

## **Morvern DMG – Autumn meeting, 31 October 2023, 2pm Lochaline Village Hall**

In attendance at Lochaline Village Hall: Peter Lawson (Chair, Kinlochteacuis and Killundine), Steve Fox (Vice-chair, Carnoch), Kevin Masson (Kingairloch), Izzy Baker & Ellen Bird (Glencripesdale RSPB), John Jackson (Forestry and Land Scotland), Steven Wheatley (SWT Rahoy Reserve), Derek Lewis (Drimnin), Ian Collier (Scottish Forestry), Andrew MacMaster (NatureScot), Clara Montgomery (Morvern Community Council), Tom Edwards (Secretary, minutes).

by Zoom: Michael Skelly (Glen Sanda), William Hawes (Ardtornish);

### **AGM**

#### 1. Review of constitution

The Group constitution allows a maximum of two consecutive terms for office holders, which the Chair and Vice Chair have now served. It was agreed to amend the Group constitution to allow office holders to serve three consecutive terms in exceptional circumstances. Other amendments to the constitution were agreed to: provide for the Secretary/Treasurer role to be appointed on such terms as the Group agreed, as an alternative to their being elected, to reflect current practice; in the event of a vote being called for reappointment of an office holder for a third consecutive term, for this to require a two-thirds majority of votes cast; and to replace references to “Chairman” and “Vice Chairman” with “Chair” and “Vice Chair” respectively.

#### 2. Election of officers

The re-election of Peter Lawson as Chair and Steve Fox as Vice Chair was agreed by consensus.

#### 3. Accounts

A revised account was presented by Tom Edwards showing the current position and projected income and expenditure for the remainder of 2023 and for 2024. The Group’s general funds remain in surplus at the end of 2024. There is currently a balance carried forward in the Group’s HIA fund, and this would be used up by the end of 2024. To cover the cost of the planned HIA, there will need to be a modest increase in the HIA component of subscriptions for those members who contribute to this. The 2023 subscriptions will be invoiced after the meeting and will be as agreed at the April 2023 meeting, a roll-over of the 2022 sub, minus the HIA contribution as there was no HIA in 2023. The Group agreed to come back to 2024 subscriptions at its next meeting.

The Accounts were adopted, Proposed Steve Fox, Seconded Derek Lewis.

#### 4. Date of next meetings

2 April 2024; 5 November 2024

### **DMG meeting**

#### 1. Chairman's welcome & any apologies

Apologies: Neil Roberts (Laudale), John Macdonald (JAME partnership), William MacKinnon (Killundine); Iain Thornber

#### 2. Minutes of April 2023 meeting and matters arising

Tom Edwards reported on an action to establish the extent of commercial and native woodland in the Group area. From the DMG audit in 2019, commercial woodland on 10 landholdings<sup>1</sup> covered 6,855ha and native woodland 4,474 ha.

The draft minutes were agreed, proposed by Izzy Baker and seconded by Steve Fox

### 3. DMG cull return for 2022/23 to ADMG

A table with the Group's cull for 2022/23 by sub-Group and landholding was circulated prior to the meeting. This shows the correct cull figures and the totals will be included in a return to the ADMG.

### 4. Individual Landholding Reports – see table at end

- a. Stags 2023 (numbers and condition)
- b. Poaching
- c. HIA
- d. Proposed hinds 2023/24
- e. Impact on other land use
- f. Woodland planting/opening plans
- g. Peatland restoration plans

### 5. Spring 2024 count

It was agreed to have a foot count in March if it will be feasible to count the whole group. It would be best to identify more than one count window to take account of the possibility of bad weather.

RSPB now has a drone, with a thermal camera, plus conventional camera. This has been used to count deer in woodland at Glencripesdale. Will be able to use this for survey of rhododendron as well as conifers in native woodland.

NatureScot will be prioritising resources including for helicopter counts at areas with higher deer densities and high impacts. For Morvern a heli-count would need to be match-funded by the Group. The Group's desire for a helicopter count is noted by NatureScot. It may make most sense to have a helicopter count in 2026 after the Group's current cull plan ends.

**Action:** Kevin Masson, Neil Roberts and Tom Edwards to liaise re: organising a foot count in March 2024

### 6. HIA 2024

Morvern Woods SAC will be monitored by NatureScot in 2024.

The Group monitored dwarf shrub heath in 2020 and blanket bog in 2021. At its last meeting it was agreed to defer HIA of non-designated native woodland until at least 2026, once the Group's cull plan has been completed.

It was agreed to carry out HIA of dwarf shrub heath in 2024, with repeat monitoring of the 90 plots monitored in 2020, 30 per sub-Group.

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<sup>1</sup> Ardtornish; Carnoch; Drimnin; FLS; Glensanda; Kilmalieu; Killundine; Kingairloch; Kinlochteacuis; Laudale.

## 7. Native woodland creation & Green finance

NatureScot has agreed an MoU with Hampden / Lombard Odier / Palladium re: private investment in native woodland creation and peatland restoration through purchase of carbon credits. Initial intention is to develop this approach through pilot projects. Morvern DMG has been approached re landscape scale native woodland creation involving DMG members and other landowners. DMG officers have had a number of meetings this year regarding this. Palladium is developing a model agreement using Kinlochteaquis as an example so DMG members can see what this would involve, and once this is complete would like to present this to the group, either at next meeting or in a specific meeting.

In Morvern there will be significant restock of commercial plantations in the next few years. This is not eligible for carbon credits. A Scottish approach to biodiversity net gain that supported this would be a significant opportunity and benefit for Morvern.

### Opportunity map

Following the Spring meeting, members and other landowners in Morvern were asked to identify areas on which they could consider: native woodland creation; peatland restoration; restructuring of existing plantations to native woodland, either now or at end of rotation. Good response was received and a map has been prepared identifying these areas.

**Action:** Tom Edwards to confirm that members are happy to share the information they contributed to the opportunity map within the Group.

## 8. Agency updates

### a. NatureScot

The position re: helicopter counts was covered under item 5. Legislation removing the close season for male deer is now in place. Night shooting of deer remains subject to authorisation, but under authorisations, thermal and night vision scopes can now be used.

Some welfare concerns were reported re: copper ammunition in some now legal loads (e.g. the 80 or 85 grain .243 in copper), and also a shortage of copper ammunition in larger calibres.

### b. Forestry and Land Scotland

Updates for deer management on FLS land in Morvern included in the table below. Recent experience of thermal counting of woodland by drone has proven very effective. A site with 9,000 hectares of woodland and open ground was counted in two days.

### c. Scottish Forestry

A number of Plant health notices for Phytophthora in Larch in Morvern are in the process of being issued. This will require felling of larch within a perimeter of infected trees.

The revised UK Forest Standard has launched. Full implementation will be delayed until 2024.

Two issues to note with the revision are that there are lower limits on max % a single species can make up in new plantings (65%); and that woodlands in a Long-term Forest Plan should have a competent deer management plan.

The UK Forestry Standard 5<sup>th</sup> Edition is available here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/651670336a423b0014f4c5c0/Revised\\_UK\\_Forestry\\_Standard\\_-\\_effective\\_October\\_2024.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/651670336a423b0014f4c5c0/Revised_UK_Forestry_Standard_-_effective_October_2024.pdf)

There will be an announcement on revisions to SFGS in due course following conclusion of the recent consultation.

## 9. Deer Management Plan and open range cull plan

As noted above, the Group's cull plan and population model runs to spring 2026. Plan to revise the Group's Deer Management Plan along with the population model then.

## 10. ADMG update

Regular updates from the ADMG are provided through the E-Scope newsletter. This can be received by email by signing up here: <https://us12.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=d3fc8c5fa7488240ad43cd222&id=9b75d86623>

## 11. RSPB / Saving Morvern's Rainforest Update

The Nature Recovery Fund bid has been successful and negotiations on the details are close to being finalised with NatureScot. This will allow the hiring of a works team for Rhododendron control. The RSPB will be concluding agreements with landowners in coming weeks. There will be an obligation on the RSPB for 10 years of follow up on Rhododendron control. This will comprise two follow up surveys and treatments.

The RSPB is working on a business plan for tree nursery. Would welcome indications of demand from DMG members for using the nursery in terms of the species and number of trees they would want from a nursery.

**Action:** Ellen Bird to send Tom Edwards details of what information is wanted and TE to circulate to group.

## 12. Game dealer collections

No issues were reported.

## 13. DMG Radio Channel

This would be useful for collaborative counts. This will be taken forward in the planning of the next deer count.

## 14. AOB

### a. New fungal disease of Scots Pine

A guidance note was circulated prior to the meeting. An area in Glen Tarbert has been identified with this, but is not the only one. The note explains what signs to look for and where they should be reported. There will be a presentation about this new disease at the Assynt Field Club on the 16 November 2023 at 7pm which it will also be possible to join via Zoom:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82372779892?pwd=Qq0VL6nH0xTTtdL3leauR5rCvPObuX.1>

Meeting ID: 823 7277 9892

Passcode: 800703

Tom Edwards

31 October 2023

## Landholding reports

	Stags 2023	Condition	Poaching	HIA	Proposed hinds 2023/24	Impact on other LUs	Woodland expansion /opening	Peatland restoration
Ardtornish	26		None reported	None	180 hinds in total, focussing on SE.	NRF application was successful, c£780 kpa. Concluding a natural capital agreement.	Planning to expand by 600ha over next 5 years, behind fences.	Planned to start late 2023
Carnoch	18	Good to v Good	None	Not formal	20-25 plus followers	None	None	Revisiting previous ideas
Drimnin	18 (8 after 21/10)	Good	None		30 plus followers (3 hinds and 2 calves already taken out of season)		Ongoing projects	Ongoing projects
JAME Forest Partnership	37 (19 before 1/7 / after 21/10)				5 hinds and 4 calves already taken out of season			
FLS	54	Very good	None	None	As 2022-23	None	Restocking programme continuing	Assessed prior to restocking
Glencripesdale	7 (average age 6, average weight 64kg)	Good			10 plus followers outside fence, plus any inside fences.			
Glensanda	11	Excellent	Nil	Informal and formal monitoring. Impacts are increasing.	Has seen a build-up of hinds. Looking to achieve 40 hinds in 2023-24 and then revert to c. 20 pa after that.		Native woodland scheme just started with fencing work ongoing. Planting to be completed in spring 2024.	

Killundine	22 (2 after 21/10)		None		40 plus followers		Native woodland scheme, fence in Killundine gorge, will create zone between this and the sea and keep low deer density within this area. Mature plantations to be felled in next 2 to 4 years.	None planned at present.
Kinlochteacuis	12		No	Nil	12-15 depending on what is on ground		None	Not immediately
Kingairloch	46	Good	None	None	80 (60 last year, this was conservative, longer term plans of 70pa)	Want to reduce hind numbers on S Loch Linhe coastline	Opening some fencing to expand deer corridors to reduce erosion, for which there will be compensatory planting.	Not imminent but looking at this.
Laudale	31 (plus 5-10 still to be taken in SSSI / new enclosures). Average age 8, average weight 68.2kg	Good			70 plus followers			
Rahoy hills	3	Good	None		15 plus followers		None	Looking to progress
RSPB Glencripesdale	10 (still to be taken)		Woodland HIA, report in prep.	Some in woodland writing up at moment.	20	Close to renewing stalking lease with Laudale	Some fencing proposals in pipeline.	None planned at present.
Be'Ach, Clounlaid, Crosben	8 (5 within enclosures and 3 on open hill).				25 plus followers.			
Oronsay	0							