will look into this.</p>	
7.2.	<p>SNH Glencripesdale</p> <p>NR reported 20 hinds and 6 calves, license only started in hind season so no stags yet, though 10 proposed. Suggested out of season licensing may be appropriate. More deer seen than previously, generally good condition, fencing not sound.</p>	
7.3.	<p>Mark Foxwell (MF) reported on behalf of SWT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 hinds • 3 calves <p>PL was stalking and reported better condition later in the season. There was no argocat access used. Monthly counts are undertaken going back 10 years which are useful.</p>	
7.4.	<p>NR reported Laudale culling as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 41 hinds - 16 calves - 3 stags <p>Calves consistently poor throughout season, perhaps down to weather, though rather disappointing.</p>	
7.5.	<p>Torquil Kennedy (TK) reported the following cull for FCS (total):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75 stags • 72 hinds • 22 calves <p>Roe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 bucks 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 does • 5 kids <p>Condition good, not aware of any poaching.</p>	
7.6.	<p>IT reported Glensanda culling as: 18 hinds and 6 calves. Some left on the hill but very poor. Some mortality already seen within yearlings. Concerned about predation from sea eagles, this has been noted elsewhere.</p> <p>Argo training has been carried out on site.</p> <p>Potential stag cull between 15 and 20.</p>	
7.7.	<p>NR confirms Laudale cull as 35 hinds and proposed cull for SNH Glencripesdale as 10.</p>	
7.8.	<p>JM reported Drimnin as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open hill: 1 hind and 1 calf • Enclosed: 5 stags • 19 hinds • 6 calves <p>Reduction on the open hill is due to influx of deer into lower ground. This in turn indicated that hind numbers are up so this will be incorporated into next years cull for the population model. Average weight was 41.6kg, average age was 4 years and pregnancy rate 50%. Condition was poor to begin with and progressed well through season, similar story with calves, small in the Autumn. High infestations of warble and nasal botfly intermittent. No poaching recorded, though in section of fencing has been cut into a new restock site which is alarming and no explanation to date.</p> <p>HR confirmed there has been several gates opened into new plantations. JM confirmed similar in Killundine a few years past.</p> <p>JM noted Drimnin count is down around 30 stags from what it should be and hind numbers are up – looking ahead around 50 hinds should be culled next winter. Exact ratio of two hinds to one stag. Proposed cull of 7 stags next year.</p>	
7.9.	<p>JM reported Killundine figures as:</p> <p>Open Hill:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 hinds • 5 calves <p>Inbye:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 stags • 3 hinds • 3 calves <p>Slightly increased hill cull as seeing significantly more numbers than usual. Average weight 39.3kg, average age 5 and pregnancy rate of 57%. Most of cull was taken in January and February. Hinds in good condition latterly, 3 left on the hill due to immaciation. Generally very good aside from high warble. No evidence of poaching. Increased cull planned for 2019/2020, as high numbers counted – 112 stags, 187 hinds and 82 calves. Expected cull as 50 hinds and 15 stags.</p> <p>Recruitment 43% ratio of 1.6 hinds to 1 stag. 35% of stags, young, 38% middle aged and 25% young when counted.</p> <p>JM and team have got all training necessary so nothing requiring updated.</p>	
7.10.	<p>SL passed on Rahoy's information as:</p>	

	<p>Counted on 26th Feb:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 69 stags, 72 hinds and 32 calves <p>Cull:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 26 hinds, 11 calves and 1 roe buck. - Finished before the start of the year. <p>Found leakage in the fence, said that calves were well grown and in good condition.</p>	
7.11.	<p>SL reported Kingairloch as:</p> <p>South – 12 hinds, 6 calves North – 20 hinds</p> <p>SL noted that JM will now be carrying out stalking on Kingairloch.</p>	
7.12.	<p>NR Reported Glencripesdale (enclosed) as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 stags, 6 hinds, 2 calves, 1 doe and 1 kid. <p>All in very good condition. Not sure of culling plan for Glencripesdale open ground.</p>	
7.13.	<p>SL requested that SB split Ardtornish hind numbers between East and West and feed back.</p>	SB
7.14.	<p>PL reported Kinlochteacuis as: 11 hinds, 2 calves in good condition</p> <p>Recent training includes DSC level 2, Fit and Competent Register. No DVC's. No signs of poaching. AECS scheme has been applied for involving peatland, salt marsh, ancient woodland and woodland management.</p> <p>Recruitment counts have shown 35-36% at this stage. Proposed stags is 10-12 subject to what's possible.</p>	
7.15.	<p>SF reported Carnoch figures as:</p> <p>14 hinds, 8 calves and one yearling stag.</p> <p>Quite a few are taken from lower ground so condition not as bad as others. Proposed cull of 14 subject to mortality etc.</p> <p>Working with Victor Clements and Ardgour Estate and Conaglen on collaborative woodland scheme grant – will report as progresses.</p> <p>Obtained DSC level 2 and Fit & Competent training.</p>	
7.16.	<p>PL noted there may be DSC 1 course on Kinlochteacuis in summer, will let JM know if going ahead as he would have people interested.</p>	
7.17.	<p>PL requested that group keep informing of any updated training.</p>	Whole Group
7.18.	<p>No reported culling from Carna or Oronsay, PL noted that Carna have introduced cattle.</p>	
8.	Agency Updates	Actions
8.1.	<p>LS gave brief update regarding current reviews, draft pre-assessment of group will be reviewed at meeting on Friday (26/04). These results will feed into Autumn SNH deer management review which builds on initial targets from 2014 and 2016. Part of the original report was SNH using statutory powers and applying the Code of Deer Management.</p>	
8.2.	<p>PL highlighted Forestry Commission change to 'Forestry Scotland'. IC confirmed this and noted more information available on new website. He confirmed the service will remain the same.</p>	

	IC noted good funding available for woodland creation and restocking money for 2019 is drying up. Habitat and species money is tight also, but hopefully can service designated site work.	
8.3.	<p>PL gave update on sporting rates – that some of the figures have been revised and offered out. He has agreed on reduced bill.</p> <p>SF has also accepted a reduced rate.</p> <p>MF noted that SWT have ratings but do not pay.</p> <p>JM gave update that for his properties he is associated with (16), Solicitors and MSP's have been involved and it has not yet been resolved. From the initial number there are around 5 or 6 to be reassessed and the other have all been reduced by around half.</p> <p>NR confirmed Laudale has been reduced by around half and has been accepted.</p> <p>IT noted there has been application put in for Glensanda but unsure of outcome at present.</p> <p>PL has spoken to Inverness-based assessor to suggest that there should be recognition for those working collaboratively within DMG and this should give exception to sporting rates.</p>	
9.	Forestry Commission Scotland	
9.1.	PL questioned if there is compensatory cull for Beach plantation in Ardtornish LTFF. AK stated it was not that focused but there was within the approval of planting – it is irrelevant as will be included within overall deer reduction.	
9.2.	SL concerned about compensatory cull. PL suggests this could be further discussed at a sub-area meeting.	
10.	Proposed Budget	
10.1.	<p>Alan Kennedy (AK) [not present] produced draft budget which is subject to upcoming professional fees. £2000 has been put in the budget for Angus' work and £1000 for other professional services.</p> <p>PL noted population model was paid separately.</p>	
10.2.	<p>PL explained that AK's budget concludes £3485 in the bank today, providing group continues to pay ADMG subscription due in August/September in arrears, this is what the group has to spend this year. Depending on cash position in October the group may need to increase subscription rate significantly to spend the same again next year. The budget proposed assumes there is no money left. There is currently a surplus but costs are increasing because of professional services, this year should be okay but subscription rate needs reconsidered. Question is how this happens – by base acreage cost rate or by land mass etc.</p> <p>RP suggested half on acreage and half on cull. PL confirmed he and AK will try and come up with a proposal for the next meeting.</p> <p>AD highlighted the extra time that the recent working plan has required and that although he has not yet calculated time and costs etc., going forward there may need to be reconsideration of fees as this is entirely unprofitable at the present rate. PL agreed there has not yet been a set figure on this and it will be considered within the budget.</p>	

II. AOB		
11.1.	<p>PL added paragraph which was on the grazing targets information circulated but didn't make it online:</p> <p><i>'This is not intended to replace more detailed monitoring that individuals may wish to undertake, but rather to provide a holistic overview of the grazing impact within the Morvern Deer Management Group Range'. Landholdings will need to engage individually with SNH where they contain SSSI or SAC sites and may need to agree more stringent targets. It is recognised that the most robust method for the protection of designated sites is often by the exclusion herbivores by deer fencing.'</i></p> <p>He hopes this will address some of the earlier concerns regarding designated sites and targets.</p>	
11.2.	<p>JM asked to put name forward for RP's population modelling training, so he is able to update the population model. SF said he would like to join also. RP agreed.</p>	RP, JM, SF
11.3.	<p>Proposed dates for next meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thursday 31st October 2019 - Tuesday 14th April 2020 - Tuesday 3rd November 2020 	
11.4.	<p>AF highlighted woodland creation workshop coming up on 17th and 18th May and will send details to Peter to circulate around group.</p>	AF PL
11.5.	<p>PL asked group if they are happy that emails circulated include all email addresses publicly, group agreed.</p>	