

## **Morvern DMG – Spring meeting, 2 April 2024, 2pm, Community Hub, Lochaline**

In attendance at Lochaline Hub: Peter Lawson (Chair, Kinlochteacuis and Killundine), Steve Fox (Vice-chair, Carnoch), William Hawes (Ardtornish), Neil Roberts (Laudale), Izzy Baker (RSPB Glencripesdale), John Jackson (Forestry and Land Scotland), Steve Wheatley (Scottish Wildlife Trust Rahoy Reserve), Willie MacKinnon (Kinlochteacuis and Killundine), Ian Collier (Scottish Forestry), Clara Montgomery (Morvern Community Council).

by MS Teams: Michael Skelly (Glensanda), Gaetan Hannecart & Kevin Masson (Kingairloch), Derek Lewis (Drimnin), Graeme Taylor (NatureScot), Tom Edwards (Secretary, minutes)

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

Apologies were received from Ellen Bird, John MacDonald, Andrew MacMaster, Iain Thornber, and Harvey Phillips

## **Extraordinary AGM**

### 2. Presentation of accounts and member subscriptions for 2024 and 2025

Tom Edwards spoke to a paper which presented the Group's 2023 accounts, and proposed subscriptions for 2024 and 2025. It was agreed to set subscriptions to cover the budgeted costs for general funds at the proposed levels. Some members intend to provide their own HIA data going forward and they will continue to make a subscription towards the cost of analysing and reporting on HIA for the Group. Proposed subscriptions for HIA for 2024 were agreed.

## **DMG meeting**

### 3. Minute of previous meeting and matters arising

Actions from the minutes of the meeting of 31 October 2023 were reviewed and had all been completed. The draft minutes were then agreed, proposed by proposed Steve Fox, seconded by William Hawes.

### 4. HIA update

HIA monitoring of dwarf shrub heath will be carried out by Tom Edwards and Gus Routledge in April 2024 on the subscribing landholdings.

### 5. Green finance

Discussions have been ongoing with a consortium including Palladium since January 2023 on a green finance offer for native woodland creation. Palladium are working on a new proposal for native woodland creation and hope to be able to extend this offer to members of Morvern DMG. They would be able to present this proposal at the next DMG meeting.

### 6. Reports from individual landholdings

Reports are summarised in the table at the end and covered the 2023/4 Hind Cull and any comments on the condition of hinds/calves; poaching; proposed stag cull for 2024; and any updates on designated sites; habitat improvements; landholdings and conservation management plans; and training and certification. A consistent calendar for reporting cull figures was agreed with the reporting year running from 1 April to 31 March. Culls to date would be reported at the autumn meeting, with final figures given at the spring meeting.

**Actions:** Steve Fox to send Tom Edwards the group's training log.

## 7. Agency updates

### a) NatureScot

Graeme Taylor explained that the priority deer areas map had been produced for the Scottish Government Strategic Deer Board. It identifies a number of areas where either deer numbers are high or where there are impacts on public interests; or where there is known to be significant positive work already underway on habitat restoration. Morvern is in this second category, forming part of an Atlantic Rainforest cluster.

The Scottish Government consultation on managing deer for nature and climate closed on 29<sup>th</sup> March. NatureScot has also held bilaterals with other organisations about the consultation. One of the proposals which has attracted most comment is for Deer Management Nature Restoration Orders. As distinct from existing regulatory powers these would be about targeting ecological restoration or improvement. They could include a package of measures including setting cull levels; fencing; other deer management measures; and could also include incentives. The timetable for legislation following the consultation has not been set out yet, but the expectation is for a Bill to be introduced in the Scottish Parliament in the summer, which would become law sometime in 2025.

A number of pilot projects are being developed, which would offer incentive payments for increasing cull rates. These are in the Cairngorms National Park for red deer and may also include Sika in the central belt or N. Ross, and Roe deer in the central belt.

NatureScot has also piloted community stalking on its land at Creag Meagaidh NNR and is now extending this to Beinn Eighe NNR.

NatureScot will launch a new Deer Online Service in April 2024.

### b) Scottish Forestry

Currently working on implementing a number of Statutory Plant Health Notices in Morvern for ash dieback. It was highlighted that the new UK Forest Standard<sup>1</sup> adopted in 2023, includes the following requirement:

“In areas where deer are present, deer management measures should be developed and implemented as part of a management plan, with the aim that deer browsing does not prevent regeneration of trees or the development of resilient forests; ideally this will be in co-operation with neighbours or as part of a Deer Management Group.”

Forest grant applications will be required to demonstrate compliance with the standard going forward. The overall budget for forestry grants has been cut. Scottish Forestry is currently preparing budgets for grant schemes going forward.

## 8. ADMG update

It was noted that an ADMG representative has not attended recent meetings of the group, and members agreed it would be good to have an ADMG rep at a future meeting, to hear about recent

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<sup>1</sup> <https://cdn.forestresearch.gov.uk/2023/10/The-UK-Forestry-Standard.pdf>

ADMG initiatives and activities. It is possible to subscribe to e-Scope, ADMG's newsletter through the ADMG website.<sup>2</sup>

**Action:** TE to contact ADMG representatives and invite to future meetings, which can also be joined by video-link.

#### 9. RSPB Saving Morvern's Rainforests update

Funding bid to the Nature Restoration Fund for rhododendron removal in W Morvern has been approved. The work will be done by an in-house works team, and will begin in summer 2024. The works team leader has been appointed, and a woodland advisor is also being recruited. Plans for a tree nursery are progressing with the lease of a site from FLS at Keill. This needs some ground clearance work before the nursery can be laid out. Helen Woolston is the nursery manager. The project will soon be employing 8.5 FTE locally, which is significant. Funding bids are being made for rhododendron clearance beyond end of current NRF project and also looking to extend works to E Morvern.

#### 10. Deer management plan

The Group is continuing to implement its cull plan. It is considering when best to begin work on a revised DMP. A number of land ownerships have changed hands in recent years. The forthcoming deer legislation will have an important bearing and it would make sense to revise the DMP once the details of this are known. The requirement in the Land Reform Bill for landholdings above a certain size to have a public land management plan, and for these plans to include information on deer management will also have a bearing.

#### 11. Game dealer collections – during winter 2023/24 & copper ammunition

Members exchanged experiences over the season on collections, and game dealer policies on the use of copper ammunition, and with using it.

#### 12. AOB.

a. Wildfire preparedness – Rhian Evans is the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service representative in Morvern. It would be possible to hold Fire Awareness training with the Fire Service. Details of fire insurance held by group members would also affect the emergency response to a fire. The group had previously begun an audit of fire-fighting equipment. NatureScot has fire foggers on staffed NNRs, and also has fire management plans which include contact details, maps, and information for the Fire Service such as access and where to get water. They are also looking at resilience i.e. how to manage fire in the landscape which can include creation of fire-breaks but also re-wetting. The Cairngorms National Park is developing an integrated fire plan. Kingairloch has a fire management plan. This can be shared with the Group.

**Actions** – potential dates for a meeting with Rhian Evans to be explored. If there is a choice of dates Tom Edwards to set up a doodle poll to identify the best date for members. Kevin Masson to send Tom Edwards Kingairloch's fire management plan. Graeme Taylor to share an example NatureScot fire management plan. Group members with fire insurance to provide summary details to Tom Edwards.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://deer-management.us12.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=d3fc8c5fa7488240ad43cd222&id=9b75d86623>

b. Mink control – Ardtornish is considering a water vole survey. If there are water vole populations found, or if water vole were reintroduced, this would need to be accompanied by mink control, and so Ardtornish is interested in any information on mink control or mink populations from neighbours. Small numbers of mink are trapped on the peninsula in the spring. RSPB Glencripesdale have camera traps out, but have not recorded mink. There has been control previously at Kingairloch but not currently, no sign recorded. Drimnin – no recent evidence since trapping project ended c. 15 years ago. This was a previous project around Loch Sunart.

**Action:** William Hawes will report back to the next meeting on Ardtornish' plans

c. NatureScot was asked to clarify what deer densities are the threshold for regulatory action? NatureScot will be focussing on some areas with >10 deer per km<sup>2</sup>, but also other areas where deer are having impacts on public interests.

13. DONM

5 November 2024, 2pm at Morvern Community Hub

Tom Edwards, 2 April 2024

<b>Landholding</b>	<b>Summary of report</b>
Ardtornish	186 hinds and 75 calves (114 hinds and 44 calves SE and 72 hinds and 31 calves NW). Condition average. 2 stags from enclosed woodland since 21/10. No poaching recorded.  Foot count in March 2024 found an average of 4 deer/km2. A drone count is planned at end of April. Will decide on 2024 stag plans based on results of these counts and HIA work in 2024.
Beach/Clounlaid/Crosben*	25 hinds and 12 calves
Carnoch	25 hinds and 13 calves. Condition average. 1 additional stag was shot after 21 October within enclosure. 20 to 22 stags planned for 2024. No poaching. The long-term reduction in livestock is showing improvements in habitats. Renewal of argo qualification needed.
Drimnin	16 hinds and 8 calves. Condition good. No poaching. 12-15 stags planned. New strategy being prepared for estate – community consultation ongoing. All training up to date. Exclosure of Killundine gorge planned once harvesting completed there.
FLS	98 stags, 41 hinds and 6 calves. 9 bucks, 10 does and 2 kids. No poaching. Barr – broadleaved planting programme is underway
Glencripesdale Estate	18 stags, 15 hinds, 7 calves. Average weight & age stags 62kg, 5.8yrs, hinds 40kg 6 yrs
Glensanda	40 hinds, 10 calves. 1 Roe buck in enclosed woodland. Condition variable. No poaching.
JAME Forest Partnership	19 hinds and 8 calves. 8 stags (after 21/10). Immigration of deer noted, thought to be via coastal strip.
Killundine	24 hinds and 11 calves. Condition below average. 1 stag in enclosed woodland. Proposed stags for 2024 as per previous years. Deer fence along Killundine river and around SSSI woodland, and plan to maintain zero-tolerance within SSSI there.
Kingairloch	75 hinds and 39 calves (North 45 hinds and 25 calves, South 30 hinds and 14 calves). Condition poor at start of season, better towards xmas, poor at end. Stags for 2024 – as 2023. Habitat – planned riparian planting, scoping report for peatland restoration project for W end of estate. One staff member to do DSC 1. Significant upgrade to larder facilities will be complete by end of April.
Kinlochteacuis	10 hinds and 1 calf. Condition average. One report of poaching. Calving percentage low. 15 stags are planned split between Kinlochteacuis and Rahoy Hills Reserve. Recently completed Argo training and a First Aid course.
Laudale	72 hinds and 27 calves (W 43 hinds and 17 calves, E 29 hinds and 10 calves). 10 stags taken in woodland as planned (9 W, 1 E). Average weight & age stags 68kg, 7.1 yrs, hinds 40kg 7 yrs. Condition deteriorated after Christmas. Working with Scottish Forestry and Nature Scot on plans to improve condition of designated site.
Oronsay	No hinds and no calves
Rhemore croft	3 hinds and 3 calves. 5 stags (after 21/10).
RSPB Glencripesdale	10 stags, 16 hinds and 5 calves. Average age stags 5.1, weight 52.6kg; Hinds, average age 6.8yrs, weight 42kg A management plan is being finalised, a summary of which will be circulated to the group when complete. As part of this a foot count is planned, as well as HIA.
Rahoy hills	15 hinds and 6 calves. Condition of hinds was poor. Will look at HIA results and thermal drone count before deciding on cull levels going forward.