

Morvern DMG Meeting Minute, 2 November 2021

Present: P Lawson (Kinlochteacuis, Killundine, Chair), S Fox (Carnoch – Vice-Chair), R Mackay (Ardtomish), R Lintott (Kingairloch), D Lewis (Drimnin), M Henley (SWT Rahoy), J MacDonald (West Highland Venison), A MacMaster (NatureScot), Ian Collier (Scottish Forestry), Douglas Weir (Morvern Trust, Angus Robertson (Morvern Community Council), Bruce Taylor (Brambletree Management), Cathy Mayne (Secretary).

AGM business

1. Officers to be elected Autumn 2021. Susan Larson stepping down as Secretary. With no nominations or volunteers forthcoming, all other current Office Bearers are happy to remain in post. CM happy to take on with Secretarial duties and assist HR in accounting duties. Circulated draft of potential costs. Chair, V-C and Treasurer remain the same, proposed by Ross, seconded by Derek. Cathy to act as Secretary in a paid position.
2. Accounts presented by H Raven; simplified format presented today. An EDMG to take place in the next few weeks to provide proper accounts for approval.
ACTION – HR to produce Accounts and Budget, EDMG to take place in the next few weeks.
3. Approval of MDMG fee and ADMG levy. MDMG proposed on an area basis to cover the Secretariat costs. Areas to be checked by individual properties. Participants to be checked.
ACTION – new fee structure to be set up, all properties to check landholding areas used.
4. Any other business – none.

MDMG

Apologies: Hugh Raven (Ardtomish), Lorraine Servant (NS), Neil Roberts (Laudale), John Jackson (FLS), Andy Robinson (RSPB), Tom Turnbull (ADMG), Alistair Firth (The Woodland Trust), Susan Larson (Kingairloch), Lynda Campbell (ADMG), Andy Jackson (Carna), Donald Kennedy.

1. Chairman's welcome & any apologies. Climate Emergency being highlighted by current COP26, rural businesses and land managers have an important role to play. Please see attached report by PL and SF highlighting the Climate Emergency actions being carried out by Morvern DMG. Open range population and cull model also very ambitious, reducing densities from VH to Mod (Edwards, Scottish Environment Link). Appropriate grazing is required.
2. Minutes of previous meetings - Autumn 2020 and Spring 2021 - and matters arising. Proposed Ross, Seconded SF. Matters arising – DL proposing to take forward Land Managers Group participation and write-up.
3. Individual Estate Reports including any collaborative management.
 - a) 2021 Stag Cull.
 - b) Condition reports. Generally v good condition.
 - c) Poaching activity.
 - d) Habitat Impact Comments. SF maintaining L-M impacts according to their own monitoring plots.
 - e) Proposed Hind Cull 2020/21
 - f) Any deer related impacts to other land uses
 - g) Any planned woodland expansion or woodlands being opened to deer
 - h) Planned Peatland preservation/restoration.
 - i) Estate audits & training log update.
 - j) Recruitment and mortality counts since spring meeting

Stag Culls:

Carnoch	17
Laudale East	18
Laudale West	21
Glencripesdale	7
Glencrip NNR	10
KLT	12
SWT Reserve	2
Ardtomish NW	8
KGL north	27

KGL south	22
Inversanda	7
Ardtomish SE	21
FLS	60 + 10 roe bucks
Killundine	16
Drimnin	15 (7 hill, 8 woodland)

Proposed hind culls:

Camoch	30 +
Laudale East	
Laudale West	
Glencripesdale	
Glencrip NNR	
KLT	10 + followers
SWT Reserve	15 + followers
Ardtomish NW	55 +
KGL N	55 + followers overall
KGL S	25 +
Inversanda	
Ardtomish SE	105 +
FLS	
Killundine	25-30
Drimnin	10-15 + followers on open range

Check early January to ensure that the hind cull is being taken – brief meeting.

ACTION – All deer managers to maintain communications through hind cull to ensure whole area target cull is met.

4. Detailed update from Ardtomish

Licensee has taken on 50% of the stag and hind cull in terms of total cull (syndicate). New model has worked well through the stags but wait to see how it goes through the hind cull. All deer going through Ardtomish larder and still SQWV.

ACTION – Skills register to be updated with the new licensees (SF).

5. Proposed deer count spring 2022.

A count is really important. Historically Simon and Neil that took this forward. Ross, Neil and Stephen and Killundine perhaps liaise with Peter for the Spring? Provisional date to be set, announced at the EGM, with 15 April suggested.

ACTION - PL to arrange for plan for count 2022 with Neil, Ross and Stephen (Killundine).

6. Cathy Mayne - open range HIA report.

The HIA reports were referred to and briefly summarised. With so much being historic impacts, habitats are only slowly improving. Woodland HIA taking place in March 2022 using the new approved methodology from NatureScot that is soon to be issued (CM to check with AMcM in February). CM and IC preference is for a walk-through methodology.

ACTION – AmcM to forward new methodology, CM to use.

7. NS (SNH) report:

- Designated site condition report. LS, AMcM, PL and SF met earlier in the year to discuss population targets, which were agreed. Reflecting on HIA report, make sure targets continue to be met. Deer Working Group Report 10 deer/km sq target is unlikely to allow recovery of the woodland feature so may require population reductions in vicinity of some designated site features, whereas others do require grazing. This is not a simple one-way street. 10 deer/km sq is likely to be a wider target.
- Actions agreed with members. Make sure Group hind cull is met; keep in touch with progress towards target as the season continues.

ACTION – Group members to maintain handle on hind cull as it progresses.

- Proposed measures. New guidance to be circulated with various information – to be circulated by AMcM.

ACTION – AmcM to circulate.

8. Deer Management Plan.

DMP is due for review; have modified with Open Range Cull Plan but prefer not to embark on a full new DMP at this stage. Probably want to wait for 2022-3, with current land ownership changes. And potential new deer legislation

adopting the DWG proposals would be a more appropriate time to review the whole Plan. Meanwhile MDMG is working to a modified cull plan that is on-going. AMcM indicates that works well for NS.

9. Updates from:

- ADMG (LC sends apologies and a late written update submitted).
- FLS (FCS) and SF (IC). IC – happy to still be working with the group. Undercurrent of enthusiasm from Carbon Funding and there has been a lot of interest in the future; potential big influx of new applications next year.
- Community Council. AR – CC and DMG work closely together and keen for this to continue. Communications are important and currently good. Issue 1 – area around Lochaline Village from FLS land with reductions of fences to stock height, which will lead to movement of deer from Fuinary to Ardtornish and village properties. AMcM suggests high stag culls in these woodlands are indicative of immigration from the open hill. Useful response from JJ (FLS) today. FLS not being particularly proactive in communications, in spite of being a major deer player in the Group. Issue 2 – around COP26, people discussing in a loose way what Morvern residents can do, peaking this past fortnight with an initiative with a couple of Community events happening each day of the COP26 summit (energy, recycling, conservation and land management – see DK's piece). PL – Ardtornish to deal with ingress of deer onto agricultural land and into village; culls taken here should not form part of the open range cull.
PL – seeking to fence strategically to support changes in FLS fences. Potential need for OoS and night authorisations to manage this (NS happy to support). DL – concerns about managing deer when they are habituated in the village. Seek to get clarity about precisely where changes in fencing are taking place. IC – resourced for deer management makes strategic fencing easier to support. Clarity and detailed proposed changes needed.

ACTION – concern raised about potential impacts of changes to FLS fencing and need for a map of some kind to detail these changes. PL and AR to progress this together.

10. AOB.

Any public comments.

Community plan is out, with most having a chance to submit to it.

Larder inspection at KLT last week; discussed a cutting room for direct sale to the public but is quite a significant step.

Are others keen to collaborate on this?

DK heads up one of the community climate agenda groups, which is independent from the Community Council.

Appetite to progress? Next stage would be to look more closely at practicalities of delivery and funding requirements for a very low deer density. Document attached. Interest in seeing how this might actually be delivered.

Proposed Date of next Spring meeting – Tuesday 19 April 2022.

Proposed date for the Autumn Meeting - TBC.

Annex 1 – ADMG written update.

ADMG UPDATE – MOVERN GROUP – 2.11.2021

The Scottish Government's response to the Deer Working Group is going to bring further changes ahead, with the Scottish Government accepting almost all of DWG's recommendations. Some of the changes will require legislative change and may be subject to consultation. We need to wait to see what timescale is involved. Nature Scot can advise. We know that DMG's will continue to face challenges in the years ahead.

The main message from ADMG is that DMG's continue to deliver the Deer Management Plans that groups have worked hard at and continue to collaborate with their neighbours.

Focus in particular, is on delivering the public interest and the green agenda.

Climate change and green recovery is top of the Scottish Government's agenda and DMG's will need to continue to look at peatland restoration, planting new woodlands and protecting existing woodlands. Opportunities and funding are available to groups, through traditional routes and carbon credits etc.

The Deer Working Group highlighted the target population for open range deer of <10/sq.km. We encourage groups to maintain this level or less but have highlighted to Scottish Ministers that there must be recognition of other herbivore, sheep, goats etc and their grazing impacts. DMG's have all demonstrating sufficient progress with HIA work and population modelling and we encourage DMG's to continue with this. We all wish to avoid mandatory culls being implemented by Nature Scot.

ADMG are currently investigating a system of DMG's assessing their own progress to demonstrate competence rather than the Nature Scot assessment process, which is recommended to end.

ADMG regional meetings and AGM have continued to be on zoom. A recent seminar for Chairs and Secretaries was held by ADMG. The next regional meeting is currently in person on 24 November 2021 at the Kingsmill Hotel in Inverness. Some game dealers are looking to stop taking lead shot carcasses from next year. Although legislation is still a couple of years away.

Annex 2 – Community Council COP26 report from DK to MDMG.

Morvern Does COP26. Deer and habitat restoration sub-group.

Talk to Morvern Deer Management Group. Zoom meeting 2nd Nov 2021

Hello everyone, thanks for allowing me these ten minutes. I'll **focus** on **carbon**. . . You know why.

All living things rely on molecules containing **carbon**. Life is a **carbon sink**. Photosynthetic **BACTERIA** and **ALL PLANTS absorb carbon from the atmosphere** & multiple processes make it available it for other living things.

Vegetation communities, soils, and the lifeforms they support, are **always changing**. **Large herbivores DRIVE change** in vegetation & soils - and in the **diversity & numbers** of living things in them, **and** in the air above (bacteria & other microbes, insects, birds, bats).

At its simplest, the more **forms of life** and greater the **number of individuals** that live in a place, **the more carbon can be absorbed** and stored there.

I was at first disappointed when I heard this was to be a Zoom meeting. But never mind, I clicked my **Zoom Forward in Time** button! Don't know what year but it was shortly after mid-century, I hope. I **Zoomed right out** over Morvern's landscape and occasionally **Zoomed right in**. This is what I saw:

Various **ZONES** (& zones within zones) across the peninsula. . . vegetation changing everywhere, at different rates in each zone – but all moving in much the same direction. Some not much changed yet, some already **transformed**.

Some zones with fences; some huge, some small. Some with none at all. Some plantations (was that mainly Aspen? Eucalyptus?) Different approaches, different methods, different timescales must have been applied to different zones. No doubt for different reasons.

I saw the top few cm of bogs healing up, & fragile mosses recovering from 300 years of disturbance, depletion, and erosion – at last again laying down new peat instead of oxidising & emitting carbon in CO₂ & methane (80 times more warming in the atmosphere than CO₂).

As you may know, mature native woodlands are the most biodiverse ecosystems on land. Deep brown-earth woodland soils can contain hundreds of millions of living bacteria in a teaspoonful, similar numbers of other single-celled organisms, similar volumes of fungal threads, up to 10,000 nematode worms per millilitre and many other mind-blowing numbers of bigger wriggling creepy-crawlies. . . Insects and reptiles and birds and mammals and other creatures have lots of carbon and cycle it around, but woods lock it up in the trees and soils & in the myriad lifeforms they contain.

I saw **patches of open upland birchwoods** with other trees and shrubs & dwarf-shrubs, scattered over hillsides.

Those new woods were sucking up nutrients from the subsoils, dropping leaves and organisms on the woodland floor, full of those lifeforms breaking them down, building humus & enabling other plant roots to penetrate deeper and do more of the same. . . Many patches had been **re-established** in spots where **bracken** dominated for decades before 2021 (bracken is a woodland-understorey plant, bracken soils are woodland soils). I saw new **ribbons of woodland and woodland-edge habitats** along burn-sides and ravines & by lochans (with willows and aspens & others),

spreading into the hills. A billion beasts dropping into the waters; fat frogs, fat fishes. On the highest ground, montane willows and tall herbs were at last escaping their cliff-ledges, imprisoned there for centuries. Melancholy thistles no longer so lonely, no longer so melancholy. On the heaths multiple millions of **dwarf shrubs** were growing taller... More lignin; more bloomin'; more nectar; more buzz; more fluttering; more song; more romanticising (who doesn't?); more fomicating; more carbon cycling into more living organisms, multiplying.

And **black grouse** were back in Morvern, **red grouse** abundant again.

And I saw those wooded burnside ribbons **connecting** with bigger, older **woodlands** lower down the glens – and with Morvern's famously rare fragments of **ancient Atlantic rainforest** nearer the coasts. Thriving and expanding, spreading-out & joining-up into **Habitat Networks** across the peninsula for a whole host of lifeforms. Habitat Networks make it easier for things that live in them to spread and colonise new ground. To link up. Woods are favourite habitats for so many forms of life for similar reasons: More (and more available) food, more browse, more shade, more shelter from the storm. More security, better cover from predators... For all the same reasons that **deer** love them and benefit from them.

I zoomed in and saw bigger, heavier, healthier wild hinds than any I'd seen before in Morvern. More resources, less competition. Hinds more promiscuous, with more milk & stronger calves going into winter. Lower winter mortality. More, bigger, fitter young stags. Bigger, healthier, fitter, stronger stags. Bigger heads and better trophy antlers. Healthy **Woodland Habitat Networks** are **optimal Deer Habitat Networks**. They evolved together. Woods are good for deer - and deer are good for woodlands. It's the way it is.

And I saw people on the hill. Sportspeople. Some enjoying fine sport and some clinically managing deer groups to enhance their optimal habitats and to keep them healthy. I saw ecologists planning operations & monitoring habitat conditions; drone operators with optical & infra-red, collecting frequent, accurate, consistent data... Transparent data, data that is easy to share, easy to access, understand, analyse and use to model future populations *reliably*. I saw shepherds with dogs and small concentrated flocks scarifying targeted patches for seeding; riders on hill ponies doing the same and transporting prepared seed to target patches. I saw fencers and planters and seed-collectors. People working at it. Photographers and filmmakers... I searched and searched, but couldn't see a single dark-green, purple-flowered bush, anywhere... Whew!

I saw a tour coach, a carpark, maybe a visitor centre, maybe a game larder/a local butchery? Interpretation boards...

Zoom in... What does that say? "The Morvern Deer Management Partnership" - A Public/Private/Community Partnership, funded by: I could see a list just **far too long** for me to make out the details. No-one could have lost out in all this, everyone involved must have benefitted... or it would never have happened.

Zoom right out... I saw Morvern as a giant solar collector. Not turning sunlight into the electric, but sunlight and water and carbon dioxide into a massively bigger carbon store.

How did that happen?... Who did that?

Zooming back to the present... Back down to earth.

Hello

Well, it must have been **YOU**. You are the ones with Morvern's future landscape in the palms of your hands

It must have been us... you and the rest of the community, working together to make it happen

We must have stepped right up to the plate. Done all that we could in our climate emergency ... Been ahead of the game. **Transformed** Morvern's deer, vegetation, soils, biodiversity and **carbon budget** in the 21st century.

Thank You.

Donald Kennedy