

## **MDMG – Spring meeting, 11 April 2023, 2pm Morvern Community Hub, Lochaline**

**In attendance at Lochaline Community Hub:** Peter Lawson (Chair, Kinlochteacuis and Killundine), Steve Fox (Vice-chair, Carnoch), Gaetan Hannecart & Kevin Masson (Kingairloch), Izzy Baker, Ellen Bird (Glencripesdale RSPB), Hugh Raven (Ardtornish), John Macdonald (JAME partnership), Martin Newton (Fiunary farm), Ian Collier (Scottish Forestry), Andrew MacMaster & Lorraine Servant (NatureScot).

**by Zoom:** Michael Skelly (Glen Sanda), Tom Edwards (Secretary, minutes)

**Apologies:** Neil Roberts (Laudale), Derek Lewis (Drimnin), John Jackson (Forestry and Land Scotland), Michelle Henley (SWT Rahoy Reserve), Richard Cooke & Tom Turnbull (ADMG), Angus Robertson (Morvern Community Council).

1. Chairman's welcome & any apologies.

Since the last meeting, the Chair and Vice-Chair held a meeting regarding the proposed green finance investment in Morvern. These discussions are ongoing and when the detail of the offer is clearer, will be brought as an item to a DMG meeting for discussion.

2. Minutes of previous meetings- autumn 2023-and matters arising.

The 2022 stag cull at Kingairloch was 46 and not 25 as minuted. With this amendment the draft minutes were proposed to be adopted by Steve Fox, seconded by Hugh Raven and were duly agreed and adopted.

3. Presentation of accounts

Tom Edwards spoke to the accounts paper which he had prepared and circulated which shows the cash position of the group's finances at end 2022, and shows transactions after the year end, to give an actual account for end 2022. The paper also shows the current position and looks forward at budgeted expenditure for 2023. The accounts presented were proposed to be adopted by Steve Fox, seconded by Hugh Raven and were duly agreed and adopted.

4. HIA update

The group has set a target for condition of non-designated woodland as one of a suite of habitats for which the group has agreed targets. This is that impacts should be low/moderate for 60% of sites. The 2019 assessment was that impacts were low/moderate for 67% for native woodland and 76% for Planted Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS), so the target was met. This assessment was based on data from the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland, done in 2013. This visited every native woodland in Morvern, and included both fenced and unfenced woodland.

Since that survey, a new method of HIA has been developed - the woodland grazing toolkit and the woodland HIA lite method.

The group intended to monitor non-designated woodland in 2023. Tom Edwards' proposal, put to the autumn 2022 meeting, was to survey 30 plots in non-designated

native woodland across the group in 2023. However, this would not be comparable with the data from the NWSS used in the 2019 assessment. The rationale for carrying out HIA in fenced woodland is also questionable. Would it be better to simply check and repair damaged fences?

The group is part-way through a planned reduction in deer densities. Of the three habitats being monitored by the group: blanket bog, dwarf shrub heath, and woodland, it is blanket bog which would be expected to show an improvement in condition first, in terms of *grazing* impacts.

Much of Morvern's native woodland is designated. NatureScot plans in house condition monitoring of Morvern Woods SAC and its constituent SSSIs in 2024; and of Sunart Oakwoods SAC by contractors also in 2024. NatureScot commented that it is important that there is a long-term plan in place to secure the condition of these sites which are both in unfavourable condition per their most recent assessments.

There is also monitoring of the Loch Arienas oakwoods planned for 2023, and HIA is being carried out by the RSPB at their Glencripesdale reserve. The results of this monitoring should be available to the group.

Tom Edwards proposed that HIA of woodland by the group should be deferred until at least 2026, when the group's reduction cull will be completed, and that there should be HIA of blanket bog in 2024, and dwarf shrub heath in 2025, as previously agreed.

This proposal was agreed by the Group. It was also agreed that Tom Edwards should establish the current extent of both native and commercial woodland in the DMG area; and work with Group members to update the maps of deer fences and their condition.

**Action: Tom Edwards to carry out the above work by the autumn meeting**

The decision to defer HIA of woodland also has an implication for the 2023 subscriptions. As the accounts paper presented under item 3 shows, there are already contributions towards HIA costs being carried forward from 2022.

It was agreed that this money should continue to be carried forward as an accrual; that members' subscriptions when invoiced for 2023 would not include an HIA element (for those members that contribute to the cost of HIA); and that the accrued HIA funds would be carried forward towards the cost of HIA in 2024.

**5. Deer Count, Cull report and proposed culls for 2023/4**

An open-range foot count was carried out between 14 and 17 March 2023. Results have been collated and circulated, with additional count data for other landholdings included. A complete count was possible for the Western and North Eastern sub-group. Counted figures have been adjusted for post-count mortality and compared to the population model for 2023. These show that both sub-groups have populations very close to the population model.

The group agreed to continue with its current cull plan, and the trajectory of the population model.

There were no reports of deer vehicle collisions and no reports of poaching. Condition of hinds was variable with some members reporting hinds in good condition while others noticed hinds were in poorer condition than normal due to the prolonged wet weather at the start of the hind season.

A peatland restoration feasibility study has been completed at Laudale East, and two new woodlands are planned, covering 49 hectares and 20 hectares respectively. When the Glen Liddesdale fence is completed, Laudale plans to take an additional cull of ten stags held over from 2022 from within this fence. Kingairloch is in the early stages of planning some native woodland creation. Killundine has developed a proposal for protecting its designated woodland and has also secured its boundary fence with FLS Fiunary. RSPB Glencripesdale has carried out HIA in woodlands and is developing a long-term management plan. The ring fence is porous.

The table overleaf shows the hind, calf and other culls for 2022/23 reported to the meeting, together with planned stag culls for 2023. In summary, culls of hinds by sub-Group compared to targets were as follows:

North-west (Rahoy hills; Kinlochteacuis; Laudale W; Ardtornish W, RSPB Glencripesdale, with additional cull on Glencripesdale estate): Target: 90, Achieved: 166

North-east (Laudale E; Kingairloch N; Carnoch): Target: 80, Achieved: 82

South-east (Ardtornish E; Kingairloch S; Glensanda): Target: 140 Achieved: 121

Landholding	Hind cull 2022/23	Proposed stags 2023
SWT Rahoy hills	15h 8c	
Kinlochteacuis	11h 2c	15 (inc SWT Rahoy Hills)
Laudale	W: 43h 14c E: 27h 11c T: 70h 25c	40 (plus 10 from woodland block)
Ardtornish	NW: 45h 21c SE: 82h 28c T: 127h 49c	
Carnoch	19h 7c	17
Kingairloch	N: 36h 17c S: 24h 8c T: 60h 25c	Slight increase proposed based on count, but will be based on what is on ground in the season
Glensanda	15h 18c	10
Killundine	31h 13c (4s out of season)	
FLS	64h 21c 72s 14d 4k 17b	
Drimnin	Hill: 13h 4c Woodland: 12h 4c T 25h 8c	10-12
JAME Forest Partnership	In season: 11s 21h 12c Out of season: 6h 4c 17s Roe: 3	
Rhemore croft	In season: nil Out of season: h0 c2 s4	
RSPB Glencripesdale	20h 3c	10
Glencripesdale	32h 11c Roe: 2 (13s, inc some oos)	

Notes: h = hinds; c = calves; s = stags; d = does; k = kids; b = bucks; E = E of A884; W = W of A884; N = N of B8043; S = S of B8043

## 6. Agency updates

### a. NatureScot

A key driver will be the commitment to restore habitats by 2035. The policy context around deer management continues to evolve. The potential for involvement of green finance in deer management and habitat restoration remains an important new opportunity.

In relation to the Group's request for an update on wild boar/feral pig, a map of reported sightings was provided. This shows a record from 2013 from Laudale, which is known to be an escapee. One has been shot at Ardour. In general, they are now part of our fauna and we will have to manage them.

### b. Scottish Forestry

Proposals for revised Forest Grant Scheme out to consultation. There is budget available for woodland creation.

## 7. ADMG update

ADMG's spring report had been circulated to the group prior to the meeting.

## 8. RSPB update

Ellen Bird, project manager for Saving Morvern's Rainforest, gave an update on the project. The key initial focus is on eradicating rhododendron from Morvern. Longer-term the project is looking to facilitate expansion of native woodland. Work is underway to identify opportunities for woodland creation. A tree nursery is planned, as is recruitment of a local works team for rhododendron control work. The Nature Recovery Fund is supporting the development phase of the project. This phase will be completed by mid-May.

The Chairman proposed that the DMG should establish a sub-group from within its membership to look at the potential for native woodland expansion in Morvern.

Members expressed strong support for this proposal. It was agreed that a meeting should be held to consider this in June, with 1-2 representatives from interested landholdings.

**Action: Members who would like to join this group to let Tom Edwards know, together with their availabilities for a meeting in June.**

## 9. Deer management plan

The cull plan under the Group's existing deer management plan is being delivered between now and end 2026. It is proposed to revisit the plan in 2024 or 2025.

## 10. Game dealer collections – during winter 2022/23

Members shared their experiences. There is currently no appetite for all members to use the same game dealer.

11.AOB

Kevin Masson raised the possibility of having an agreed group channel for radio comms.

**Action: Kevin Masson to liaise with Tom Edwards re: circulating further detail of this to other members.**

12.DONM

31 October 2023 was proposed for the next autumn meeting, and 2 April 2024 was proposed for the next spring meeting.

These dates were agreed.

Tom Edwards

12 April 2023