This Deer Management Plan has been developed for the North West Sutherland Deer Management Group (NWS DMG) and also includes issues relating to domestic livestock. The Plan is funded both by the deer group and by Scottish Natural Heritage. It replaces a previous DMP that was partially drawn up in 2006, aiming to take account of changing circumstances with the group area. The Plan runs from 2015 until 2025 and has been formally endorsed by all the Members of the Group. It has been designed to be readily updated as needs arise and will be reviewed on a six-monthly basis or as required, with a systematic review taking place at the end of the first five year period in 2020.

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Also included are recommended larder sheets for males and females.
Part One - INTRODUCTION

1. Purpose of Plan
The purpose of this Plan is to provide:-
(a) an agreed statement of the shared views of the Members of the Group about the management of wild deer in the area covered by the Group;
(b) an agreed set of the actions to try and ensure that deer management in the area is in line with those shared views;
(c) an agreed set of actions that will identify and deliver relevant public interest and benefits throughout the area
(d) an agreed pattern of arrangements to try and ensure that the actions are implemented and their effectiveness monitored.
(e) a document that acts as a ready source of information for both members and the general public alike, clarifying points of contact, and setting out how communications can best be received and addressed.

2. Group Area
The North West Sutherland Deer Management Group (NWSDMG) covers 168,960 ha or nearly 420,000 acres (1. NWS Location Map). It has 19 current subscribing members, and another 6 properties who associate with and input to the Group. It is not part of any other local association, and operates under its own constitution. (See Appendix 1, NWS Constitution) The group subscribes to the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG). The boundaries of the area are:
- in the east: the A836 running northwards from Lairg, leading on to the B893 Strathnaver road up to Bettyhill, along which the River Naver is the actual boundary
- in the south west: a line following Lochs Shin, Merkland, More and Stack and along the Laxford river to Laxford Bridge
- in the west and north, following the coast from Laxford Bridge all the way around to Bettyhill.

The boundaries of the Group are considered to be well defined, and while there is some interaction of deer with adjacent ground, the DMG area is widely recognized as a coherent, if rather large, entity.

Other neighbouring Deer Management Groups are the West Sutherland DMG to the south west, and the Northern Deer Management Group and East Sutherland Deer Management Groups who share an eastern boundary.

3. Group Membership
There are a range of main management objectives within the group area, summarized on 4. NWS Management Objectives Map:
- One property covering 5,115 ha or 3% of the DMG area is primarily managed for deer.
- Three properties covering 22,152 ha or 13% of the Group area are managed for a mixture of deer and farming reasons. In these areas, the livestock are managed by sheep stock clubs or by contract agreement.
- Two properties covering 16,046 ha or 9% of the DMG area are managed for a more mixed sporting/ livestock balance, which includes deer as part of the total
- Nine properties are specifically managed for deer/ fishing, with no agricultural
interest. These cover 59,701 ha or 35% of the group area, making this the most significant classification of land use objectives in the area.

- One property covering 26,332 ha is primarily interested in range/conservation management, but with sporting interests as an important consideration. This represents nearly 16% of the total group area.

- Three properties are managed to maintain their range only, for a variety of conservation and vegetation management reasons. They cover 12,310 ha or 7% of the group area.

- Two properties are primarily interested in livestock, and deer management is carried out on their properties as and when required only. Some sporting use is made of this. These properties cover 5,359 ha or 3% of the area.

- Three members covering 5,454 ha or 3% of the DMG are managed for forestry. This area also includes four very small ownerships outwith the DMG.

- Finally, four properties covering 17,122 ha have crofting as their major land use activity, although other land-based objectives, including deer, are also pursued at a relatively low level. One of these properties is owned by the crofters themselves. These four properties represent 10% of the group area.

Including the previous four properties, ten properties, in total covering 42,440 ha are under crofting tenure. This represents exactly 25% of the Group area.

Overall, eleven members covering 138,106 ha or 81% of the DMG area include sport shooting of deer as part of or all of their activities. The remaining 8 members engage mainly in management of deer numbers to protect other interests, but will sometimes gain some income from this. A separate analysis of the balance between deer-related income and expenditure will be attempted later as part of this plan.
The following table gives a summary of the management objectives of the properties within the deer group. All are either subscribing members of the group, or have close associations with it. The properties can be located at 2. NWS Members Map.

Table 1 NWS DMG Members & Management Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Main Objectives</th>
<th>Size (ha)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achnabourin</td>
<td>mixed sporting/ crofted</td>
<td>2375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altnaharra</td>
<td>Deer/ fishing/ forestry</td>
<td>13,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balnakiel</td>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>1255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eriboll</td>
<td>Deer/ farming</td>
<td>7070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiag</td>
<td>Deer/fishing/ forestry</td>
<td>1608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Enterprise Borgie</td>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>3158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gualin</td>
<td>Fishing/ deer</td>
<td>2532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keodale</td>
<td>Sheep/ deer</td>
<td>10,849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinlochbervie</td>
<td>Crofted</td>
<td>2980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinsaile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melness Crofters Estate</td>
<td>Crofting/ deer</td>
<td>5068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merkland</td>
<td>Priority deer</td>
<td>5115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoD Cape Wrath</td>
<td>Range Management</td>
<td>6024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Lochnaver &amp; Syre</td>
<td>Mixed sporting/ sheep</td>
<td>6943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overscaig*</td>
<td>Forestry/ deer</td>
<td>2416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poole</td>
<td>Deer/sheep</td>
<td>4982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reay Forest</td>
<td>Priority Deer/ fishing</td>
<td>20,658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhiconich</td>
<td>Mixed sporting/ sheep</td>
<td>4494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhigolter</td>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>3305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rispond &amp; Polla**</td>
<td>Mixed sporting</td>
<td>7450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandwood (John Muir Trust)</td>
<td>Range Management</td>
<td>4673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinness</td>
<td>Mixed sporting/ crofted</td>
<td>6233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strathmore</td>
<td>Mixed sporting/ farming</td>
<td>8439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutherland Estates</td>
<td>Mixed sporting/ crofted</td>
<td>8405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Shinness</td>
<td>Mixed sporting/ crofted</td>
<td>1583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildland Ltd</td>
<td>Range m’ment/ sporting/ Farming</td>
<td>26,234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc woodland properties***</td>
<td>Forestry/ deer</td>
<td>858</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total area covered: 168,960 ha

* Overscaig has a multiple ownership structure.
** Rispond & Polla manage Durness Estate, who are not members of the DMG in their own right.
*** In addition to the properties above, there are four small woodland properties within the DMG area who have opted not to be part of the DMG structure. The total area of these is 858 ha.
3a. Member Descriptions
The following section gives a brief overview of the essential management information relating to each of the group members. A contact list is separately available as Appendix 2, which also includes some information on actual sporting requirements and levels of cull attained in recent years by that property.

Contact details are given in a separate Appendix 2, NW Sutherland Contact List, which is confidential to group members only. Contact details for this group are given later in the document.

Achnabourin
Achnabourin is a relatively small property which is all tenanted by crofters. The owners aim to control deer numbers and have a modest sporting cull, in addition to fishing on the Naver which is a significant consideration. There are also a number of good trout lochs on the property. There are extensive native woodlands on the Strathnaver side of the property, a proportion of which appear to have spread by natural regeneration in the past 15 years or so.

The hill area has been heavily burned in the recent past, and there is extensive bracken coverage in Strathnaver.

Altnaharra
Altnaharra aim to run a sustainable rural estate with sporting opportunities/ farming/ fishing/ accommodation/ renewable energy as part of an overall mix. The vast majority of the hill ground is used to provide sporting stag and hind shooting, with associated lettings for accommodation, and this is a major part of the overall business and the backbone of the community around Altnaharra. In addition, the estate run a deer farm. There are no longer any sheep kept on the property, although a small number of cattle have been recently re-introduced to help deal with possible undergrazed lower lying areas and overall sustainability. Fishing on Loch Naver and the River Naver are central to estate income as well, often interconnected with stalking and letting accommodation. A considerable amount of woodland felling/ restocking and woodland creation has taken place in recent years. There are no plans for any more significant plantings/ fellings/ fence removals at present.

Part of Altnaharra Estate lies in the neighbouring East Sutherland DMG area.

Three full time staff are employed with involvement in deer management.

Balnakeil
Balnakeil is predominantly a sheep farm, keeping a small number of cattle as well. The property lies immediately to the south and west of Durness, and as a significant area of good quality in-bye ground. It is an attractive holiday destination, both for family and for holiday lets. www.elliothouses.co.uk

Deer numbers are controlled to reduce competition with sheep for grazing and feed. No sporting use is made of them although this may change in the future. Two local stalkers undertake the necessary control on a voluntary basis.

Eriboll
Eriboll is a mixed sheep farm/ sporting property, lying to the east of Loch Eriboll. The sheep
are managed under a contract agreement. Deer management is important to the property, and this level of interest may increase in importance in the future. Much of the hill ground is relatively heavily designated as an SSSI. Eriboll has a significant area of in-byde ground, much of which is fenced off from deer. Website: http://www.eriboll.com/

**Fiag**

Fiag is a relatively small hill property which now includes a significant woodland area in the Fiag Plantation. Red deer stalking and fishing are important. Options are currently being explored for re-structuring the Fiag Plantation and this may well have implications for deer/fences in the vicinity. Website: http://fiagestate.co.uk/

**Forest Enterprise**

Borgie Forest is the only FE holding within the DMG area, and it includes a significant area of open ground. The forest has been heavily felled and restocked in recent years. Management objectives are forest protection and on open ground habitats- conservation of designated sites. The river Borgie which flows through the site is an important salmon river of national acclaim.

The Dalchork plantation lies outwith this DMG, just to the north of Lairg, within the East Sutherland DMG. However, given that it shares a long boundary with this Group, it is suggested that cull information from Dalchork is reported to the NW Sutherland Group for information only. For clarification, Dalchork would retain its membership of the East Sutherland Group. It is suggested that the area of open land owned by FE to the north of Dalchork also report to this group.

Very significant numbers of sika deer reside in Dalchork, with lesser numbers in Borgie Forest.

**Gualin**

Management objectives at Gualin are:

1. Maintain deer and fisheries management as important aspects of Gualin Estates core economic activity.

2. Provide 12 mature red deer stags to be shot by clients each year – necessary to fulfil the estates socio-economic objectives (employment and revenue).

3. Maintain balanced integration between sporting interests & the natural heritage by maintaining favourable condition of the designated site features through collaborative deer management.

4. Provide information and education regarding the estate management through signs, website, and face to face contact with the public.

5. Contribute to a safe and healthy environment for people to enjoy.

Red deer are an integral component of the land-based resources on Gualin and they are considered to be extremely important to meeting the above objectives. The primary objective of the deer management is to maintain the welfare of the deer in a balanced ecosystem. The salmon fishing is more important in terms of revenue to the estate and surrounding area, however, the deer stalking maintains two full time jobs on the estate.
It is the combination of both sporting activities which provides an attractive package for many of the estates clients and this encourages return visits to this remote area. Website: [http://www.gualin-estate.com/]

Keodale
Keodale is owned by Scottish Ministers and leased to the Keodale Sheep Stock Club. The sheep stock are owned by Scottish Ministers, with the Stock Club maintaining the flock and taking any profit for themselves. There are no sheep kept under crofting tenure on the property. The Keodale Sheep Stock Club (KSSC) is an extensive hill farm running 1800 ewes, 550 gimmers and 650 hoggs, along with a small herd of approx 30 cattle. They have a grazing scheme set out under an SRDP contract.

The sporting element of the lease is important to KSSC, and there is a sporting requirement of approx 20 stags. Hinds are taken as a management cull only. Current plans are to maintain the same sheep numbers in future. Habitat monitoring takes place on a regular basis, and there is no muirburning on the property.

The in-bye ground is deer fenced, lying on the eastern side of the Kyle of Durness.

Kinlochbervie
Kinlochbervie is entirely crofted and covered by three grazing committees. No keeper has been employed since the 1920s/30s. There is no organized stalking as such, and red deer management centres on control of deer in and around the village as it is required, and to reduce problems with accidents on the road. A local crofter is the recognized point of contact for deer on the property.

Kinsaile
Kinsaile is a small property, with a single crofter. The owner likes fishing and walking. Deer have rarely been seen on the property in the past, but they are now starting to become more noticeable, and could be encouraged and promoted with some attention to this, although it is not a priority at the moment. A stag or two are taken in most years.

Melnness Crofters Estate
The Melness Crofters Estate was gifted to the local crofting community by the previous owner of Hope & Melness Estate. It is run by the crofters, not the community as such. In terms of land use, sheep and cattle grazing is continued. A lease for the stalking provides a main source of income. Wildland Ltd currently undertake deer management, which includes a sporting requirement of 7-8 stags. They have recently (2014) signed a 10 year stalking lease with the crofters, who have retained a small area around the townships in which they control deer numbers there themselves. The grazing area includes Ben Hutig SSSI which is deemed to be in favourable condition.

Website: [http://www.caledonia.org.uk/socialland/melness.htm]

*Melnness Crofters Estate are not currently a subscribing member of the deer group.*

Merkland Estate
Merkland Estate is split between this DMG and West Sutherland DMG, with approx 60% of stalking taking place in the latter. Within this DMG, there are no sheep on the ground, and no crofting interest, and deer are the main management interest. Sheep were removed from
the ground approx 40 years ago. A limited amount of heather burning takes place. Strath Duchally SSSI lies partly within the property, although this is regarded as being in favourable condition. There are some significant native woodland plantings on lower ground, fenced off from the deer range. There are no plans for any future woodland creation at present.

**MOD Cape Wrath**
Cape Wrath is managed by the Ministry of Defence. The northern part of the property acts as a firing range, with the remainder of the property acting as a buffer between this and neighbouring ground. The primary land management objective is to manage the range and maintain it in good environmental condition. This especially applies to the number of designated sites on the property, both on the higher ground and alongside the coast.

2000 sheep were removed from the ground in 2006, and deer numbers have been increasing from that point, although the grazing pressure is still only a proportion of what it previously was. Parts of the property are very fertile, and deer productivity is high.

Cape Wrath can be difficult to access at times, and carcases must be extracted by ferry. There are 7 authorized members of the Cape Wrath Deer Management Group, and they are responsible for achieving target deer culls over a number of fixed, allocated time periods.

There is no sporting element to the cull, which is strictly for management purposes.

Military operations take precedent over all other matters.
Website: [https://www.gov.uk/public-access-to-military-areas#cape-wrath-training-area](https://www.gov.uk/public-access-to-military-areas#cape-wrath-training-area)

**North Lochnaver & Syre**
Syre and North Lochnaver are managed primarily for their fishing along the River Naver, with management of deer being secondary to this, although they are valued as being part of the whole. The property would like to have higher deer numbers, and to re-establish this side of their business in future, although it is not a major consideration at present. There are a moderate number of sheep on the ground, and numbers have been stable for 20 years, although many of the sheep are kept in-bye or do not wander that far out on to the hill. Much of the ground has been recently judged to be under grazed. As with many estates in the area, there has been a significant fire in recent years. The northern boundary with Poole is deer fenced out to Loch Loyal, an attempt to prevent stags from wandering on to crofting ground in the past. The fence is still in reasonably good condition, and might yet possibly serve some strategic function within the eastern part of the DMG area.


**Overscaig**
Overscaig has a very complex ownership structure, with each owner being responsible for their own deer control. For the purposes of this plan, Fountain Forestry have agreed to be a point of contact, although sporting management on ground managed by them is not all within their control. The entire area can be considered to be within one boundary fence. No one party is able to dictate or implement a deer management plan within the area. The major objective within the area is timber production, but the age structure of the plantations is such that significant thinning or felling work is unlikely to be taking place in the foreseeable future. An income is derived from commercial sport shooting, with the deer stalking based primarily on sika deer, but also some red and a few roe.
A management cull is undertaken if paying guests remove insufficient hinds.

Poole
Poole is owned by Scottish Ministers and as an organization they have no specific land management objectives for deer. One of the main reasons for this is that the land is a Crofter's Common Grazing and Sheep Stock Club which the tenants via their respective committees are solely responsible for the management of. The Scottish Government would only get involved if there were statutory breaches of any regulations or major projects.

Mrs Natalie Blyth is the sporting tenant. Her lease requires a minimum stag cull each year, and she is obliged to leave a suitable hind stock on the ground to fulfill this target.

There are a number of significant plantings and ancient woodland on the property.

Reay Forest & Gobernuisgach
Reay Forest is the biggest individual property in the DMG area. It is managed as four beats within this DMG. The estate extends to the south of the Laxford river as well, and is a member of the West Sutherland DMG. It is widely recognized as a deer forest, but fishing is equally important. There are no sheep on the ground, or indeed any other agricultural activity, and no crofting interests. Sheep were removed from the hill in the 1980s. The estate have diversified in to hydro schemes, and there is a considerable area of forestry under active management. A high proportion of this has been felled and restocked in recent years, along with some minor woodland creation. There have also been a number of conservation schemes established around native woodland remnants in recent years. All this is detailed in the estate Forest Plan. There are no significant plans for further woodland activity in the near future within this DMG area, although more significant woodland activity will be taking place on Reay Forest within the West Sutherland DMG area. Management of the Foinaven SSSI/ SAC is a particular management consideration.

There are 4 full time staff and 6 seasonal ghillies employed within the DMG area.

Reay Forest specifically note their objectives in relation to deer management as follows:

Objective 1. To maintain and secure the sustainability of current sporting and stalking interests of the Estate, while recognising the need to manage in a way consistent with good stewardship and concern for the natural heritage.

Objective 2. To safeguard and enhance nature conservation values on the Estate, by appropriate vegetational management, and by adjustment of overall grazing pressure, so far as this is compatible with maintenance of sporting interests, above.

The Estate have been operating their own deer management plan since 2008, and make full use of population modeling, habitat surveying and deer counts, which are undertaken every two years.

Website:

Rhiconich
Rhiconich is a relatively small property which has only in recent years begun to build up a significant population of deer. The owners have a significant interest in deer, but their
expectations are modest and realistic. The property is regarded as a wintering ground for stags, but very few are present during the summer months. The primary interest on the property is fishing on the Rhiconich river. The entire estate is crofted, but sheep numbers are now very low, and are likely to fall further still.

Rhigolter Farms
Rhigolter is primarily a sheep farm, although deer management is also important to overall farm management objectives, and a modest sporting objective is pursued. Rhigolter also own a small property immediately to the east of the MoD property at Cape Wrath, known as Diall.

Rispond & Polla
Rispond & Polla are managed as one unit, with Polla being the more significant property in terms of deer management. Rispond lies along side Loch Eriboll to the north in a long, narrow trip. Red deer management and fishing on the Polla are the mainstays of the estate business. Red deer stalking is also leased on Durness Estate to the north, giving a fairly compact stalking area overall.
The Durness Grazings committee have access to the hill area on Durness estate although in practice, few sheep are grazed there now. Deer encroachment on to in-by and croft land at Durness is a significant consideration, and a number of stags are culled there annually. Laid Grazings no longer keep many stock, and virtually none on the hill area.
Website: [http://www.rispondestate.com/index_files/Page723.htm](http://www.rispondestate.com/index_files/Page723.htm)

Sandwood (John Muir Trust)
The Trust seeks to maintain the integrity of Wildland and encourage natural processes, working with crofting tenants and the public to foster these aims and to work with the local community.
Public access to JMT properties is facilitated by making and maintaining footpaths which also have the effect of channeling people and minimizing impacts and disturbance.
Trust lands include a mosaic of habitats, a sizeable part of which is designated and protected as SSSI and SAC. The Trust is keen that these habitats are maintained in a healthy condition and continue to meet criteria required by SNH site condition monitoring.
With regard to deer this involves ensuring impacts are kept to a minimum and in balance with sheep stock numbers. These objectives are informed by annual deer counts and a monitoring regime.
The current policy is a maintenance cull, that of hinds is based on annual count and ongoing observations, stags are culled on more ad hoc basis largely when marauding beasts come onto in-by ground.
Where possible, this is selective and in deference to sporting aspirations of neighbors.
JMT have an open and transparent management policy.
There may be some small scale tree planting in the upcoming round of SRDP. The ground is completely crofted. There has been a gradual decline in sheep stocks, and this is likely to continue. Website: [http://www.jmt.org/sandwood-estate.asp](http://www.jmt.org/sandwood-estate.asp)

Shinness
Shinness lies towards the southern end of the group. The ground is entirely crofted, and is heavily dominated by an extensive tract of blanket bog. Very few sheep now graze the unenclosed area of the estate, and the designated sites on the property are in favourable condition. There is however an appreciable area of good inbye ground, and hill ground lying on mineral soils. Fishing on Loch Shin is important to the estate, and efforts are being made
NW Sutherland Deer Management Group

Background Information

to develop the deer stalking interest. A number of woodland plantings have been created in recent years, and there has also been extensive sanitation felling of mature Lodgepole pole on the estate to control red band needle blight. There are also some grouse on the property.
Website: http://shinnesslodge.co.uk/estate_activities.html

Strathmore

Strathmore is a fairly traditional stalking estate, on which fishing is also important. The property carries approx 100 sheep, mostly now kept on the in-bye ground. There is also a small herd of 20-25 breeding cows. A number of woodland schemes have been undertaken over the last 25 years. Habitat monitoring is undertaken within the extensive SSSI areas on the property. Deer are a key management consideration on the estate, although sporting targets are now increasingly difficult to attain. Website: http://www.gowsport.co.uk/

Sutherland Estates

Deer management on Tongue Estate is not a priority consideration, expectations are modest, and stalking rights are managed via the Borgie Lodge Hotel. They have a sporting requirement of 15-20 stags and 10-20 hinds, but these are typically sourced over a number of local estates, not just on Tongue. The estate is entirely crofted, with separate grazing committees at Tongue, Skerray and Borgie. In contrast to some other areas, sheep numbers are now starting to increase a bit again, as are cattle. Deer on lower ground are starting to become an issue in and around Tongue, less so at Skerray. Tongue Estate have a management agreement with SNH to keep deer numbers below 4 per 100 hectares. In general, there are relatively few sheep now grazing on the hill areas. Part of the ground is designated as the West Borgie SSSI, and there is a significant amount of woodland on the property.
Website: http://www.borgielodgehotel.com/

West Shinness

West Shinness lies alongside Loch Shin. The loch was increased in size and depth in 1957/8, flooding the lower ground at West Shinness and fundamentally affecting how the property could be managed. Although the property is crofted, there have been no sheep grazing over much of the area for many years, and the vegetation is mostly fairly rank, with ungrazed grasses and bog myrtle dominating large tracts of the estate. Relatively few red deer use the area, but there is an important population of Sika deer on the estate, and this forms the basis of their sporting management with 8–10 animals being culled on an annual basis.

Wildland Limited (Ben Loyal, Hope & Kinloch Estates)

Wildland Limited have been recent purchasers of three neighbouring estates within the DMG: Ben Loyal Estate, Hope & Melness Estate and Kinloch Estate, each of which retain their own keepering/ stalking capacity. A significant deer reduction is in the process of being implemented to comply with our statutory requirements and to restore designated habitats within estate’s boundaries. Wildland Limited wish to allow the land, after many years of overgrazing to move closer to its (“Future Natural”) ecological potential. Our 200 year vision can simply be summed up by a healthy environment, with happy people and productive deer. In our opinion, productive deer require the correct habitat and for deer this includes native woodland, one of our main objectives is to regenerate the mostly devoid native woodland on our properties. Ben Loyal in particular is a very fertile mountain, and retained a very high population of hinds in the recent past.
There are in-hand farming operations on Hope & Melness, and at Ribigill Farm on Ben Loyal estate, but neither Ben Loyal nor Kinloch Estate have sheep on the open hill. Fishing is important to all three properties.

It is planned that by the end of the 2014-15 that the reduction cull will be complete, and a maintenance cull will then be implemented to retain a deer population of a maximum of 5 per 100 ha. Wildland Ltd wish to pursue a sporting requirement of approx 86 stags & 98 hinds. The level of herbivore impacts will be monitored over the next few years on the available habitat, and any future management decisions will be based on robust, factual information relating to designated features and native woodland regeneration. Wildland Ltd have a sporting lease over the Melness Crofters estate, and their staff also contribute to deer management on Eriboll and Tongue Estate.

Websites:
http://www.sportinglets.co.uk/locations/kinloch/
http://www.sportinglets.co.uk/locations/benloyal/
http://www.sportinglets.co.uk/locations/hope/
3b. Reporting Units  *(For most properties, these refer to entire estate as before)*  
Extensive discussions during the production of this DMP have confirmed that almost all members believe that the Group is much too large to consider realistic population modeling at a whole-group scale. For this reason, the Group area has been split down into three sub-populations. The fit is not an exact one, but there is widespread consensus for the principle of a Northwest, Northeast and South sub-population.

This approach requires a small number of properties to report their cull and count data to the group on different parts of their unit. In addition to this, note was taken where members indicated that they would like to see a better breakdown of reporting information on neighbouring ground. In such cases, simple divisions in to reporting units are suggested. Most properties are expected to report at the property level as before.

The suggested sub-divisions within the Group are:

1. To accommodate the sub-populations model, it is necessary to ask Strathmore Estate to report in three different areas: Strathmore West, Strathmore East and Strathmore South.
2. Reay Forest estate will report on their existing beat basis.
3. Balnakeil is comprised of two distinct units, one on high ground, and one on lower ground. These are referred to as Balnakeil North and Balnakeil South.
4. The main unit at Rhigolter Farms is split by the road, with two sub-units referred to as Rhigolter and Rhigolter West (Carbreck). In addition, Rhigolter Farms retain a small area of land on the Cape Wrath side of the Kyle of Durness. This is referred to as Diall.
5. The inbye area at Keodale is separate from the main hill property, and is deer fenced. This area will be referred to as Keodale In-bye.
6. Rhiconich is split into two units by the Rhiconich river. This division then coincides with different grazing committee areas. The two areas are referred to as Rhiconich West and Rhiconich East.
7. Fiag will report separately on their open hill ground and woodland area.
8. Syre and North Loch Naver will be reported separately. The owner of the Syre plantation does not wish to report to the Group.
9. Achnabourin Estate will report north and south of the Bettyhill-Tongue road, with these two areas referred to as North Achnabourin and South Achnabourin.
10. Sutherland Estates will also report north and south of the Bettyhill to Tongue road. These areas will be referred to as Tongue Estate North and Tongue Estate South.
11. Wildland Ltd will report separately on Kinloch and Loyal Estates. In addition, it is proposed that they also report separately on Hope and Melness, with the road taken as the division.
12. Forest Enterprise will report separately on their forested ground and open ground. These units will be referred to as FE Borgie and FE Borgie Open Ground.

The woodland area at Overscaig has a very complex ownership structure, each with their own deer management provision. It is suggested that Overscaig is reported as one overall unit, with information collated across the whole.

Finally, in addition to Syre plantation, there are three small woodland properties in the South Group who either do not wish to contribute to the Group, or who have not made contact. Provisional reporting unit numbers have been allocated to them for future use if
In this plan, all count and cull information will be reported at the Deer Management Unit level. (Tables 2-4 & [3. NWS Reporting Units Map.])

**Table 2: North West Sub-area Deer Management Units (area figures are approximate)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Unit</th>
<th>Extent (ha)</th>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Deer Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. MOD Cape Wrath</td>
<td>6024</td>
<td>Range Management</td>
<td>MOD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Diall</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>Deer</td>
<td>Rhigolter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Keodale</td>
<td>10,849</td>
<td>Sheep/ deer</td>
<td>Gualin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sandwood</td>
<td>4673</td>
<td>Range Management</td>
<td>JMT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Kinlochbervie</td>
<td>2980</td>
<td>Crofted</td>
<td>Cathal Morrison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Kinsaile</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>David Forbes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Rhiconich West</td>
<td>2214</td>
<td>Mixed sporting/ sheep</td>
<td>Rhiconich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Rhiconich East</td>
<td>2259</td>
<td>Mixed sporting/ sheep</td>
<td>Rhiconich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Gualin</td>
<td>2532</td>
<td>Fishing/ deer</td>
<td>Gualin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Rhigolter</td>
<td>2630</td>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>Rhigolter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Rhigolter West</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>Rhigolter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Balnakeil South</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>Balnakeil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Keodale In- bye</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>Gualin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Balnakeil North</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>Balnakeil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Durness</td>
<td>4244</td>
<td>Deer/ crofted</td>
<td>Rispond/ Polla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Rispond</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>Deer/ crofted</td>
<td>Rispond/ Polla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Polla</td>
<td>2703</td>
<td>Deer/ fishing</td>
<td>Rispond/ Polla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Eriboll</td>
<td>7070</td>
<td>Deer/ sheep</td>
<td>Eriboll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Reay- Arkle</td>
<td>7054</td>
<td>Deer</td>
<td>Reay Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Reay- Lone</td>
<td>4434</td>
<td>Deer</td>
<td>Reay Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Reay- Gobernuisgach</td>
<td>5164</td>
<td>Deer</td>
<td>Reay Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Reay- Aultanyrie</td>
<td>4006</td>
<td>Deer</td>
<td>Reay Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Strathmore West</td>
<td>2647</td>
<td>Deer</td>
<td>Strathmore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total:** 74,669 ha
### Table 3: North East Sub-area Deer Management Units (area figures are approximate)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Unit</th>
<th>Extent (ha)</th>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Deer Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24. Strathmore- East</td>
<td>4185</td>
<td>Mixed sporting/ farm</td>
<td>Strathmore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Kinloch</td>
<td>7682</td>
<td>Range mgt/ sporting</td>
<td>Wildland Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Hope</td>
<td>3176</td>
<td>Range mgt/ sporting</td>
<td>Wildland Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Melness</td>
<td>5406</td>
<td>Range mgt/ sporting</td>
<td>Wildland Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Melness Crofters Estate</td>
<td>5068</td>
<td>Crofting/ deer</td>
<td>Wildland Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Loyal</td>
<td>9970</td>
<td>Range mgt/ sporting</td>
<td>Wildland Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Tongue Estate South</td>
<td>4798</td>
<td>Crofting/ deer</td>
<td>Borgie Lodge Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Tongue Estate North</td>
<td>3607</td>
<td>Crofting/ deer</td>
<td>Borgie Lodge Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. FE Borgie</td>
<td>1611</td>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>FE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. FE Borgie Open Ground</td>
<td>1556</td>
<td>Range mgt</td>
<td>FE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Achnabourin South</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Mixed sporting/ crofted</td>
<td>Achnabourin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Achnabourin North</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>Mixed sporting/ crofted</td>
<td>Achnabourin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Poole</td>
<td>4982</td>
<td>Deer/ sheep</td>
<td>Natalie Blyth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Syre Plantation*</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>Syre/N L’Naver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Syre</td>
<td>2235</td>
<td>Mixed sporting/ sheep</td>
<td>Syre/N L’Naver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. North Lochnaver</td>
<td>4708</td>
<td>Mixed sporting/ sheep</td>
<td>Syre/N L’Naver</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total: 60,417 ha**

*Syre Plantation is not currently a reporting member of the Group*
Table 4: South Sub-area Deer Management Units (area figures are approximate)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Unit</th>
<th>Extent (ha)</th>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Deer Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40. Strathmore South</td>
<td>1607</td>
<td>Deer</td>
<td>Strathmore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Altnaharra</td>
<td>14,600</td>
<td>Deer/ fishing/For</td>
<td>Altnaharra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. Merkland</td>
<td>5115</td>
<td>Deer</td>
<td>Merkland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. Fiag Open Ground</td>
<td>1045</td>
<td>Deer/ Fishing</td>
<td>Fiag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Fiag Plantation</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>Fiag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Overscaig</td>
<td>2416</td>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>Fountain/ Misc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. West Shinness</td>
<td>1583</td>
<td>Mixed sporting/ sheep</td>
<td>West Shinness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. Shinness</td>
<td>6253</td>
<td>Mixed sporting/ sheep</td>
<td>Shinness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. Strath Tirry</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>n/k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. Rhian Bridge</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>n/k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. Name n/k</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>n/k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Dalchork Plantation*</td>
<td>(7574)</td>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>FE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. FE Open Ground*</td>
<td>(2816)</td>
<td>Range Mgt</td>
<td>FE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 32,473 ha

*These two FE areas are part of the East Sutherland Deer management Group. However, it is recommended that deer cull information from these two units is reported to the NW Sutherland DMG as this area has a relatively high deer cull, and it is likely to affect the deer population that might otherwise exist on open ground in the South Group. Deer numbers culled in this area will not be taken into consideration when calculating member subscriptions.

4. Deer information required & culling operations
The data on deer counts and culls supplied by Members to NWSDMG has always been based on their overall land holdings. Members agree, however, that for the purposes of implementing this Plan they will report counts and culls and set cull targets at the Management Unit scale (see above). This will allow a better analysis of the information provided in and around those areas of differing management objectives.

Members will agree on the deer management records that will be kept by all Members for sharing with the Group, including count and cull data, and the format in which these sets of data will be presented. The agreed formats are included in Appendix 4, NWS Deer Cull Information.

Recommended cull record sheets are appended to this document.

All NWSDMG members agree to make sufficient resources available to carry out the culling programme outlined in this plan.

All culling operations will be conducted in a low-key manner, and priority always given to spreading activity throughout the normal seasons using existing resources.
5. THE DESIGNATED SITES IN THE NW SUTHERLAND DMG AREA

Within the DMG area there are five different types of designation:

* **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**
* **Special Area of Conservation (SAC)**
* **Special Protection Area (SPA)**
* **National Scenic Area (NSA)**
* **Ramsar Site**

In addition, 100,686 ha or 59% of the DMG area has recently been classified as “Wild Land Areas”, along with significant areas in adjacent deer management groups. While it is not yet clear how such a classification will work in practice, it may well have important implications for fencing or woodland creation schemes, and therefore have a bearing on deer management in future.

There are no National Nature Reserves or National Parks within the area.

**Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) represent the best of Scotland’s natural heritage. They are ‘special’ for their plants, animals or habitats, their rocks or landforms, or a combination of such natural features. Together, they form a network of the best examples of natural features throughout Scotland, and support a wider network across Great Britain and the European Union.

Scottish Natural Heritage chooses sites after detailed survey and evaluation against published scientific criteria. SSSIs can include freshwater, and sea water down to the mean low water mark of spring tides, as well as land. At 31 March 2008, there were 1,456 SSSI’s, covering a total area of 1,036,000 hectares or 12.9% of Scotland.

SNH designates SSSIs to protect the best of our natural heritage by making sure that decision-makers, managers of land and their advisors, as well as the planning authorities and other public bodies, are aware of them when considering changes in land-use or other activities which might affect them.

The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 provides the legislative framework around which all SSSI sites are administered.

**Special Area of Conservation (SAC)**
Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are areas designated under the European Directive commonly known as the ‘Habitats’ Directive. Together with Special Protection Areas, which are designated under the Wild Birds Directive for wild birds and their habitats, SACs form the Natura 2000 network of sites. Most SACs on land or freshwater in Scotland are also underpinned by notification as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). The additional SAC designation is recognition that some or all of the wildlife and habitats are particularly valued in a European context.

The SSSI & SAC designations can be located on 7. NWS SSSI & SAC Designations Map.

**Special Protection Area (SPA)**
A Special Protection Area (SPA) is an area of land, water or sea which has been identified as being of international importance for the breeding, feeding, wintering or the migration of rare and vulnerable species of birds found within the European Union. Together with SACs, Special Protection Areas are designated under the
European Wild Birds Directive which forms the NATURA 2000 network of sites. A number of SPAs include areas notified as SSSIs and the additional SPA designation affords these areas enhanced protection.

**Ramsar Site**

Ramsar is the name of a town in Iran where the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance was adopted in 1971. The UK Government signed up to the Convention in 1976.

The mission of the Convention is "the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international co-operation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world".

Currently 164 countries have signed up as Contracting Parties to the Convention with 2083 wetland sites designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.

There are currently 51 Ramsar sites designated as internationally important wetlands in Scotland, covering a total area of about 313,000 hectares. All Ramsar sites in Scotland are also either Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), and many are also SSSIs, although the boundaries of the different designations are not always exactly the same. It is not surprising that internationally important wetlands are also of European interest for a wide variety of waterbirds, bogs, lochs, coastal wetlands and other water-dependent habitats and species. Although there is no specific legal framework that safeguards Scottish Ramsar sites, they benefit from the measures required to protect and enhance the Natura sites and SSSIs which overlap them. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) also includes Ramsar sites in its site condition monitoring programme.

SPA and Ramsar sites can be located on [8. NWS SPA & Ramsar sites Map](#).

**National Scenic Area**

National Scenic Areas are Scotland’s only national landscape designation. They are those areas of land considered of national significance on the basis of their outstanding scenic interest which must be conserved as part of the country’s natural heritage. They have been selected for their characteristic features of scenery comprising a mixture of richly diverse landscapes including prominent landforms, coastline, sea and freshwater lochs, rivers, woodlands and moorlands.

There are currently 40 NSA’s in Scotland, covering a total land area of 1,020,500 ha and a marine area of 357,900 ha.

The area covered by scenic areas and the new wild land classification can be seen on [9. NWS Landscape Interest Map](#).
Within the North West Sutherland Deer Management Group there are:

- Twenty-six Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) totalling 71,582 ha or 42% of DMP area. Out of these SSSIs, six are currently assessed as being in broadly unfavourable condition, seven are in recovering condition and thirteen are in favourable condition. In terms of broad area, 17,863 ha or 25% of the total SSSI area is in Favourable condition, 23,369 ha or 33% is in Recovering Condition and 30,463 ha or 42% is in Unfavourable condition. It is anticipated that a considerable proportion of this latter area will move to Recovering condition within the next year or so and on the remainder, the “Unfavourable” assessment often relates to only part of the overall site or a single designated feature. The majority of the SSSIs in unfavourable and recovering condition are notified for the following features: Birch Woodland, Blanket Bog, Breeding Bird Assemblage and Upland assemblage, including wet and dry heaths as well as montane communities. The current condition of designated sites is summarized on the NWS SSSI Site Condition Monitoring Map.

In terms of designated features, there are 144 SSSI, SAC and SPA designated features within the DMG area. Of these, seventy eight (54%) relate to geology or bird populations and are not directly related to deer management in that factors other than habitat management may be affecting their overall status. Twenty seven (19%) relate mainly to sheep grazing. Of these, nineteen (70%) are in favourable or recovering condition, with the remainder being located mainly at Durness. Of the thirty nine features potentially relating to deer (27% of total), seventeen are in favourable condition, and eight are in recovering condition. Fourteen features relating to deer (36%) are in unfavourable condition. Of these, the blanket bog on West Strathnaver has been degraded badly by wildfires and drainage in the past and is likely to only recover very slowly. The blanket bog at A'Mhoine is mostly under assured management, but requires agreement with crofters over a small area to bring the whole in to recovering condition. The remaining twelve features are clustered on Foinaven, Eriboll and Ben Hope. On all these sites, the open ground features are all now under management that should allow progression to recovering status in the near future. That leaves three woodland sites, on which two of the three owners are currently engaged in discussions in relation to future management.

- Overlapping with the SSSIs are:
  - Six Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) totalling 17,844 ha plus one SAC covering large areas of peatland in Caithness and Sutherland totalling 143,538 ha. In total, there are 58,417 ha of land designated as SAC within the DMG, or 34% of the total. In addition, 71 km of watercourses are also designated as SAC.
  - One Special Protection Area (SPA) extending to 20,182 ha and one SPA covering large areas of peatland in Caithness and Sutherland totalling 145,517 ha. In total, 64,308 ha is classified as SPA within the DMG, or 38% of the total.
  - One Ramsar Site covering large areas of peatland in Caithness and Sutherland totalling 143,502 ha, of which, 40,565 ha is situated within this DMG, covering 24% of the area.
  - Two National Scenic Areas totalling 39,000ha.

A full account of all these sites, their current status and what properties are involved is given in Appendix 3, NWS Designated Sites. In addition, Appendix 6, Monitoring of Designated Features, details the likely contribution of deer to these sites.
Part Two - OVERALL AIMS & OBJECTIVES

6. Long Term Vision
Members generally support the long term vision for deer populations and their management as laid out in Scotland’s Wild Deer – A National Approach. Members also fully support the Code of Practice on Deer Management, and all work is carried out in accordance with Best Practice Guides, which continue to evolve.

- Deer populations will be managed sustainably so that their management is fully integrated with all local land uses and land use objectives.
- Such management will ensure high standards of deer welfare and public safety, and play a constructive role in the long term stewardship of local habitats.
- Local deer management will continue to deliver and further develop its positive contributions to the rural economy. Deer management and wildlife management more generally within the Group will be seen as an attractive and worthwhile occupation associated with high standards of skills and employment practice.

7. Strategic Objectives
The main objectives for the Group’s deer management during the period of this Plan, are as follows, in all cases adhering to Best Practice Guidelines:-

(i) To safeguard and promote deer welfare within the NWSDMG area.

(ii) To achieve an appropriate balance between deer and their habitat, and between deer and other land uses, to minimize unacceptable damage to agricultural, forestry or sporting interests, and to maintain and improve the condition of the natural heritage.

(iii) Within the constraint of (ii) and the necessary management culls associated with this, to fulfil the annual sporting and venison production objectives of individual Members. During this plan this will amount to some 487 stags and approx 1130 animals overall annually.

(iv) To maintain a confined but viable population of sika deer in the woodlands in the south of the Group.

(v) To market such activity and produce to best advantage.

(vi) Without prejudice to (ii), to roughly maintain the overall size of the herd over the period of this plan, 2015-20, to bring local numbers in to line with actual sporting and other aspirations in that area, and to facilitate an overall grazing regime that will gradually improve the overall condition of designated sites. It is anticipated that the target summer population will then be some 3148 stags, 3716 hinds and 1337 calves, by 2019, and 3550 stags, 3550 hinds and 1345 calves by 2025, and numbers will be maintained at this level, subject to ongoing reviews of group objectives and regular habitat condition monitoring. The difference in the two population totals is to try and achieve a 1:1 ration of stags: hinds by the end of the ten year period, allowing numbers to gradually converge over the ten years.

(vii) To ensure such resources, training and monitoring capacity that is required are made available to achieve the above objectives.
NW Sutherland Deer Management Group

(viii) To establish a thorough and robust set of working arrangements whereby access provision can be managed within the group area, taking account of current guidelines and industry initiatives.

(ix) To facilitate the implementation of any other deer-related management agreements within the group area, and to provide a mechanism for dealing with any disputes.

(x) Where appropriate, to provide site specific management advice or information.

(xi) To ensure full participation from throughout the area in the deer management group.

(xii) To maintain and improve local employment, be that specifically in deer management, or wildlife management and agricultural activity more generally within the area.

(xiii) To ensure that an effective system of communication is in place for the internal purpose of members, for the wider community of the area and for external agencies and other interested parties. The Group will seek to be pro-active in all their communications.
Part Three  -  MANAGEMENT POLICIES & INFORMATION

8. Red Deer

Red Deer Population

In comparison with cull data, documented in the next section, count data across the Group is patchy at best, despite a commitment by key Group members to try and count each and every spring. This has tended to achieve incomplete or varying coverage, making comparisons between years difficult. The data which does exist is summarized below.

The terrain that exists within parts of the Group area does make counting extremely difficult, with waves of rocky knolls interspersed with extensive flat areas of peat, making it difficult to get an elevated viewing point across large areas at a time. The practicalities of counting are much more difficult here than in many deer management group areas in Scotland.

Historical

Although there are limitations to comparing count data between two years, an opportunity was taken to compare the helicopter count of 2012 with a foot count from nearly 25 years previously in 1988, to try and get a feel for the broad changes that might have occurred with deer populations over that period. In addition to variations that might arise because of count methodology, we have no information on the thoroughness of counting that might have been implemented in the more peripheral areas of the Group in 1988. Nonetheless, the figures provide some interesting information.

The data is broken down into the North West, North East and South sub-population areas.

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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>1546</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>545</td>
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<td>2671</td>
<td>1495</td>
<td>-1176</td>
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<td>Rhiconich</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>118</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strathmore-W</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>-204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>888</strong></td>
<td><strong>1031</strong></td>
<td><strong>1911</strong></td>
<td><strong>1543</strong></td>
<td><strong>697</strong></td>
<td><strong>555</strong></td>
<td><strong>3496</strong></td>
<td><strong>3129</strong></td>
<td><strong>-367</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1988, there were relatively few deer around the periphery of the NW area. While it is possible that a lesser counting effort is responsible for this, the likelihood is that this is indeed correct, and it matches up with local accounts of how deer numbers have changed.
over that period of time. Most properties have more deer in 2012 than they did in 1988. The property that stands out in this regard is Cape Wrath, seemingly with very few in 1988, and over 400 in 2012.

Sheep have been removed from that area in the timescale concerned.

The interesting feature however is that the overall deer population in the NW area appears to have decreased over the period, primarily due to the decrease of almost 1200 deer on Reay Forest. This would have been regarded as the core deer forest area within the group in 1988, and is certainly the core area in the NW area today. Nos of stags are very similar, with the reduction being almost entirely hinds and calves.

It appears therefore that over the period, the deer range has expanded over a wider area so that there are now resident populations throughout, but that there has been a significant decrease in densities at the heart of the sub-population area. The overall population has not changed significantly over the period, being more spread out over a larger area. This represents quite a fundamental change over the period, but one which probably has more positives that negatives associated with it in terms of deer usage of the available habitat.

There has been an increase in stag numbers over the period, with a larger decrease in hind numbers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stags</td>
<td>Stags</td>
<td>Hinds</td>
<td>Hinds</td>
<td>Calves</td>
<td>Calves</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achnabourin</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>47</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>FCS Borgie</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope &amp; Melness</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>193</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinloch</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>-285</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyal</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>1082</td>
<td>1239</td>
<td>157</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melness Crofters</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>334</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Lochnaver</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poole &amp; Syre</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>-142</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strathmore- E</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>171</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutherland Estates</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>153</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>564</strong></td>
<td><strong>859</strong></td>
<td><strong>1599</strong></td>
<td><strong>1939</strong></td>
<td><strong>627</strong></td>
<td><strong>603</strong></td>
<td><strong>2790</strong></td>
<td><strong>3401</strong></td>
<td><strong>611</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the NE sub-area, there has been a modest increase of 600 animals over the period, with this increase shared out across a number of properties. Two properties, Kinloch and Poole/Syre, have had a significant decrease over the period. Ben Loyal has always carried by far the greatest number of deer in the area, with the populations in 1988 & 2012 being very similar.

There have been increases in both stag and hind numbers over the period.
For the south area, the 2008 count data has been used, which is believed to be more representative of the real position in 2012. There has been an increase in deer numbers over the period, accounted for almost entirely by the increase on Altnaharra, with the increase on Shinness being matched by a similar decrease on Merkland. There has been a very significant increase in stag numbers, but how accurate the 1988 figure is cannot be known. There is no reason to think that the increase constitutes any kind of problem.

The ratio of calves to hinds is interesting when compared across the 3 X areas.

In the NW area, the proportion of calves is 0.36 in both years, despite the lesser number of hinds today, and even within Reay Forest where hind numbers have more than halved, the ratio remained exactly the same.

In the NE area, the ratio has fallen from 0.39 to 0.31 over the period, a significant change, but it has also fallen from 0.36 to 0.30 in the south group. The former had an increase in hind numbers, the latter had a decrease. There would appear to be different things going on in different areas. Of course, these figures just represent the two years concerned, and it cannot be taken that they constitute a trend.

**Current Count Data**

Most members of the Group undertake a foot count in most years, but in the last 5-6 years or so, efforts have been fairly varied. Presented here are the helicopter deer counts from 2008 & 2012, and a foot count from 2013. Due to weather conditions, the 2012 count took place over 6 weeks, and a number of Group members, especially in the south, regard the result as being flawed. For the purposes of modeling later in this document, the 2012 data is used for the NE and NW sub-populations, with the 2008 data being taken as a better estimate of numbers in the south in 2012.

The uncertainty surrounding the accuracy of these counts highlights the need to achieve a good helicopter in the next few years to set an accurate baseline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Stags</th>
<th>Hinds</th>
<th>Calves</th>
<th>Total Red Deer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2301</td>
<td>3801</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>7035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012*</td>
<td>2411</td>
<td>3963</td>
<td>1322</td>
<td>7696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008*</td>
<td>2616</td>
<td>6142**</td>
<td>8758</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* *Helicopter count.*

** *Unclassified count includes hinds, calves plus % of young stags.*

Leaving out the number of calves, which will vary according to the year, there is actually a
fairly consistent count between the foot count in 2013 and the helicopter count in 2012.

Notwithstanding the doubts about the 2012 data, NWS DMG do have a better source of recent count data than many other groups across the country. Wildland Ltd and Reay Forest have got separate helicopter count data for 2013 covering their own ground, and these more or less tie in with the 2012 helicopter count for the group as a whole, taking in to account culls since then.

The following table gives a breakdown of deer populations in the North West area in 2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North West Count 2012</th>
<th>Stags</th>
<th>Hinds</th>
<th>Calves</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Density</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balnakeil</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1255</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Wrath</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>6024</td>
<td>6.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durness</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4244</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erriboll</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>7070</td>
<td>5.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gualin</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2532</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keodale</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10849</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinlochbervie</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2980</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinsaile</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polla</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2703</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reay</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>20658</td>
<td>7.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhiconich</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4473</td>
<td>2.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rispond</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandwood</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4673</td>
<td>2.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strathmore-W</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2647</td>
<td>5.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhigolter</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3305</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1031</td>
<td>1543</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>74669</td>
<td>4.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recruitment Rate: 0.36

The overall deer density of 4.19 per 100 hectares is likely to be sympathetic to most habitat types except for native woodland, although there is some variation in densities within the area, with Erriboll, Reay Forest and Strathmore being greater than 5 deer per sq km.

This table shows the distribution of deer densities in the North East part of the Group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North East Count 2012</th>
<th>Stags</th>
<th>Hinds</th>
<th>Calves</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Density</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achnabourin</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2532</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCS Borgie</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3167</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope &amp; Mleness</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>8582</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinloch</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>7682</td>
<td>5.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyal</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>9970</td>
<td>12.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melness Crofters</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5068</td>
<td>6.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Lochnaver</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4708</td>
<td>5.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poole</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4982</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strathmore- E</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4185</td>
<td>6.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutherland Estates</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8405</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syre</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2235</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recruitment Rate: 0.31
The density here is slightly higher at 5.53 animals per 100 hectares, but the figure is skewed by the high densities on Ben Loyal. These have been reduced fairly significantly since 2012. Otherwise, densities are relatively low over most of the area.

The recruitment rate in the North East is significantly lower than the North West.

The following table shows the distribution of deer in the South group in 2008, taken as a better reflection of 2012 numbers in that area. NB The Unclassified deer data has been attributed to hinds, calves and stags, and therefore has been manipulated slightly and should be viewed with caution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>South Count 2008</th>
<th>Stags</th>
<th>Hinds</th>
<th>Calves</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Density</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Altnaharra</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>13500</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiag</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1608</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merkland</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>5115</td>
<td>7.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinness</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>6253</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strathmore- S</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1607</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Shinness</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1583</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>794</strong></td>
<td><strong>506</strong></td>
<td><strong>151</strong></td>
<td><strong>1451</strong></td>
<td><strong>29666</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.89</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recruitment rate: **0.30**

The overall density of 4.89 deer per 100 hectares is likely to be sympathetic with a range of habitats, and all the designated features in the south group are in favourable condition. The recruitment rate of 0.30 is the lowest of the three areas, probably a reflection of the broad swathes of relatively infertile bog habitats to be found in that area of the group.

The table below is a summary of the figures above for 2012:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Area</th>
<th>Stags</th>
<th>Hinds</th>
<th>Calves</th>
<th>Total Deer</th>
<th>Area (ha)</th>
<th>Deer per 100 ha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>1031</td>
<td>1543</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>3129</td>
<td>74,610</td>
<td><strong>4.19</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>859</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>3401</td>
<td>60,417</td>
<td><strong>5.63</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>1451</td>
<td>28,925</td>
<td><strong>5.02</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td><strong>2684</strong></td>
<td><strong>3988</strong></td>
<td><strong>1309</strong></td>
<td><strong>7981</strong></td>
<td><strong>163,952</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.86</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These figures relate to the open range part of the Group, and do not include the forested areas*

The average deer density of 4.86 per 100 hectares is likely to be sympathetic to the majority of habitat types across the DMG area, with the probable exception of native woodlands. These will be discussed later.
Red Deer Cull Data

**Historical**
The NWSDMG have good cull data from 1987 onwards, and it is considered that 98% of all cull return information has been gathered in that period (Heather Gow, pers comm).

The graph below is a summary of stag, hind and calf cull data over that period for the Group as a whole.

It should be noted at the outset that cull data cannot be used as a proxy for population size or growth, and the two are not necessarily related in this case. However, there are trends here that are interesting.

Firstly, the stag cull has gradually increased over the period, from just under 300 to just under 600. This suggests that the value placed on the stag cull has increased over the period, and it certainly appears from other data that the sporting stag requirement is much larger now than it was 25 years ago. The importance of deer stalking appears to have increased over the period concerned, partly as sheep stocks have declined.

Secondly, while the hind cull has always been higher than the stag cull, it has exceeded the stag cull by 100-150 animals in the last 10 years or so, but by a much larger amount before that. There is a suggestion that the Ben Loyal hind cull dropped during the last 10 years and this allowed numbers to build up, illustrating that hind culls do not equate with population, and that management decisions on one large property can skew the statistics for the Group as a whole. The large peak for 2014 shows the increased hind cull for Ben Loyal/ Kinloch/ Hope & Melness Estates.
**Current Culls**
The table below is a summary of the red deer cull within the area for 2013-14:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Stags</th>
<th>Hinds</th>
<th>Calves</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>766</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>1300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>1124</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>2140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following table outlines the NWS DMG red deer cull since the 2007-8 season.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Stags</th>
<th>Hinds</th>
<th>Calves</th>
<th>Total Deer Cull</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>549 (65)</td>
<td>1124 (36)</td>
<td>467 (25)</td>
<td>2140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>544 (21)</td>
<td>627 (16)</td>
<td>290 (10)</td>
<td>1461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>1366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>1413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>1419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-9</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>639</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>1429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-8</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>1407</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures in brackets indicate the nos of red deer culled in the FE Dalchork plantation, and are not included in the overall Total figure.*

Except for 2013-14 when changes to management objectives have resulted in a reduction cull across a number of estates, the red deer cull in the six years before has been remarkably consistent, certainly in terms of overall deer culled. The two very harsh winters of 2010 & 11 appear to have had very little effect on this. In each of these years, there are a number of the smaller properties who have sometimes not reported, but these would not be sufficient to change the broad pattern outlined above.

**Red Deer Management Issues**

The following factors have been identified as issues relating to red deer management within the group area, some of which relate to running of the deer management group:

*Communications*
NWS is a large and fragmented group. Good communications are difficult to achieve. Many people are not aware who the main contacts are on neighbouring ground, or what their priorities are.
Related to this, it is difficult to find sufficient personnel to make the Group work properly. There is a need to attract additional people to help the Group operate effectively across the area.

*Changes in deer distribution*
A gradual drift/ expansion of resident hind populations towards the coast and the periphery of the Group, brought about by decreasing sheep numbers and increasing age profile and declining activity of the crofting population. This is leading to deer now becoming resident nearer centres of population/ roads/ in bye ground. There are positives with this as well, but increased problems on inbye grazing and with cars on roads are a negative consequence of this.
Wildland Proposals
The Wildland proposals to reduce deer population density to 5 deer per sq km have
caused considerable debate within the area, although such densities are in keeping with
the needs of designated sites, and are broadly in line what many adjacent properties are
carrying anyway.

Designated Sites
The extent of designated sites within the area, although many are in Favourable or
Recovering condition. In terms of public interest, they are a very significant
consideration within the DMG area.

Public Safety
Public safety concerns due to unregulated stalking/poaching. There appear to be a
number of particularly aggressive individuals operating within the area, who have given
rise to concerns for public safety, as well as for their deer culling activities.

Additional issues include:

Larder provision
Better larder provision in some areas would benefit group members. Being able to use
such facilities for hanging and butchering lambs would also be very welcome within the
area, although legislation would likely prevent this at the moment.

Advertising of sporting opportunities
Better advertising of sporting opportunities within the area would allow hotels and other
businesses access to current opportunities within estates, and allow them to source
activities for guests at short notice.

Integration with Grazing Committees
Better access to deer population data by grazing committees, to inform SRDP
applications. Many grazing committees within the area have such schemes in place,
often involving a lot of money, but there is little access to deer information on the same
land. Better integration of information sharing is likely to benefit both parties, and lead
to better lines of communication across the area.

Woodland extension
In recent years, there have been a series of new woodlands planted within the area, many
of which have been planted on the better hill ground and in-bye land, which is a scarce
resource within the DMG area as a whole. A number of people have questioned whether
it is wise to do this. Also relating to woodland, a high proportion of conifer woods have
been felled in recent years, primarily to reduce the incidence of red band needle blight
but also because many of these woods are now at an age where they should be felled.
These woods have had to be fenced for restocking, reducing deer shelter. It is likely that
more woods will be felled in the next five year period, further reducing the very limited
deer shelter that is available in some areas. This may well have implications for the red
deer herd in local areas.

Landscape scale fires
Such fires have been widespread in the area in the last 20 years, often covering hundreds
of not thousands of hectares. It often takes many years, if not decades, for vegetation to
recover, and this is a particular problem on designated sites, and puts additional pressure
on estates to keep deer densities lower than what a more resilient moorland habitat would probably otherwise support.

*Lack of Police cover within the area*
Lack of policing/ enforcement capability within the area undermines the ability of estates to counter-act a number of the above mentioned issues.

*Potential spread of sika deer*
While sika are valued within the southern part of the group, there is a sufficient core population there to export individuals to the north and west. Efforts to control their spread have generally been effective to date, but increased woodland connectivity might well increase their ability to spread, increasing the resources required to counter-act this in future. (See account of sika below)

**Other Deer Species**

*Sika Deer*
Sika deer are well established in the South area of NWS DMG, and a number of properties regard them as a valuable sporting/ venison resource (Shinness, West Shinness, Overscaig, Fiag). All of these areas have significant areas of woodland, and the relative lack of red deer in the very southern part of the group makes these sika deer proportionately more important, and there is no suggestion that they should be removed. The deer management group will therefore continue to collate all important information in relation to sika deer, and support those group members who use sika deer as a valued resource.

The following table gives a summary of the nos of sika deer culled since 2007-8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Stags</th>
<th>Hinds</th>
<th>Calves</th>
<th>Total Deer Cull</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>38 (79)</td>
<td>45 (59)</td>
<td>23 (33)</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>44 (78)</td>
<td>42 (75)</td>
<td>30 (47)</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-8</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures in brackets indicate the numbers of sika deer culled in the FE Dalchork plantation.*

The numbers culled are relatively high, and increasing, and this suggests a fairly substantial and viable population has become established.

The FE Dalchork culls show that a significant population is also present within the woodland area there.

While in many DMG areas the policy is to shoot out sika deer where possible, it is fairly clear that within the South group in NWS DMG at least, the current population will be retained and managed to keep them within acceptable numbers while delivering sporting and venison requirements. There is no suggestion that the level of damage due to sika deer is a significant problem, although the age structure within the Dalchork plantation is such that ongoing heavy culling of this species will be required.

Sika stags do spread, both to the west towards Laxford Bridge, and to the north towards Borgie. All the estates in these areas have declared their intention to cull out all sika deer
where possible. In recent years, Merkland and Reay Forest have accounted for 3-5 sika stags each year between them, and a single sika stag has managed to get all the way to Sandwood in 2007-8. At Ben Loyal, 2-3 stags are accounted for annually in conifer plantation there, and a single sika hind has been culled in two of the last six years. A small number of sika stags have also been able to reach FE Borgie, with four being culled there in each of the past two seasons. A sika hind was also culled there in 2011-12. It would appear that the sika cull is increasing in recent years, that travelling stags to the west are getting culled, but that they may be starting to become resident further to the north, despite efforts to prevent this. This may become more of an issue if stronger habitat continuity in native woodlands is achieved, and will certainly be a longer term policy issue for the group. It does not appear to be a significant issue at the moment.

Some of the sika increase in the past two years can be attributed to an additional property submitting statutory returns.

Roe Deer Population

Roe deer are not a significant consideration within the DMG area, with only FE Borgie returning any significant numbers on a regular basis. Overscaig and Ben Loyal contribute a few animals each year. Culls on other properties are only very occasional. Greater habitat connectivity may improve conditions for the species. As it is, relatively small woodland areas interspersed with extensive peatlands will provide few opportunities for roe deer to spread and get established.

The following table gives a summary of the nos of roe deer culled since 2007-8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Bucks</th>
<th>Does</th>
<th>Kids</th>
<th>Total Deer Cull</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>n/k (19)</td>
<td>n/k (18)</td>
<td>n/k(5)</td>
<td>n/k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>17 (19)</td>
<td>19 (30)</td>
<td>15 (9)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures in brackets indicate the numbers of roe deer culled in the FE Dalchork plantation.*

The apparent increase for 2011-12 and 2012-13 arises from an additional woodland property providing statutory returns for those years.

Roe Deer Management Issues

There are not considered to be any significant roe deer management issues within the group area at present.
9. Moorland Management
A very large proportion of the DMG area can be described as moorland of one type or another, ranging from the very extensive peatlands, through wet heath and dry heath to complex mosaics interspersed with each other and with other habitats. Much of this area is designated under a variety of mechanisms, as discussed elsewhere. A requirement for many of these sites is that muirburning is not carried out, or only carried out under very carefully controlled conditions. As a result, the practice of controlled muirburning is now relatively rare within the DMG area.

What is much more commonplace are the large, landscape fires that have frequented much of the area over the past twenty years or so. Some of these have been set to help with sheep or deer grazing, but for others, the motivation is not always clear, and the identity of those setting the fires is seldom evident. They often reach to several hundred hectares, several thousand hectares in some cases. Some of these have been very damaging, particularly as re-vegetation is very slow over much of the DMG area. South Achnabourin is a good example where landscape scale fires have left an area of SSSI in unfavourable condition, and where it will take many, many years for the vegetation to grow back again. Such fires also allow bracken to spread, which is particularly noticeable in Strathnaver. Uncontrolled fires in a number of other areas have left a fairly impoverished ground vegetation with areas of bare peat which are more vulnerable to deer tracking and browsing.

It will become a major management issue for the Group to try and manage these situations in the future.

Other than sheep and deer grazing, there are a very modest amount of red grouse within the DMG, some of which are used for sporting purposes at a very low level, where numbers allow. However, as a land-use, this is very restricted in scale.

Limited use is still made of peat cutting within the DMG area, which is potentially increasing again in some areas. However, this affects a very small proportion of the overall area, and its cultural significance and genuine utility are generally understood and accepted.

10. Hill Sheep & Cattle Management
Sheep are managed within the DMG under a variety of systems. Farms such as Balnakiel and Rhigolter are owner occupied and focused primarily on agriculture, and have long been regarded as being among the best sheep farms in the north of Scotland. Eriboll and Syre/North Lochnaver are managed under contract arrangements. Poole and Keodale are owned by Scottish ministers and rented out to sheep stock clubs who maintain the flocks at an agreed level and take any profits. About 25% of the total area of the Group is under crofting tenure, with Common Grazing Committees managing sheep on the hill ground and individual crofters managing sheep on their own in-bye ground. It is not thought that there are any secure 1991-type tenant farmers as such within the area. Almost all of the estate in-hand flocks have now been cleared off the ground, with only Hope & Melness, Strathmore and Ben Loyal estates retaining any sheep, either managed by their own staff or by some let arrangement. Large swathes of the DMG area now carry no sheep at all.
Of the DMG area of 168,960 ha:

- 5450 ha or 3% is forested,
- 77,695 ha or 46% of the area of the group carries no sheep at all, bar a few strays from neighbouring properties
- 33,969 ha or 20% of the group area is technically available to a common grazings committee, but sheep tend to be present either in very small numbers, or confined to in-bye grazing. To all practical purposes, the hill grazings of these areas are not really grazed by sheep at all. This could change of course in future, and may not necessarily be a permanent arrangement.
- Only 52,476 ha or 31% of the DMG area has sheep grazing on the open hill, but even within this, access to hill ground can often be restricted, or sheep tend to concentrate around the in-bye grazings or improved parts of the hill only. In practice, only a proportion of this area is grazed by sheep. These areas that are more actively farmed tend to be owner occupied, contract shepherded or managed in-hand. Of the 25% of ground under crofting tenure, perhaps only one fifth of this has the hill ground actively grazed by sheep at present.

The distribution of the above areas can be seen on 5. NWS Sheep & Parish Boundaries MAP.

Changes to Sheep Numbers
The relative balance between herbivore numbers and how they are changing is important to understand in relation to overall grazing levels, how this might be impacting upon the natural heritage, and how overall production and employment in an area might be changing.

To this end, data on sheep numbers from obtained from SGRPID, and summarized at a parish level. The data obtained was for 2013, 2008, 2003, 1998 and 1993, to see what changes were taking place in the area at 5-yearly intervals. On top of this, individual estates and grazing committees were asked about sheep numbers within their boundaries over the same period, to see if this matched up with official SGRPID figures.

There are five parishes covering the NWS DMG area. The parishes of Durness and Tongue lie entirely within the area. The parishes of Farr, Lairg and Edrachille lie partly within the area, and data relating to these areas may not necessarily reflect what is going on in that part of the parish within the NWS DMG area.
**Background Information**

**Durness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of holdings keeping sheep</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% change from 1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of breeding ewes</td>
<td>10,271</td>
<td>8,698</td>
<td>6,630</td>
<td>5,661</td>
<td>5,516</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Sheep</td>
<td>21,262</td>
<td>20,412</td>
<td>15,795</td>
<td>13,822</td>
<td>12,983</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Sheep per holding</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>658</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>618</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data above for Durness broadly ties in with that gathered from individual properties and grazing committees. The no. of holdings keeping sheep and the breeding flock have both decreased by about half over 20 years, with the greater part of the drop taking place in the first 10 year period, and a lesser drop taking place after the changes to Single Farm Payment in 2003. Since 2008, the sheep flock seems to be relatively stable, and those keeping sheep questioned during the survey suggested that they have no plans to decrease sheep numbers any further. The last significant clearance of sheep was from Cape Wrath in 2006.

**Tongue**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of holdings keeping sheep</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% change from 1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of breeding ewes</td>
<td>7,372</td>
<td>7,640</td>
<td>6,992</td>
<td>4,954</td>
<td>4,221</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Sheep</td>
<td>15,761</td>
<td>17,627</td>
<td>16,157</td>
<td>11,702</td>
<td>9,683</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Sheep per holding</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>179</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with Durness, the data collected from individual estates and grazing committees ties in relatively well with the figures outlined above. The decrease in both holdings keeping sheep and nos of sheep is slightly less than Durness. Significantly, most of the decrease has taken place since 2003, not since 1993. One significant event would be the removal of sheep from Ben Loyal in 2006. This more recent reduction in grazing pressure will still likely be working its way through in to increased deer habitat and a reducing impact on the natural heritage. Throughout the parish of Tongue, sheep are either absent now from the hill area, or present there in only relatively small numbers. The vast majority of sheep in the area are kept on in-byre ground for most of the year.
FARR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of holdings keeping sheep</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change from 1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of breeding ewes</td>
<td>20,690</td>
<td>22,081</td>
<td>17,935</td>
<td>13,120</td>
<td>12,721</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Sheep</td>
<td>46,884</td>
<td>52,937</td>
<td>41,773</td>
<td>30,560</td>
<td>31,688</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Sheep per holding</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>285</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The parish of Farr shows a more steady decline in both sheep nos and nos of holdings keeping sheep. Much of the parish lies outwith the NWS DMG area, and it appears from discussions with individuals that the reduction in sheep numbers within the DMG area is much higher than for the parish as a whole. There has potentially been a reduction in sheep numbers of 66% over the 20 year period. The sheep populations on Poole and Syre/ North Lochnaver are relatively stable. Sheep were cleared from Altnaharra in 2002, and there appears to be a significant reduction in sheep in Strathnaver over 20 years or so, with only a small number of active crofters remaining there.

LAIRG

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of holdings keeping sheep</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change from 1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>-33</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Change from 2003</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>No of breeding ewes</td>
<td>9,717</td>
<td>9,863</td>
<td>8,343</td>
<td>6,938</td>
<td>5,466</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Change from 1993</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Change from 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Sheep</td>
<td>22,982</td>
<td>23,791</td>
<td>19,855</td>
<td>16,994</td>
<td>13,463</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Change from 1993</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Average Sheep per holding</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>245</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The parish of Lairg lies mostly outwith the DMG area. Within the DMG area, there is in fact only a few hundred sheep using the hill area on Shinness, a decrease of about 85% over 20 years. Sheep were removed from Merkland about 40 years ago. Sheep grazing in the South part of the group is therefore fairly minimal on the open hill area.
EDRACHILLIS

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of holdings keeping sheep</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>% change from 1993</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Change from 2003</td>
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<td>No. of breeding ewes</td>
<td>5,710</td>
<td>5,244</td>
<td>4,360</td>
<td>2,566</td>
<td>2,245</td>
<td>-26</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Change from 1993</td>
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<td>-61</td>
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<td>% Change from 2003</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Sheep</td>
<td>11,730</td>
<td>12,250</td>
<td>10,534</td>
<td>5,520</td>
<td>5,447</td>
<td>-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change from 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Sheep per holding</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>121</td>
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</table>

Edrachillis lies partly within the DMG area. Individual discussions suggest a reduction of 62% over the 20 year period, which is almost exactly the same for the parish as a whole. The data above suggests that while the there has been a relatively steady fall in nos of holdings keeping sheep across the 20 year period, the greater part of the actual reduction of sheep nos has taken place in the last ten years. There have been no big clearances of sheep as in other areas, with the decrease seemingly being a combination of reductions over many individual crofts.

**Discussion & Context**

Reductions in sheep stocks of 40-66% are very significant over a 20 year period, both in lowering the overall herbivore pressure, but also in lowering the overall amount of related employment/work in the area. There are variations in the scale of reductions across the area, and when exactly the reductions took place. Some took place early in the 20 year period, many others since 2003 and the changes that took place in Single Farm Payment shortly after then. The implications of much of this will still be working its way through the system. One of these is that the loss of sheep grazing nearer to the crofting areas on the coast is allowing deer to expand their range and take up residency there. Another implication has been that a reduction in numbers of active crofters has meant fewer people taking deer from in-bye croft land over that period, and a reduction in overall poaching as well. So deer are getting more exclusive usage of much of the interior of the group area, and pushing their way towards the coast. Most people recognize this trend. Many welcome it, some are more anxious about it.

There are a number of individual common grazing committees where sheep and indeed cattle numbers have been increasing in recent years, largely because of new people moving in to or back to the area. The implication of this is that a continuing decline in sheep numbers is not inevitable if potential active crofters can be attracted back to the area.

Those common grazing areas where sheep are declining point to the simple fact that crofters are getting older and no longer able to get out to the hill. Many say that they simply have never replaced their dogs, and are simply keeping a few sheep on in-bye land to keep up their interest in things. Very few young people are choosing to remain.

The numbers of lambs going through Lairg sales are about 40% of what they were 20 years ago, reflecting a similar trend over a much bigger area.
Cattle
A number of properties keep cattle, although many are restricted in in-bye ground only. Fewer than 100 cows are present on the hill area throughout the group area, being restricted to the better parts of the hill in most cases.

A number of properties have expressed an interest in establishing small herds of hill cattle again, primarily to help with habitat management, and to improve the grazing in the more fertile, grassy areas. It is certainly the case that vegetation to support them exists, and that such a trend, where it to get established, would be welcome in the area.

11. Forestry & Woodland Management
The DMG is heavily dominated by moorland and high mountain tops, with rock, water bodies and peat taking up a very large proportion of the area. All such ground is largely unsuited to tree growth. The better ground in the straths and glens and on the coast is very restricted, and is proportionately much more valuable for crofting and agriculture. The native woods that occur in the area tend to be on the more marginal land within such areas, often confined between the better land and the peatlands beyond.

As a consequence, native woodlands within the DMG area are very limited indeed in extent, occupying a small proportion of the overall area. They tend to be relatively fragmented, and connectivity is often poor, except in some of the longer straths such as Strathnaver. In some of these woods, there has been a pulse of new regeneration during the past 20 years or so, presumably as a consequence of reducing sheep numbers over that time. Such areas are particularly noticeable in the northern part of Strathnaver, around Tongue and Kinlochbervie, and, more generally, following the road around the north and west coast in the area.

Borgie Forest, managed by Forest Enterprise, and the woods at Overscaig are the only significant coniferous plantations within the DMG, although there are a series of planted shelter belts on many of the estates in the area, the biggest of which extend to several hundred hectares, but which are typically less than 20-50 hectares. In recent years, many of these shelter belts have been felled to reduce the incidence of Red Band Needle Blight, and they have largely been re-fenced and restocked with broadleaves. There are plans to fell others in the near future. Many of these areas were experimental Forestry Commission plantings in the past, trialling different establishment methods and provenances.

In general, NW Sutherland is too far away from processing facilities and the road infrastructure is poor, and extensive “commercial” forestry is unlikely to ever occupy a greater proportion of the land than it does at present. If anything, the current area covered by conifers is likely to decrease through restructuring with broadleaves, and the very extensive areas of peat will constrain woodland extension of any kind, except perhaps low density birch/willow scrub.

The management priority for woodlands in the area will be to secure and improve the condition of designated and ancient woodlands, and to try and improve connectivity of these where possible. There is little scope or justification for very significant increases in woodland area, particularly if this were to remove some of the better land in the straths within the area. The woodland vision put forward by Wildland Ltd is one of relatively low density broadleaved trees occupying the drier knolls between areas of peat, and this recognizes the constraints on native woodland expansion in such a location. In terms of carbon sequestration, a focus on securing the peatlands within this particular DMG area
should be the primary goal, given the sheer dominance of this habitat within the area. Indeed, the peatland habitats here are a very significant proportion of those present within the country as a whole, and are nationally and internationally recognized as such.

12. Supplementary Deer Policies

SNH Authorisations
Members will be encouraged to share information within the Sub-Group on any out of season and night shooting authorizations, over some or all of the land where they carry out the deer control.

The vast majority of deer are culled in season, but deer marauding on crofts in spring and the need to control sika deer are important considerations in maintaining some flexibility within the group area.

Winter Mortality
Members will monitor and report any significant levels of winter mortality to the Sub-Group, or any significant health issues encountered. It is considered that mortality within the group is approx 2% for adults and 6% for calves in their first year. Recruitment is approx 30 - 36%, varying across the Group. These figures are used in the current population models for NWS DMG.

Deer Related Traffic Incidents
It is agreed by the Members that they will keep records of any collisions between deer and cars or other vehicles in their area together with relevant information (eg. location, species of deer, fate of deer, damage to vehicle, human injuries), while also recording dead deer in their annual cull returns and where appropriate, larder sheets. Members may also wish to contribute to the national project collating RTA reports which can be accessed at http://www.deercollisions.co.uk

Highland Council report that for the 5 year period from 2007-12, that there were 7 deer-vehicle collisions within the DMG area, two of which resulted in slight injury. The incidents were scattered along both the A836 and A838, with no particular location being regarded as a particular problem.

Deer are now frequenting the in-bye ground and village area at Kinlochbervie on a more regular basis, and there have been a number of local reports of near accidents involving deer, often involving lorry drivers coming from the harbour. These increasing reports appear to be the result of deer becoming resident closer to the coast, brought about partly by reducing sheep numbers and reducing crofter activity.

Kinlochbervie Community Council have concerns about increasing deer numbers and their impact on road safety, and cite this as an issue that has been developing in importance over 15 years or so.

Deer Fences
Attaining an up to date picture of the status of these fences should be a priority for the group. Almost all significant woodland areas within the Group area are fenced off from deer, although many areas are retained as deer shelter, and a number of pole-stage plantations have been opened up for deer access in recent years.

All deer fences are included on the Management Objectives map. Fences still to be added to this map. It will be important to update all relevant known information.
Supplementary/ diversionary Feeding
Six properties within the DMG feed deer in the winter months, usually with potatoes or root crops, but also with hay or silage/haylage. Feedblocks are also used. The rationale for feeding is partly to see deer through difficult weather, partly to keep them away from roads or designated sites during the winter months.

Members currently feeding deer are:

Strathmore
Reay Forest (3 X beats only)
Gualin
Fiag
Altnaharra

Members agree that they will inform the Group if they decide to undertake any such feeding in period of this Plan, or if any significant changes are made to current practice. All deer feeding which takes place will comply with industry Best Practice guidance.

Venison Marketing
Larder provision within the group is generally good, but local co-operation to ensure appropriate capacity takes places at a number of locations within the area.

Group members share a commitment to high standards beyond the larder door, right through to the sale of the carcase or else its use locally. Several group members are members of the venison quality assurance scheme (SQWV) and other Members will be encouraged to attain the standards required. As a matter of general principle, Members also support the local consumption of locally shot, high quality venison.

A wide range of game dealers and processors are used by group members, with no one organization having a dominant role.

13. Non-native Species Policy
At present, as well as the native red and roe deer, there are known to be sika deer within the DMG boundary, in fairly significant numbers.

There are no fallow deer within the Group area, and there are no known plans to introduce any.

Sika Deer
Sika deer are present within the South sub-area of the Group, and at fairly significant numbers within woodland areas, with the annual cull now being in excess of 100 animals.

Sika deer are therefore valued within the area both for sporting purposes and for venison, and it is anticipated that this will remain the case. Use of sika deer is due in part to the lack of red deer in these areas.

The group policy on sika deer will therefore be to treat the species as a valued venison and sporting animal, but to try and confine them in these areas, and prevent spread along the natural corridors to the west and to the north. Stalkers beyond the wooded areas in the South Group are therefore asked to remove all sika animals as and when opportunities arise.
There is no suggestion yet that sika deer are breeding with red deer in this area.

Other non-native species
Sightings of any other deer species, notably muntjac, will be reported immediately to both the deer group and to Scottish Natural Heritage, and efforts made to remove such animals.

There are no wild goats within the area.

14. Communications Policy
The NWS DMG is committed to the transparent communication of all relevant information to its members, to government agencies and to the public more widely, with the caveat that some sensitive data will be distributed to group members only.

The primary source of information about the Group will be on the Association of Deer Management Groups’ website, on which all information relevant to the group can be located. This will include the deer management plan and associated maps, a constitution, minutes of group meetings, and population models. The link for this information is: XXXXXXXX

All enquiries to the Group should be made through the Group Secretary via email, or if necessary, via phone to the Group Chairman or vice Chairman. Their contact details are:

North West Sutherland Deer Management Group

Group Secretary: Mrs April Conroy
Sec.nwsdmg@btopenworld.com

Chairman
Mr Andrew Marsham
Rispand & Polla
Polla House
Laid
Lairg
Sutherland
IV27 4QE
Andrew.marsham@gmail.com
Tel: 01971 511224

Mr Pieter Bakker of Altnaharra Estate is vice-Chair of NWSDMG.
Altnaharra.estate@btconnect.com Tel: 01549 411220

The contact details for individual properties will not be available as a matter of course through the Deer Group or website, although the Secretary can put you in touch with the relevant people if appropriate to do so. No cull information on individual properties will be made available outside the membership of the Group.

Every effort will be made to deal with non-emergency issues within 10 days. More pressing issues will be dealt with promptly if appropriate.

For more long established or strategic issues, it may be appropriate for the issue to be brought up at a deer management group meeting, which take place at six monthly intervals.
The Chairman may recommend this to you. The spring meeting will be an open meeting to which anyone is entitled to attend. Items for inclusion on the Agenda for such meetings must be submitted to the Group Chairman three weeks in advance of the meeting, otherwise they can be taken up under “Any Other Competent Business”. Any item that is not deemed appropriate for discussion on the Agenda will be addressed in some other, appropriate fashion. Please respect the judgement of the Chairman if his view is that, in the first instance, an issue should be dealt with outside a formal group meeting. This may be because of time pressures, or the nature of the issue at hand.

All local Community Councils, Common Grazing Committees and other relevant interests will be made aware of meetings in advance, and invited to contribute to the agenda for these.

Local input on the continuing evolution of the group Deer Management Plan is welcomed and encouraged. Email contacts for local community councils are included in Appendix 2, as are contact details for all grazing committees. These details are not being made public through the website, but are available on request to Group members and community interests as required.

Any queries about the running of the DMG can be addressed to Scottish Natural Heritage, at any of the contact points listed here below:

**Scottish Natural Heritage Contact**
Valerie Wilson Scottish Natural Heritage, The Links, Golspie Business Park, Golspie, Sutherland, KW10 6UB Tel: 01408 634063 or Mob 07936 325042
Valerie.Wilson@snh.gov.uk

James Scott is the SNH Wildlife Operations officer covering the Sutherland area: James.Scott@snh.gov.uk, and is also seconded to the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG), leading on collaborative deer management.

For more general deer enquiries: wildlifeops@snh.gov.uk

NWS DMG will seek to respond to any requests from media sources or the local public for information, and individual members may arrange, from time to time, appropriate open days and information events if these are requested or deemed to be useful.

NWS DMG welcomes comment on all matters either directly or indirectly associated with deer management within the North West Sutherland area.

**15. Training Policy**
NWS DMG encourage and facilitate the attainment of all qualifications and training necessary for the delivery of effective deer management within their area of operation, and support continuing professional development through the adoption of Best Practice Guidance and other relevant courses.

The recognized and recommended industry standard for culling deer is that all those personnel involved in deer management should attain level of Deer Management Qualification (DMQ) Level 1 or equivalent.
As at February 2015, 27 of the 29 personnel involved in deer management in the NWS area have obtained this qualification.

The DMQ Level 2 qualification is increasingly held as the de facto industry standard for professional stalkers, which requires the identification, stalking, dispatching and lardering of deer under supervision.
At February 2015, 16 of the 29 personnel involved in deer management in the NWS area held the DMQ Level 2 qualification.

For those expected to larder deer and prepare them for the human food chain, industry requirements are that they have attained Trained Hunter status. This is the equivalent of any DMQ course passed after 2006, or an upgraded version of DMQ1 passed before that time.
At February 2015, 17 of the 29 personnel involved in deer management within with NWS area had trained hunter status.

All personnel requiring to take deer under special authorizations must be on the SNH “Fit & Competent” register. The requirement for this is to hold the DMQ Level 2 qualification, or DMQ Level 1 plus two references.
At February 2015, 3 personnel in the NWS area required to take deer under authorization, and were on the Fit & Competent register. This low number reflects the fact that the vast majority of deer within the area are culled in season and during daylight hours.

All personnel within the area are encouraged to be proficient in First Aid, manual handling, ATV driving and maintenance and other tasks which are central to their job. NWS DMG will monitor the level of skills among staff in the DMG area, and undertake to facilitate any such courses or training that may be necessary to put right any deficiencies that are identified. All estates will support their staff in attaining the agreed standards.

Group members are encouraged to bring forward any suggestions for suitable training that might be of relevance to the Group as a whole, or to ask for support in arranging training for their staff. The most relevant training going forwards is likely to be in relation to habitat surveying and monitoring work. While many group members are already capable of doing this, others will require some structured training, and the management of such activity across the area will be an important function for the group to be able to undertake.

16. Reviewing the Plan
This Plan provides an agreed framework for a co-ordinated and co-operative approach to deer management in the area. The actual implementation of the Plan will be decided on an ongoing basis at the Group’s spring and autumn meetings, with scope for the Membership to adjust and adapt the Plan to meet changing circumstances. This Plan, with its attendant maps and databases will be circulated along with the Agenda to all group members prior to meetings, any changes actioned, and the revised plan included with the minutes of that meeting, or at a suitable time thereafter. Group members are therefore encouraged to report all changes in contact details, personnel or management practices that might be relevant to the group, or any potential upcoming projects that might affect deer management within the area, even if such proposals are still at a planning stage.
The population models and maps will be updated on an annual basis as required, with the former adjusted so that it is always looking five years ahead.
The Members agree that there will be a more systematic review of the Plan and its provisions during autumn 2019 and thereafter, 2025, and, if considered necessary, the production of a revised edition of the Plan will be actioned at these points.
Part Four  -  OPERATION OF THE GROUP

North West Sutherland DMG has been assessed against the DMG Benchmark document developed by the Association for Deer Management Groups. In this section of the plan, an account is given of how the Group currently meets the recommended operating criteria and, where appropriate, correcting or amending actions are listed.

Area & Boundaries
The boundaries of the group are considered to be appropriate and secure to significant deer movements from elsewhere, with a number of significant lochs, deer fences and, of course, the coastline all helping this process. NWS is considered to be a coherent deer management group. The location of the group is shown on the 1. NWS Location map.

There are no sub-groups as such within the Group, but, for the purposes of this plan, three sub-populations of deer have been identified in the north west, north east and south of the area. These areas are not an exact fit, and the population models derived from them should be regarded with some care, especially the model for the south group. However, they do form a useful starting point for projecting deer populations at a meaningful local level over the course of this plan.

Action Point

1. Monitor the operation and accuracy of the three population models during the course of this plan, and review as required.

Membership
Almost all of the significant land holdings within the NWS area are members of the Deer Group, although there are six properties who contribute data and communications to the Group, but who are not actual members, and a further four small woodland properties on the periphery of the group area where the owners are either unknown, or who are reluctant to participate in the group.

In addition, approx twenty five percent of the Group area is crofted, and there are nineteen common grazing committees who operate within the area and who therefore have the potential to impact upon the overall upland resource. Some of these areas, and individual crofters, account for an unknown number of deer annually in protecting their crofts. There would be immense benefits to the deer group and also to the crofters by sharing information better, and initial soundings are that many of the crofters would be willing to do this. It is acknowledged that a new arrangement might not be straightforward to implement, but that perhaps some sort of associate membership status could be devised.

Action Points

2.1 Before the end of 2016, look to recruit the above mentioned landholdings as members of the Group. It is likely that most will be paying a minimum subscription only.

2.2 During 2015, devise a suitable arrangement whereby the grazing committees can input in to the deer group, and where information on deer culled on crofters ground can be gathered to better inform Group management decisions.
Meetings
The group already meet twice a year, and a number of steering group meetings took place to help deliver this plan. Attendance at meetings is generally good, although actual participation is patchy. SNH & FE attend meetings, and group have demonstrated an ability to take forwards business between meetings.

Action Points
3.1 As above, look to encourage wider community participation, including invitations to community councils and grazing committees. All such groups to be given the opportunity to contribute to the agenda of meetings.

3.2 Minutes to be structured to include Action Points.

Constitution & Finances
There is no existing constitution, but this has been addressed as part of this management planning process.

The Group do not produce an annual budget, nor do they have significant cash reserves to act as a buffer, or to help with cash flow.

Action Points
4.1 A constitution to be adopted at Spring 2015 group meeting.

4.2 The group will produce annual budgets, and look to increase member subscription rates so that a buffer can be built up in bank account. A realistic aim would be to have the equivalent of one year’s subscription to ADMG in reserve at all times.

Deer Management Plan
No plan has been in place, and this document has been developed to fill that need. A Steering Group that has included group members and SNH have ensured that all the relevant elements of an approved plan are in place, and it is planned to endorse the plan at the spring 2015 group meeting. A full range of local interests have been consulted on deer management issues within the area, including grazing committees, community councils and the local authority.

Action Points
5.1 Endorse DMP at spring 2015 meeting

5.2 Ensure a system of communications is in place whereby local interests have access to the plan, and can input to future development of it. This is especially important as many of these interests will only be seeing the document for the first time after endorsement by group members themselves. The DMP will be copied to all local interests after adoption. Feedback will be invited, and any necessary changes will be made to the Plan at autumn 2015 meeting.
Code of Practice on Deer Management
The code has been endorsed in both this plan and in the constitution of the Group. The terms of the Code will be delivered through implementation of this plan, and the Code will guide all actions taken by the group and by individual members.

**Action Point**
6.1 Ensure adherence to code at all times, both by the Group, and by individual members.

ADMG Principles of Collaboration
The ADMG principles of collaboration are accepted and endorsed by the Group and by individual members, namely:

- We acknowledge what we have in common, namely a shared commitment to a sustainable and economically viable Scottish countryside.
- We make a commitment to work together to achieve that.
- We accept that we have a diversity of management objectives and respect each other’s objectives.
- We undertake to communicate openly with all relevant parties.
- We commit to negotiate and, where necessary, compromise, in order to accommodate the reasonable land management requirements of neighbours.
- Where there are areas of disagreement we undertake to work together to resolve them.

These principles are also referenced in the North West Sutherland DMG constitution.

Best Practice Guidance
All deer management within the group area will be carried out in accordance with Best Practice guidance, and group members will input to this process and seek to influence it as it continues to evolve.

Data & Evidence gathering- Deer Counts
NWS DMG have traditionally counted in the spring each year, but these counts have been often only partial, and the information gathered has been variable in quality. There are two issues which make foot counting difficult in the area. Firstly, the area is very large compared to the number of personnel who might be available to undertake counts. Secondly, the terrain is such that counting is very difficult, there being vast expanses of very flat ground where it is difficult to see over long distances without missing animals, or where there are complexes of small rocky knolls which break up the terrain, and where deer can be hiding anywhere. Unlike the more rolling hills or steep sided glens to the south, it is very difficult to achieve good vantage points for deer counting over much of the area. It is accepted by many group members that information gathered from such counts can be inaccurate and misleading. A number of individual estates have become more dependent on their own privately funded helicopter counts, and one property is currently looking to take forward an initiative using drones to count deer.

Publicly funded helicopter counts in 2008 & 2012 returned data that was disputed by some
NW Sutherland Deer Management Group

group members, essentially because it took several weeks to complete the count.

A partial recruitment count was undertaken in 2014.

Forest Enterprise manage the only significant woodland holding across the group area, and make use of dung counting when setting their cull levels.

**Action Points**

9.1 *It is highly recommended that a helicopter count is carried out in 2016 to establish a solid population baseline for the area. Such a baseline should then provide an appropriate degree of confidence to rely on population modelling over the subsequent five year period.*

9.2 *It is recommended that beyond 2016, that the Group undertakes a helicopter count every five years, relying on population modelling in between to set cull targets on an annual basis. Such counts may involve a degree of private or SRDP funding.*

9.3 *It is recommended that spring foot counts, if they are to take place at all, are integrated with recruitment counting each year in late April/early May, with the priority consideration at that point being to assess recruitment from the previous year, and to form a broad overview of the deer population and general health after the winter. There is a strong case to be made for abandoning spring counts if regular helicopter counts can be organized in their place, with the caveat that recruitment & mortality counts and population modelling are used and information used updated on an annual basis.*

**Data & Evidence Gathering- Culls**

A broad population density of 5 deer per sq km is likely to be suitable for a wide range of habitats within the DMG area, with the probable exception of native woodlands, for which site specific actions will need to be undertaken by individual estates. In many areas of the group, the current population density is already less than this.

The broad strategy going forwards will therefore be to set cull levels which ensure a stable population density across the area, this being required to ensure the socio-economic, sporting and venison production requirements of members.

Aspirational sporting requirements have been provided by Group members, and a five year population model has been drawn up for each sub population area. From this, culls have been apportioned to each Deer Management Unit area. These population models and cull targets can be found in the Working Plan part of this document. In most cases, target culls are very similar to current levels, with a lesser cull being advised in some areas.

**Action Point**

10.1 *Update the population models and target culls on an annual basis, using recruitment and mortality data collected, as well as actual culls from the previous year.*

**Data & Evidence Gathering- Habitat Monitoring**

Many group members have had experience and training in habitat monitoring, but coverage is not uniform, confidence is low in some cases, and Habitat Impact Assessments are not currently undertaken in a structured manner across the DMG area.

Good data has been collected on sheep usage of the hill areas, both through individual
properties and from parish data from SGRPID in Caithness. This data shows very significant reductions in numbers of sheep using the area over a 20 year period, giving greater scope and flexibility as to how deer management is undertaken across much of the DMG area.

**Action Points**

11.1 A schedule of habitat and designated site monitoring will be devised in conjunction with SNH during 2015, and will be included in the Working Plan part of this document.

11.2 The DMG will co-operate with government agencies and provide or access sufficient resources to ensure that this programme is implemented over the ten year period of this plan.

11.3 Updated sheep information will be attained from SGRIPD for 2018 and 2023, in line with the data gathered on a five-year basis since 1993.

11.4 The DMG will liaise with grazing committees on an ongoing basis so that they are aware of any significant changes in sheep numbers or hill usage at a more local level.

**Competence**

Of the 29 personnel involved in deer management within the NWS DMG area, the following qualifications are held:

- DMQ Level 1: 27
- DMQ Level 2: 16

17 personnel hold trained hunter status, and 3 personnel are on the SNH “Fit and Competent” register. Note: in this latter case, personnel only need to be on the register if they are applying to cull deer under authorization at night or out of season. The greater number of stalkers within the group do not apply for such authorizations, and therefore do not require to be on the register.

In addition to the above, there are 15 personnel used by the MoD at Cape Wrath for deer management. All carry DMQ Levels 1 & 2, as well as having trained hunter status.

Office bearers from the DMG have attended courses ran by the Association of Deer Management Groups in relation to operation and leadership within local groups.

**Action Point**

12.1 DMG members will seek to ensure that DMQ Level 1 and Trained Hunter status are delivered as the now accepted industry standard within the area, and encouragement will be given to professional stalkers to achieve DMQ level 2.

12.2 Questionnaire results suggest some confusion as to how “trained hunter” status is actually defined. NWS DMG to provide this clarification to all members, and to facilitate any necessary training to give all employees this status by the end of 2016.

12.3 Training or support in higher level qualifications will be encouraged where that is appropriate.

12.4 The DMG will work with crofters and grazing committees to ensure that deer culling carried out on crofting ground meets with all appropriate industry standards.
12.5 Training and support will also be sought from ADMG where that is required to help with running of the Deer Management group.

Training
A Training Policy is included earlier in this document.

Action Points
13.1 Promote and facilitate the uptake of appropriate deer management qualifications, and specifically address the issue over how trained hunter status is defined.

13.2 Be aware of the ongoing development of Best Practice Guidance and any new techniques or standards that arise from that.

13.3 Review training needs on an annual basis.

Venison Marketing
While the quality of deer larders across the DMG is generally good, the uptake of the Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV) scheme is mixed within the area. The perceived bureaucracy surrounding this seems to be more of a limiting factor than poor facilities or training as such.

Group members use a number of outlets for their venison, with a proportion of the total cull being processed or sold locally.

Action Points
14.1 The DMG will work with ADMG to promote uptake of SQWV within the area.

14.2 In the medium term, beyond the settling in period for this Plan, the DMG will explore options to market venison from the area in a more collaborative manner.

Communications
A Communications policy is included in an earlier section of this document.

The annual communications strategy will involve making all relevant documents available through the ADMG website, including local stakeholders in notices and the opportunity to contribute to the Agenda of meetings, holding one open meeting a year, answering all requests for information from the media and arranging open days and demonstration events where these are appropriate.

All local stakeholders, including grazing committees and community councils have been consulted on the development of this plan. See 6. NWS Community Councils and Grazing Committees Map.

Action Point
15.1 Implement the communications strategy as agreed, and ensure a mechanism is in place for dealing with business and issues between meetings.
Part Five  -  PUBLIC INTEREST OUTCOMES

North West Sutherland DMG has been assessed against the DMG Delivery of Public Interest document developed by Scottish Natural Heritage and the Association for Deer Management Groups. In this section of the plan, an account is given of how the Group currently delivers public benefit and, where appropriate, correcting actions are listed.

**Develop Mechanisms to manage deer**

NWS DMG have completed both the Benchmark and Public Interest assessments.

A series of actions have been identified to be taken forward in a Working Plan, and roles for implementing this have been assigned.

A forward looking deer management plan is in the process of development, and is expected to be endorsed in March 2015. The plan plus associated documents, maps and minutes of meetings will be published on dedicated website space through the Association of Deer Management Groups website. See here: XXXXXX

**Action Points**

*PIA 1.1* Publish and endorse the new NWS Deer Management Plan in spring 2015.

*PIA 1.2* Re-assess the Group against both the Benchmark and the Public Interest criteria once DMP has been endorsed, and then annually thereafter.

*PIA 1.3* Review the Working Plan on an annual basis and minute progress and changes.

**Delivering Designated Features in to Favourable condition**

Designated sites and features within the DMG are documented with Appendix 3, NWS Designated Sites. This includes an up to date account of their current status, and suggested actions through which a number of sites in Unfavourable condition can be brought forward in to assured management status.

Specific actions will be laid out in the Working Plan at the back of this document.

**Action**

*PIA 2.1* Implement actions outlined in Working Plan re: designated sites.

*PIA 2.2* Also in Working Plan, implement the series of actions required to monitor designated sites over the ten year period of this plan.
**Manage Deer to retain existing Native Woodland cover and improve woodland condition in the medium to long term.**

There are approx. 7509 hectares of woodland within the NWS DMG area, covering 4.5% of the area of the Group (National Forestry Inventory, NFI). This is very low compared to the national average of c. 18.5%, but it reflects the very large tracts of ground that is unsuitable for planting, and the distance from markets and processing facilities, as well as the relatively poor roads infrastructure. The 7509 ha includes all recently planted woodland.

Of this area, 1465 hectares or 20% is composed of native or nearly native woodland (NFI), a figure which is slightly lower than that provided by the Native Woodlands Survey of Scotland (NWSS), which gives 1636 ha. A proportion of this (396 hectares or 24%) is to be found within designated sites.

Of the total woodland area, 1074 hectares is under an agreed management regime through an SRDP Forest Plan or Management Plan since 2008. There were no hectares under an SFGS management plan from 2003-7. In addition, there are approx. 1600 ha of trees in FE Borgie Forest, which is actively managed and has been significantly felled and restocked in the past decade or so. Given that over 2200 ha of the total woodland area is recent woodland creation, the total area of woodland under active management (1074 ha plus 1600 ha) is actually a very large proportion of the total mature woodland resource.

As an alternative means of quantifying active management, 743 hectares of woodland within the DMG has been subject to a felling or thinning license between 1998 and 2011, but with only 44 ha subject to licence from 2012-14. (Woodlands covered by a Forest Plan do not require a separate felling licence).

Of the total native woodland area of 1636 ha (NWSS), the following herbivore impact levels are currently given:

- **Low**: 524 ha
- **Medium**: 423 ha
- **High**: 150 ha
- **Very High**: 540 ha

58% of native woodlands therefore show low or medium herbivore impact levels.

Of the native woodland outwith designated sites (1240 ha), 88% had a woodland canopy greater than 50%, 89% had 90% or more native species and virtually 100% of the area was free from invasive species (only 31 ha were impacted at all, and only 4 ha with 10% or more cover). These are parameters listed for “satisfactory condition”, independent of herbivore impact levels. They apply to 942 ha of native woodland or 76% of the area outwith designated sites. Therefore, irrespective of herbivore impact levels, 24% of native woods are impacted by these other factors which downgrade the condition of the woods.

Of this 942 ha, the herbivore impacts are as follows:

- **Low**: 253 ha
- **Medium**: 247 ha
- **High**: 130 ha
- **Very High**: 312 ha
These areas are shown on 13. NWS Herbivore Impact woods outwith designated sites.

Therefore, 53% of these woods that are otherwise in “satisfactory condition” outwith designated sites show low or medium herbivore impacts. Deriving from this, 40% of the overall 1240 ha of native woodlands outwith designated sites can be considered to be in overall “satisfactory condition.” This is in comparison to the 60% of such woodlands which Wild Deer- A National Approach (WDNA) envisage being in such condition by 2020.

If the NW Sutherland DMG wanted to achieve this target within their own area, then 20% of native woodlands outwith designated sites or 248 ha would require to be targeted, either for reducing herbivore impacts, reducing non-native or invasive species or increasing the canopy cover in some areas. There is a connection between canopy cover and herbivore impacts, in that low or medium impacts that allow for regeneration will inevitably increase the canopy cover within the woodland.

There are four significant clusters of woodland areas within the DMG where herbivore pressures are high or very high. Two of these are within designated sites, two are outwith designated sites. (See 12. NWS Key herbivore impact woods map)

The two designated woodland areas are:
- **Strathbeg woods (Foinaven SSSI/ SAC):** 58.7 ha
- **The Ben Hope SSSI woodlands:** 69.3 ha

Initiatives are already ongoing to try and achieve regeneration behind fences in these two areas.

The two undesignated woodland complexes are:
- **The Loyal Estate woodlands:** 186.1 ha
- **The Hope Estate woodlands:** 56.9 ha.

Both these areas lie within the areas targeted by the recent deer reduction cull, and while some of the Loyal woods are also within an area grazed by sheep, the reduction in deer browsing is likely to result in reduced impacts across much of this woodland area. The combined area of 243 ha is just slightly less than is required to bring the total woods in “satisfactory condition” up to 60% across the entire DMG.

If deer pressures were reduced on all four of the above sites, then 81% of the native woodland resource would have impacts that are low or medium.

Of the remaining native woodland areas, the only other discernible cluster is the complex of small woodlands within the Eriboll SSSI. The majority of other woods are scattered through a network of lower impact sites, and some of these impacts will be down to sheep grazing as well.

**Actions**

*PIA 3.1 Achieve a reduction in browsing pressure using fencing in the Strathbeg Woods and Ben Hope Woodlands, by the end of the first five year period of this plan, 2020.*

*PIA 3.2 Monitor the browsing levels within the Loyal Estate and Hope Estate woodlands over the next 2-3 years to determine whether impacts have been reduced to low or medium.*
Demonstrate DMG contribution to woodland expansion target

There has been a modest increase in woodland area within the DMG over the past 20 years or so, with 1099 hectares being established under the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) since 2008, 185 hectares being established under the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme (SFGS) since 2003, and 940 hectares being established under the Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) since 1994. See 11. NWS Woodland Creation Map.

This woodland expansion amounts to 2224 hectares in total, or 30% of the woodland area today. Although the overall increase in terms of area is modest, the proportional increase has therefore been very significant over twenty years or so. Of the most recently planted woodland under SRDP, 97% consisted of native woodland plantings, with the remaining 3% comprised of 10 ha of conifers, 7 ha of native woodland regeneration and 19 ha of mixed conifer/broadleaved planting. Almost all of this recent planting has therefore been with native species, as is the case with the restocking of conifer plantations felled over this period. The very small level of native woodland regeneration will be largely due to the nature of the SRDP grant scheme, in which this was a particularly risky financial undertaking. The 7 ha represents approx 8% of the Scottish total over 5 years, so, if anything, NW Sutherland is over represented in this category. Such low levels of regeneration do have significant consequences for improving native woodland habitat networks.

With the exception of planting to increase habitat connectivity, it is not considered that further planting within the DMG is a significant priority within the period of this plan. Much of the suitable planting ground, which is very restricted in extent, is more valuable for grazing and other uses, and it is suggested that improved management of peatlands is the more important action within this area in terms of securing carbon sequestration.

The exception to this will be the proposal to establish or regenerate significant areas of low density birch/willow woodlands within a matrix of peatlands and other mixed habitats on Ben Loyal/Kinloch/Hope & Melness estates. This vision recognizes the relative importance of peatlands and native trees in this area. The extent of these plans has yet to be determined.

During the production of this plan, no other Group members outlined any plans for significant woodland creation schemes, although there is potential for achieving woodland expansion around a number of designated woodland sites.

The impacts of the current Wildland Ltd proposals have been incorporated in to the population model for the NE area of the group. It is acknowledged that while this will deliver improved condition of a wide range of open ground habitats, it may not necessarily deliver expansion of native woodland habitats, and this will have to be kept under review and monitored.

**Actions**

PIA 4.1 NWS DMG members will not be asked to deliver a particular level of woodland creation over the period of this plan, but encouragement will be given to any proposals that increase regeneration and connectivity in and around designated and ancient woodland areas. In terms of mitigation of climate change, by far the greater contribution can be made by ensuring appropriate management of blankets bogs which extend to over 51,000 ha across the DMG. However, the Group will commit to holding a scoping exercise within the first two years of this plan to determine what potential woodland creation projects might be possible and integrated at a Group level.
PIA 4.2  It is anticipated that within the first 2-3 years of this plan that Wildland Ltd will outline the extent of woodland creation that they would like to undertake.

PIA 4.3  NWS DMG to assess the impact on deer populations of any proposals that come forwards from Wildland Ltd. It may be that the reduction cull already undertaken will result in a significant extension of low density woodland habitat across the 3 X properties and that no further action is required.

Monitor and manage deer impacts in the wider countryside
Outwith the designated sites within the DMG area, it is considered that there are the following areas of a range of broad habitat types, taken from the LCS88 dataset. A full summary of the habitat types can be found in the Excel spreadsheet: Appendix 8: NWS Broad Habitat Data. This is a particularly good set of data for this area, with only 75 hectares obscured by cloud across the whole area. However, the data is now over 25 years old.

The main habitats in the wider countryside, outwith designated sites are:

23, 798 ha of blanket bog, covering 14% of the DMG, and representing 46% of the total blanket bog in the DMG area.

28, 344 ha of heather moorland, covering 17% of the DMG, and representing 64% of such habitat across the whole DMG.

31, 493 ha of wet heather moorland, covering 19% of the DMG, and representing 62% of the total resource across the DMG.

3,013 ha of improved pasture, covering 2% of the DMG, and representing 96% of this habitat within the whole area. This is a very small area of good farmland within such a large area, and is clearly a limiting factor for agriculture locally.

1593 ha of smooth grasslands, representing 1% of the DMG area, but 85% of the total smooth grassland in the DMG.

6099 ha of woodland, occupying approx 3.5% of the DMG or 94% of the total tree cover.

Finally, there is 3376 ha of fresh water surface within the DMG, representing 2% of the area, and 62% of this feature across the whole DMG.

It is likely that with the exception of native woodland and crofted farmland and adjacent hill areas, that a deer density of 4-5 per sq km will deliver favourable status to the majority of these habitats. There are no species rich- type grasslands that would require a heavier stocking density. Because of the sheer expanses of peatland and rock, the effective deer density within the group is several times the actual figure, and it is likely that the native woodland fragments will need to be fenced to secure their futures, allowing in each case for a degree of expansion ground.

For many of the crofting areas around the periphery of the group area, deer densities of more than 3 or so per sq km tend to exacerbate marauding problems. In some ways, this issue is self regulating.
No habitat impact assessments are carried out within the group area on non-designated habitats, and this will be a very significant element of the work programme going forwards. The logistics of this will be very considerable, and require careful planning. But it may be that the status of habitats on designated sites can be taken as a measure of the status across the wider resource, given that designated sites are so extensive and well distributed across the DMG area.

**Action Points**

*PIA 5.1 An agreed monitoring programme for these habitats will be devised during the summer of 2015, to be endorsed and included in this plan by autumn 2015.*

**Improve Scotland’s ability to store carbon**

Within the Group area there are approx 7509 hectares of woodland and over 51,000 hectares of peatlands. A proportion of the wet heather moorland within the Group may eventually evolve to peat as well, and will certainly make some contribution to carbon capture. This habitat too extends to just over 51,000 ha.

To effectively capture and store carbon, the surface layer which includes the sphagnum mosses needs to be complete. If this is broken through trampling or burning then not only will the bog not capture carbon, it will actually oxidize and release carbon from the peat in the process. For these reasons, it is important to keep deer densities relatively low, and to avoid burning deep peats.

Native woodlands will be assessed on a site by site basis, and constitute quite a small proportion of the area of the DMG. The area of peatlands is significant at a national and, indeed, at international level.

A deer density of less than 5 per sq km is likely to allow broad swathes of peatland habitats to move in to favourable condition. At present, the greater area of peatlands habitats is in favourable or assured management status, and this is therefore likely to be the case with peatlands outwith the designated sites as well. As indicated in the previous section, no HIA assessments have been made in the peatland habitats outwith designated sites.

The greatest opportunity for ensuring that significant areas of peatlands move in to favourable condition is to ensure a deer density of 5 deer per sq km or less across most of the DMG area, and to try and prevent large landscape scale fires across the area which are very damaging. Gains from any other activities would be negligible in comparison to this.

There is one significant opportunity to potentially expand the peatland area on Ben Loyal estate by clearing two conifer plantations and restocking these elsewhere. The area of these plantations extends to several hundred hectares, but the significant outcome is likely to be a better usage of the surrounding area by breeding wetland birds if these particular woodlands were no longer there.

To date, no requests have been made to the Group to contribute to River Basin Management Planning.

**Actions**

*PIA 6.1 Achieve and maintain a broad target deer density of 5 deer per sq km or less across the DMG area. This should now broadly be the case already.*
PIA 6.2 Achieve the reduction in herbivore impacts to woodland sites suggested earlier in this section of the document by the end of the first five year period of the plan.

PIA 6.3 Discourage any burning that might impact on peatland sites.

PIA 6.4 Contribute to River Basin Management Planning as appropriate when requests to do so are forthcoming.

Reduce or mitigate the risk of invasive, non-native species
A non-native deer policy is included earlier in this plan. This includes a section on sika deer, which are considered to be an asset to a number of properties within the southern part of the DMG.

Action
PIA 7.1 Cull spreading sika deer in order to contain the current population in the southern part of the group.

PIA 7.2 Monitor woodland habitats in the south of the Group to establish if there is any evidence for sika numbers increasing there to unsustainable levels. This to be achieved by Group members, with advice from SNH as required. In practice, it is likely that an increasing population will export individuals to be culled in migration corridors to the west and to the north.

Protection of Historic and Cultural Features
There are likely to be many thousands of sites throughout the DMG area that have archaeological or cultural importance. It is likely that for the majority of these that light grazing by deer and sheep will be beneficial in keeping back rank vegetation growth. At present, the DMG are not aware of any cultural sites that are being negatively impacted by grazing. A greater threat to such features will be woodland creation projects that do not ensure adequate buffer zones around such features, or other development projects.

Actions
PIA 8.1 The DMG will maintain communication with the local community and look to address any issues that are identified with regards to sites of cultural interest and herbivore grazing.

PIA 8.2 As required by Forestry Commission, all potential woodland creation projects, including natural regeneration schemes, will be assessed by the applicants for any negative impacts on cultural or archaeological sites.
Delivering higher standards of competence in deer management

A training policy and audit is provided earlier in this document.

Of the 29 personnel who are involved in deer management, 27 have DMQ Level 1, 16 have DMQ Level 2, and 17 have trained hunter status. Only three personnel are on the Fit & Competent register, but this is a reflection of the low number of deer culled out of season or at night by estate staff.

One significant feature in the group is that a number of individuals are not clear how “trained hunter” status is defined, or what the Fit & Competent register is.

There is a particular issue within the DMG area, mentioned by estates and community representatives alike, which is unregulated deer culling/poaching, and the public safety concerns that have on occasion arisen from this. This has more to do with enforcement and local policing than competence as such, but it is an issue that should be addressed within the area.

Staff within the DMG area have a wide variety of other qualifications and certificates covering other aspects of their work. These include ATV, Argocat, First Aid, Chainsaw, digger, water bailiff, Health & safety, boat handling and VHF telemetry. There does appear to be quite a strong ethos of training and staff improvement across many of the properties within the DMG.

**Action Point**

PIA 9.1 Clarify the definitions of “trained hunter” status and Fit & Competent register for all Group personnel, and look to ensure that all personnel hold trained hunter status by the end of 2016.

PIA 9.2 Maintain communication with Community Councils and Grazing committees in relation to any concerns that they may have in relation to unregulated deer culling activities, involving the local police where necessary.

Contribute to Public Health and wellbeing

Deer Vehicle Collisions are regarded as not being a significant issue throughout most of the DMG area, with the possible exception of Kinlochbervie. There are a number of stretches of road within the DMG where deer are well known to be in close proximity to the road at night, such as Strathnaver, but they are not regarded as being a significant problem as such.

Food safety and meat hygiene is best maintained through appropriate training and facilities, and a high proportion of personnel within the Group have Trained Hunter status. All properties operate their larder facilities to Best Practice standards.

The Trained Hunter training allows personnel to be able to identify any notifiable diseases in deer found in the area. It is not thought that any such problems have been identified in recent years. In any incidences that do occur, the carcase will be held back from the food chain and a veterinary surgeon asked to inspect.

Members are aware of the threat of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in deer being imported from North America, and ADMG and BDS guidance on this has been circulated to the Group.
All members are reminded to be aware of the risk of tick borne diseases, especially Lyme’s Disease, and to communicate such risks to guests and members of the public who might frequent their land through suitable channels.

There are relatively few access/deer conflicts within the Group area, with Ben Hope being the only location where numbers of visitors impact upon deer management. The estate involved has adjusted their management/expectations accordingly. Highland Council access officers do not consider there to be any difficult situations from their perspective within the DMG.

It is considered that access management is not a priority consideration for the majority of group members, and no particular action points are associated with this at the moment. The access path up to Ben Hope is badly degraded, and addressing this and better signage may mitigate visitor/deer interactions there to some extent.

A number of Group members already promote access and provide good information for the public.

**Action Points**

*PIA 10.1* Maintain communication with local Community Councils re: DVCs and look to implement any mitigation which may be deemed helpful in reducing local risk, particularly at Kinlochbervie.

*PIA 10.2* DMG to clarify “Trained Hunter” status and ensure that all have attained this by end of 2016.

*PIA 10.3* Remind DMG members on an annual basis about the dangers of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and individual members to ensure safety precautions are taken by anyone who has had recent contact with deer or habitats in North America.

*PIA 10.4* DMG to highlight the risks of ticks and Lyme’s Disease to their guests and the public more generally through all appropriate channels.

*PIA 10.5* DMG to work with SNH and Highland Council re: improving access track at Ben Hope.

*PIA 10.6* Group members and DMG to all promote a positive and welcoming message to all those visiting the area throughout the year.

**Maximize Economic benefits associated with deer**

Allowing that a proportion of the stag cull is a management cull only, it is estimated that the direct sporting value of the stag cull in the NWSDMG area is approx £210,000 annually. Up to one third of the hind cull is likely to be taken with sporting guests, the value of which might be £70-90,000 annually.

In both cases, extra value will be obtained from a number of estates through letting of accommodation and other ancillary services, and this can reasonably be expected to be equivalent to the letting fees outlined above. In total therefore, the sporting value of deer stalking in the area is likely to amount to approx £600,000.

Based on a cull of 515 stags, 610 hinds and 265 calves (2012-13 cull), it is estimated that
the total value of venison produced within the group area is approx £150,000 annually. This does not take account of the fact that a number of properties market a proportion of their venison directly within the area, and a number of small game/ fish dealers operate in close proximity to the group.

The total direct economic value of deer management within the NW Sutherland area is therefore likely to be in the region of £750,000 annually, this before any economic multipliers are considered. The majority of sporting estates will also consider their overall capital value to be related to the numbers of stags that can be culled, this now becoming proportionately more important as incomes from river management come under pressure, and many in- hand sheep stocks have been cleared off the ground.

Within the NWS DMG area, there are currently 29 full time jobs that are either fully or partially involved with deer management. In the latter situation, income from deer management often allows the position as a whole to remain viable. This figure does not include extra seasonal ghillies that are taken on for the main sporting season, or support staff dealing with accommodation, bookings or other necessary support services. By far the most significant other interest is management of fisheries, and for a number of employees, this forms the greater part of their job. Deer are often important in this situation as a fall back option, and from the perspective that fishing, stalking and accommodation are often closely integrated in to an overall package. The opportunity to have the chance to stalk can often be important to the overall package, whether a deer is actually taken up or not.

Livestock management, general estate work, forestry and rangering are other important activities for those also involved with management of deer. Habitat impact monitoring is also becoming a key and integral part of the remit of many employees in the area.

A number of properties within the group who do not obtain any sporting value from deer management will regard such activity as an overall net cost to their own management objectives, and would no doubt readily forego any income derived from deer management. This cost will however largely be expressed in terms of wages spent in the local area, funded directly or indirectly from the public purse in most although not all circumstances.

Opportunities to add value to deer management
The most significant opportunities for increasing the value of deer in the area probably relate to deer watching.

The gradual drift of deer towards the periphery of the Group and centres of population has been welcomed by many who run B & Bs and other tourist related businesses. They generally welcome opportunities to see wildlife in and around where they are based.

The Wildland proposals are centred on providing an increased variety of wildlife in the area, with added provision for accessing this. Deer will likely still be a very important component of that. Marketed properly, this should become a significant visitor attraction in the area.

It has been suggested that availability of sporting opportunities should be more readily available to hotels in the area, and the DMG could potentially play a role in that.

Action Points

PIA 11.1 Increase awareness of the value of deer in and around areas of population, to emphasize the point that deer in these areas provide positive outcomes as well as some negative ones.
Larder/ infrastructure sharing

A number of smaller properties would like to see more co-ordinated use of larders within their areas, possibly linked in with home butchering of lambs, although current legislation would make that difficult at present.

Discussions have taken place elsewhere in the Group in the past in relation to larder sharing, and collaboration does occur in some areas.

Action Point

PIA 11.3 Investigate the potential for joint venison/lamb use of larders during the first 2-3 years of this plan. If appropriate, DMG to consider SRDP funding to help deliver.

Minimize the economic costs of deer management

For virtually all of the properties within the DMG area, deer management is just one of many activities that they are involved in, and the costs of employing staff, maintaining houses and estate infrastructure will be spread across a number of different enterprises or interests, with staff undertaking different activities at different times of year. The proportions of time spent on different activities, including deer management, will vary between properties. No-one spends all of their time on deer. Indeed, few, if any, spend most of their time on deer, but the overall infrastructure of staff, housing, roads and equipment must be maintained to allow deer management to be undertaken and to be effective.

There is no accurate data reflecting the costs of providing this within the DMG, nor should we anticipate that properties would try and differentiate out their costs relating solely to deer management in this way. Many larger businesses and organizations struggle to attribute their overheads in any significant manner between enterprises or areas of interest, and it would not be realistic to expect small, highly integrated rural businesses to do so.

At a DMG level, there are 29 personnel directly involved in deer management as a key part of their job. Terms and conditions will vary, but if an average cost of employing a staff member of £40,000 is used (to include vehicle costs etc), then a broad brush cost of £1,160,000 could be attributed to maintaining the very basic infrastructure of staff and equipment within the area, necessary for allowing deer management to be delivered to a satisfactory level. In addition to this, in any one year, there will be very significant investment in upgrading buildings or facilities, to be used in conjunction with deer management or for other activities. This is likely to amount to several times the above cost in any one year.

The cost of maintaining staff within the area is likely to be greater than income brought in from deer alone (£1,160,000 vs £750,000, see above), but this does not account for income from other sources. For example, on a number of properties, income from fishing lets is at least as important as income from deer, and in some cases, it is very much more, delivered by the same staff. The broad figures do not allow for economic multipliers within the local economy, and having a resident and reliable point of contact in these properties helps with overall maintenance and security and therefore protects the capital value of the properties as assets.
Almost all of the members of the DMG will regard the cost of employment and maintaining infra-structure as the necessary price that has to be paid to manage these properties, and that income from deer is an important part of the funding equation that allows these people in particular to remain. With other sources of income, a number will certainly be running as profitable businesses. Others will accept a net annual cost as being necessary to maintain or improve their overall asset.

Within the NWS group members, there are four properties where deer management would be regarded as more of a cost than an opportunity, but even here, the distinctions may not be clear cut.

*Forest Enterprise* manage their conifer plantation at Borgie Forest. A full time ranger is employed, and extensive perimeter deer fences must be maintained against deer. There will be a considerable net cost to doing this, but Borgie Forest also provides a recreational asset that is not replicated anywhere else in this part of Sutherland, and it would be accepted that, effectively an island, there is no other way of maintaining this, and that deer are a natural part of a forest ecosystem and need to be managed. Having a ranger on site allows a number of other activities to be promoted and maintained. It would be questionable if such a position would be maintained or justified if deer management input was not required.

*John Muir Trust* do not derive any sporting income from deer, and management objectives focus on control of numbers. However, deer are considered an integral part of the overall ecology, and the need for management is acknowledged and respected. An employee to manage the property is likely to be retained anyway. Deer stalking is a good way to see the ground, and the important habitats local to them are generally in favourable or recovering condition.

The *Ministry of Defence* at Cape Wrath would consider the management of deer to be an overall cost, but, in the absence of sheep, deer are required there to maintain an acceptable level of grazing on the range. Those personnel undertaking deer management look forwards to the opportunity, and do so largely within their own time.

*Balnakiel farm* cull deer primarily to reduce competition for grazing resources and feed for their sheep. Management is undertaken as and when necessary as situations arise by on site staff. As such, effort expended in culling deer can be varied depending on the pressure at any one time, and is within their own overall control. There is no suggestion that this effort is begrudged.

The interesting interaction between deer and other land uses arises on crofted ground around the perimeter of the group. Good quality land is very restricted, being less than two percent of the total area, and is a powerful draw to the crofted areas in the spring months in particular. Crofters have the right to protect their crops and grass against marauding deer, and there is no doubt that very significant damage can be caused by a large number of animals on a small area, even over one night.

In recent years, the numbers of active crofters have declined significantly, sheep numbers have declined by up to 60% in many areas and, of those crofters that remain, many are only keeping a small number of animals to maintain their interest. In these areas, competition from deer has become less important, efforts to control deer are not employed to any great extent, and deer are starting to become resident in those areas. The most active crofters that currently remain are to be found mostly in the Durness area, and the north and middle areas of Strathnaver, and around Tongue and Skerray/ Borgie. In these latter areas, deer numbers
are considered to be within acceptable limits by the grazing committees, but at Durness, Tongue and Strathnaver, pressure from deer does cause problems and expense, despite crofters having the right to control them. Part of the problem is that deer are becoming resident on other nearby low ground areas because other crofters now have no need to control them, but even where this is not the case, deer will readily travel several miles overnight to visit grass fields where they have the opportunity, simply because there is a time delay before grass has grown sufficiently on the open hill.

Crofters in these areas can, to some extent, plan their activities around deer, knowing what crops would constitute too high a risk, and they do generally accept that deer will continue to exist locally and will always have to be allowed for.

There is no data available on the net costs of deer on these crofted areas. This is compounded by the fact that little or no information is collated on the extent of deer culled on these properties. An important action to implement going forwards must therefore be to try and work with Grazing Committees to collate such information, determine the scale of any conflicts that exist, and see if action can then be taken to mitigate against this.

One interesting footnote is the situation that exists on the Melness Crofters Estate, where the property has been bought out by the crofters themselves, and deer management is therefore entirely within their own hands. Their management response on their hill ground has been to maintain largely the same population and expectation of sporting returns as before, and to lease out the stalking which is an important part of their overall finances. It might be implied from this that whatever problems deer generate on lower ground, that this is an issue that people are willing to put up with or deal with, and that the wider value of maintaining a deer herd to the local economy is in fact acknowledged within the wider community, at least when they have the opportunity to benefit directly from that.

**Action Points**

**PIA 12.1** DMG to assess the current PACEC survey in to the value/ costs of deer management and extract information from NWS in order to inform more fully the above narrative. Complete and adapt if necessary by spring 2016.

**PIA 12.2** Engage with Grazing Committees to collate deer culled on lower ground, and see what management action might be employed to mitigate against unnecessary expense to crofters, and loss of deer to the deer management group as a whole. Set up communication and reporting structures by spring 2016.

**Ensure effective communication in deer management issues**

It has been a criticism of the Group that communication across the area has been poor in the past, and this current plan is one of a number of actions that the DMG are now taking to address this.

The Deer Management Plan, minutes of meetings and other relevant information is being made available on the ADMG website at: XXXXXX

Grazing committees and local community councils to be added to circulation list as appropriate, and one meeting per year to become an open meeting. These local groups will all be notified of meetings in advance and given the opportunity of contributing to Agenda.
Existing opportunities for community involvement and education include school visits, providing outlets for rural skills training from the local High School, guided walks and youth club outings. A number of deer group members provide good interpretation facilities on their properties, and Highland Council, SNH and a variety of local initiatives provide good access and interpretation of local features of cultural or historic value, or of key local landscapes or habitats.

**Action Point**

PIA 13.1 Take forwards those actions outlined in the Communications Policy/ Working Plan by spring 2016

**Ensure Deer welfare at individual and population level**

It is not thought that there are any issues relating to deer welfare at the moment, although a number of people within the area, notably on grazing committees, have expressed concern at the level of unregulated stalking in some areas, and the potential for adverse impacts to individual deer arising from this.

A number of properties feed deer in the winter months to protect vulnerable animals and to keep them in locations where they can be readily monitored. More widely, achieving a deer density that allows habitats to move in to favourable condition is likely to produce a more versatile and resilient natural food supply throughout the year, and reduce the need for artificial feeding.

The restocking and fencing of felled conifer plantations is removing valuable winter shelter from some areas of the range, and this is likely to have an impact on local deer populations in some areas. Some compensatory culling may be required on the back of this.

Training and levels of competence within the Group are generally good.

**Action Points**

PIA 14.1 Engage grazing committees and help support training where appropriate to do so. Try to close down opportunities for unregulated stalking activity through peer pressure.

PIA 14.2 Focus on bringing natural habitats in to favourable condition status.

PIA 14.3 Liaise locally on significant woodland management operations where these affect shelter for deer.

PIA 14.4 Collect deer information within the Group as per agreed recommendations. This will provide animal-specific data which can be monitored and compared to identify potential welfare issues within the area.