

**Morven Deer Management Meeting**  
**Minutes from Meeting Held at Lochaline Village Hall 31<sup>st</sup> October 2019**

**Attendees:**

Alan Kennedy – Treasurer – Ardtornish (AK)  
Peter Lawson – Chair – Kinlochteacuis (PL)  
Angus Davidson – Consultant (AD)  
Derek Lewis – Drimnin (DL)  
Douglas Weir – Morven Community Trust (DW)  
Gareth Mills – Glensanda (GM)  
Chris Donald – SNH (CD)  
Hugh Raven – Ardtornish (HR)  
Ian Collier – Scottish Forestry (IC)  
John Jackson – Forest and Land Scotland (JJ)  
John Macdonald – Drimnin/ Kingairloch/ Killundine (JM)  
Lynda Campbell – ADMG (LC)  
Mark Foxwell – SWT (MF)  
Sarah Robinson – SWT (ST)  
Susan Larson – Kingairloch (SL)

Apologies – Steve Fox, Lorraine Servant, Neil Roberts, Alasdair Firth (AF) & Simon Boulton

**Elections**

PL – asked whether prefer elections now or in Spring. Spring was agreed.

Budget

AK produced a draft budget showing increased subscription reflecting increased admin costs for assessment last spring – this has been circulated.

If budget is adopted the money brought in will allow group to pay ADMG and keep AD on for another year.

PL - asked if everyone is content with the increased subscription.

AK - 43% increase being proposed set against last year's levy to give an idea of what we will have to pay

40% increase in carcass levy

40% increase in subscription

PL – stated professional support required

AK – have £3,500 available but currently owe Angus Davidson £5,500

Don't have money at present but intention is to keep AD on board next year.

With increased subscription, would be able to pay off AD in full and pay ADMG subscription.

Only leaving 300-400 approx. for professional fees

AD- Significantly more work was required than expected towards end of project, leading up towards review, coming up with a focused action plan.

Going forward fully understand that group may want to explore more local and affordable options and AD happy to take a step back.

DL - In essence looking at a one-off increase in the annual fee?

PL - Look at fees on a year by year basis.

CD - Best performing deer management groups plan for increasing capacity, take on professional assistant. Really worth having someone who can show how to implement plan.

DL – If costs are to be repeated, for smaller estates it may begin to undermine viability of the deer operation

PL - If there are no other unforeseen costs the levy could drop back to what it was before.

AK – Budget includes £2.4k towards professional fees.

PL - Costs to be kept under review.

PL - spoken to Rory and Angus about deer plan. The working plan should keep us right for the next year or two. Saving the investment of a whole new deer plan.

PL – Everyone happy. Levy approved. That concludes AGM

### **Spring Assessment**

PL - Spring assessment results have been circulated. Result “pretty good”.

Out of a score of 200 - no reds, 7 ambers

Habitat impact assessments

Propose working group to take forward actions from Working Plan. The working group would not be an exclusive group, let us know if any stakeholders would like to be involved. Need to get email addresses for some in Drimnin direction. Motion agreed.

### **Estate Audits**

PL - if there are any audit actions to be addressed please action them so that we can feed back to Angus

Deer Count

PL - Need to look at a deer count for next year

No SNH funding for a helicopter count

Last count cost £25K

Chair suggestion to go for a robust foot count this spring.

Good Friday 10<sup>th</sup> April – Potential count date

Members agree - allow 3 days, maybe begin Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> continue into Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> April.

PL - remote possibility, 5% chance of a drone count.

AD – asks CD if SNH coming away from helicopter counts due to budget

CD - Project set up with Scot Gov looking at different technologies. Other deer management groups looking at fixed wing and ultra-detailed photographs using transects and different methodologies.

### **Notifiable Diseases/Incidents**

PL - Any notifiable diseases within the group this year? No

PL - Any Lyme's disease cases this year?

SL – Yes, not known if sourced from Kingairloch. Never found tick so could have been from anywhere.

PL - Be aware of Tick encephalitis

PL - Road traffic accidents. Yes. One vehicle written off

### **Actions from previous meeting**

PL - One action point re Woodland creation workshop. AF Informed PL at last minute so he wasn't able to circulate to group.

### **Estate Reports**

Presentation from **Ardtornish**

HR: Handed out materials.

Explaining Ardtornish policy.

Designated sites. Reports on conditions of designated sites - SNH online tool. Morven woods SSSI is in unfavourable condition and declining due to over grazing.

Primary reason for decline are herbivore impacts (very high impact). Moderate to very high.

Lack of regeneration lack of woodland age structure. Insufficient recruitment to maintain canopy density. Secondary reason – regeneration of non-native trees and shrubs. Trying to take action but damage is extensive.

Trying to be lawful corporate citizen. Reduce grazing impacts. Reduced number of sheep by several hundred and also felt need to reduce deer numbers.

Major issues with soil erosion on sites

Climate emergency in Scotland. One of the biggest contributors to emissions in Scotland is degrading peatland soils. Emitting 1000's of tonnes of carbon per year. Nearly solely down to herbivore impacts.

HR involved in management of another Estate in area – carbon footprint exercise done. Annual carbon emissions from degrading peat are between 20,000-30,000 tonnes per year. Big priority to solve soil erosion problem.

Reason to do a reduction cull to minimise herbivore reduction.

Woodland creation proposals - planning and consulting on 6 new enclosures 700 acres of woodland.

Woodland expansion in line with SNH & SG requests. Increase woodland cover is one of the most effective things that highland hill managers can do to decrease soil erosion and greenhouse gas emissions.

AK: Stag cull – 30 this year and next. Shot 16 open hill, 6 in woodland to date.

22 to date. Reserve of 8 to take between now and end of March. One roe doe. Takes total to 17. Shot between 40-50 hinds out of total of 170.

3 years of 170 hinds and 30 stags.

Deer condition- good condition due to good growing season.

No poaching activities.

Spring 2017 - Surveyed Ash wood. Surveyed again in 2019. Heavy browsing in 2017 but following fencing no browsing in any of 10 woodland plots this year.

Woodland 2<sup>nd</sup> phase hoping to be submitted by end of calendar year.

Looking at options for peatland restoration. Submitted audit

32% recruitment

Mortality not counted. Thought to be very little.

All now quality assured apart from John.

AK: Cull map will be prepared but would like to see others reciprocate as previously agreed.

AD: Location is worth knowing and can be mapped. What is crucial for Rory's population model is which subgroup the deer are shot in.

JM:

Best recorded rut in 10 years

**Kingairloch** total of 31 stags

**Drimnin** - total of 7 stags on open hill, 16 stags enclosed woodland areas and 6 in agricultural areas

**Killundine** - 13 stags from open hill area, 8 stags from lower enclosed woodlands and 4 from agricultural areas

Conditions exceptional everywhere. In comparison to previous years, better age structure in stag groups. More shootable stags compared to recent years.

Mortality extremely low.

Recruitment

Kingairloch – Inconclusive

Killundine – 43%

Drimnin – 40%

Hind Cull

Kingairloch – 50-60

Killundine – 50

Drimnin – 50

No poaching

Killundine - Heather beetles – heather die off. Never witnessed that before.

DL – Heather beetle at Drimnin around 15 years ago.  
Training - all up to speed.

**JJ: Forest and Land Scotland**

65 stags to date all in good condition  
Results from surveys still pending  
Proposed hind cull similar to last year  
No planned woodland expansion (moving into different species – conifer/Native)  
No planned peatland restoration  
No recruitment

Forestry and Land Scotland fences are tight. Still have a section to upgrade.  
Not a lot of movement there in past year.  
When fences are replaced will place them closer to legal boundary.

**MF: SWT**

2 stags  
15 hinds target  
Monitoring in place  
Repeat monitoring this year

**PL: Kinlochteacuis**

13 stags, 2 of which on the wildlife trust ground  
Good condition  
Strong rut then very quiet  
Average weights down by a couple of percent  
4 family members through DSC1  
35% recruitment this year (spring)  
Fewer calves at foot (important count spring 2020)  
No poaching  
Established HIA plots  
Proposed hind cull - Kinloch will be 10-15 hinds  
If seeing significantly unexpected numbers from Glencripesdale, react to that due to SSSI/SAC  
No planned woodland expansion

**GM: Glensanda**

12 stags  
Good condition  
No poaching  
HIA - SAC doing and say deer not impacting too much  
Woodland expansion – considering  
Biodiversity management plan coming up for review in 2020. Looking at land/habitat management plan 2021/2022.  
A lot of peat to move. Got approval to move peat and do peatland expansion.  
Stalker - Michael Skelly.

**DL: Drimnin Woodland Plans**

- Native woodland Restoration plan
- Involve planting within SSSI enclose some areas there to try and get the restoration going in some areas which are outside the existing Drambuie regeneration area.
- Along Northern Coastline
- Planning a belt of native woodland outside the SSSI. Begin to create a native woodland band around the coast.
- 40 hectares of planting & similar area north of Mungusdale plantation

- Further regeneration spread through planting
- Fencing a bit porous between them and Killundine.

**CD: SNH Glencripesdale**

10 stags within enclosed woodland

Target of 20 hinds

Very good condition of stags

Rut dropped off after 12th October 2019

Average weights good 73kg

Average age – 7.7 yrs

Recruitment 35%

No poaching activity

**Glencripesdale** – CD said SNH wrote but got no response. Legislation says if they don't report it is an offence. However fiscal unlikely to be interested.

Deerline numbers for 2018/19

6 stags

6 hinds

2 calves

PL: Hoping we've got a system in place to deal with deer ingress but need to keep an eye on it.

**Laudale:**

33 stags

32% recruitment

Proposing 45 hinds

**Glencripesdale Woodland –**

4 stags

1 hind

1 calf

**Carnoch South**

11 stags – Open hill

5 stags - Enclosed woodland

Excellent condition

Good weights

No poaching activity

Heavy impacts of heather beetle

AK: **Rahoy** have left the group

CD: cause group issues?

PL: It is fenced. Sunart Woods – Rahoy is area of concern.

**Update from Angus Davidson:**

A lot of work was done in the spring but there are a few areas for ongoing actions. However audits will pick up most of this and we also now have a well laid out working plan. New working group will also hopefully liaise with members as required.

Habitat impact monitoring - maps have been prepared of what has been completed/reported to us up to Spring 2019. Some other monitoring has obviously been done but not passed on to me so would be helpful if findings could be passed on.

CD: SNH – Glencripesdale had a contract in line but fell through. To be picked back up next year.

Action point for coming year may be to gather subgroup baseline data.

I spoke to Rory re updating the Population model for different subgroups. Rory is of the view that the population model is indicative rather than a more traditional model where it would be updated with culls, counts, recruitment etc. My own view is that recruitment counts are important. A full spring count will give you both. One of Rory's concerns relates to the statistical robustness of using a small percentage of your herd leading to potentially misleading information.

I think it is important that cull information is entered into the Population model at the end of the hind season.

SL: Where do we go from here?

PL: Working groups to look at grazing impacts. Open hill, email group to pull data together rather than physical meetings of subgroups.

HR: Visit from Chief Exec / Chair of SNH for a talk about general land management. Ideas for Deer Management groups to be more than just deer management.

CD: SNH review has gone to minister then to Rural Affairs Committee before writing to SNH.

SNH review – How sustainable deer management has been delivered since 2016.

Andrew Barber committee – mechanics of what is in place to deliver sustainable deer management

PL - Moving from a deer management group to a general land management group.

CD: Analysis is important. How you use the information.

LC: Timings of report?

CD: Not clear.

AD: asks CD - Do you think that there is a wider understanding by government of the amount of work that has been done and how that can be supported in future?

CD: That is reflected in the report but it will be discussed at the committee, opportunity to raise issues.

LC: ADMG advocate 5 year reviews

PL: Flexible amount of time. Groups that have performed particularly badly may be subject to review every 3 years whereas groups which have performed particularly well may only be assessed on their reds and ambers which reduces the magnitude of the task.

DL: Avoid a peak in workload every few years. Query evolving into land management group and expectation. What are the boundaries of this organisation, is it appropriate? Do we have the resources?

HR: Seems to be the direction that the Scot Gov want to go in. May need a bespoke set up consisting of deer management group amongst others. District wide approach.

Lynda: Trees for Life. Looking at a much bigger area for tree regeneration.

CD: **SNH report**

Update on Designated sites:

HIA report for Sunart SAC – still in unfavourable condition. No new reports expected for Morvern Woods or Rahoy Hills. Wish to see Rahoy Hills management plan.

Do know that a lot of future condition work done

AD: Looking for information in minutes regarding present site condition of SAC?

CD: Actions relevant to designation reflected in the minutes - Deer & sheep reductions are important information for the SAC management.

AD: Public interest in condition of designated sites. Have pulled together maps showing features and current condition. Not enough information on designates sites. Additional knowledge needed. In future meetings (within the estate reports) each person that has designated sites within their property, to cover that as an item in the meeting.

HR: Seems very sensible.

CD: Really important that SNH know about changes.

PL: Important that as a group we aren't expected to micro-manage each Estate. Address crossover impact of management of designated sites.

SF: With agreement can list approved schemes.

CD: Working together and bringing forward ideas on management of SAC.

AD: Co-operation Grant available from Scottish Forestry.

PL: Tap into funding for Working Group? Possibly

SWT – Reserve issue

Neighbouring estates monitoring included.

### **Deer Management Plan**

PL: Expires in 2020

CD: Worth considering extending it and do regular reviews. Our Management Plan is 10 years.

PL: Review end date subject to requirement.

### **ADMG update**

LC: Aware of criticism re lack of communication & visibility of actions

Lot going on in background with Assessments but maybe not communicating enough to members

At 2019 - AGM 2018 annual review published and intend to do this every year

Website has been improved

E-scope now should be going out to all

ADMG analysis of assessment included in E-scope

Next regional meeting Kingsmills Hotel Inverness 21<sup>st</sup> November

AGM – 26<sup>th</sup> February 2020 venue tbc

### **Scottish Forestry**

IC: Long term forest plans, working with a number of estates. Opens up eligibility for funding. Good to be working with all.

Sustainable management forest, £25/Hectare per annum payment for operations such as monitoring.

Summary next meeting.

5k funding for completing plans for Designated sites.

Rhododendron control plan for Glencripesdale

HR: Redundant fence removal?

IC: Can be funding for Designated Sites – depends on wording.

Woodland creation

Herbivore impact assessments

Woodland Best Practice guide – think it's still being revised.

Training

PL & AD: There is demand for woodland training

### **Other Projects**

PL: RSPB - No further details on scheme

CD: Based on a life bids. Delayed

HR – Red squirrel project – translocation project with Trees for Life. Case officer maternity then involved in Migdale project. Looking towards Feb/March 2020. Meeting in hall to discuss project

### **AOB**

HR: Fergusons timber lorry possibly hauling timber by road rather than by sea. Kingairloch road end.

PL: Next meeting Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Continue to meet here.