

## NORTH WEST SUTHERLAND DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

### AUTUMN MEETING

LAIRG HALL

1<sup>st</sup> November 2017 AT 2PM

### MINUTES

#### Welcome

**Present:** George Woods (Merkland, Chair), Pieter Bakker (Altnaharra, Vice-Chair), Maaïke Silcock (Secretary), Sophie Clark (Gualin), Annette Parrott (West Shinness), David Allison (Reay Forest), Roddy Watt (Merkland), Thomas MacDonell (Wildlands Ltd.), Holly Deary (SNH), Valerie Wilson (SNH), Richard Osborne (Rhiconich), Iain Robertson (MoD Cape Wrath), Ross Peters (Achnabourin), Don O'Driscoll (Sandwood), Naimh O'Driscoll (Sandwood), Derick Sutherland (Shinness), Ian Thompson (Rhigolter).

1. **Apologies:**

Peter Voy (Sutherland), Duncan Shaw (Gualin)

2. **Previous Minutes**

The minutes were taken as read, allowing for a few changes to be made by Thomas MacDonell of Wildland Ltd.

The minutes were proposed by George Woods, seconded by David Allison.

The minutes were approved.

3. **Deer Management Plan Review**

It was agreed that the NWS Deer Management Plan needs updating.

The Plan will change every year depending on Habitat Assessments, Foot Count Numbers and Cull Figures.

It was suggested that a yearly questionnaire could be useful to update the basic information and that Victor Clements may have a format that would work.

There was concern that with Wildland Ltd owning a large section of the Deer Management Group area, that the Plan would not work. Holly (SNH) indicated that it would, that the focus needs to be on the delivery of the plan, rather than the planning of it. There needs to be an increase in collecting evidence and collating the data into the Plan.

Ian Thompson added that Rhigolter has its own, 5 year working plan which records the habitat and deer assessments. He offered to share this format with the Group. Thomas MacDonell agreed that the plan is based on foot count information, and that Victor Clements, would be the best person to update the plan. Wildland's plan is to take Deer numbers down to 5 per square Km or less on all the estates and then to monitor woodland and habitat recovery over 3-5 years. If at the next foot count the

numbers are still high, he will be applying for an 'out of season authorization' to cull. If woodland and other habitats are still not recovering, then other measures may have to be taken, fences for example. Thomas is aware that other estates may have different targets for Deer populations. The impact of other herbivores, namely sheep, should also be looked at.

Roddy Watt also agreed that the plan is out of date and that it should apply to the greater number of large estates as well as the fewer smaller estates.

Richard agreed that the habitat assessments need to be incorporated into the plan. He also thought that the plan is too long and that perhaps an executive summary at the front of the plan with key issues or 'hot spots' may get better attention.

Recording data on a map so that patterns can be seen more clearly was also suggested.

Pieter Bakker suggested an annual questionnaire to help update the plan, but unsure of how the information would be analysed. Holly suggested that SNH could help with this. Holly went on to say that there are grants of £1800 available to support Habitat Impact Assessments, but that only limited time is left for application.

George Woods will ask for a quote from Victor Clements to update the Plan.

SNH will be reviewing how DMGs are implementing their plans and assessing the delivery. In 2019 SNH needs to report back to Scottish Government on progress.

#### 4. **2017 SEASON**

Reay Forest Estate: The Deer are in good condition due to the mild and wet weather. There are more, good quality, middle aged Stags on the Estate. Some areas are showing Heather die back and a few areas of sever trampling. There seems to be a positive effect of the cull.

A cull of 110 was planned, 105 were culled.

West Shinness: A few Stags were shot, mainly Sika.

Achnabourin: Habitats have not been assessed.

Sandwood: Mature Stags in good condition. 11 were shot. Concerned about poaching, in Kinlochbervie 15 Stags were taken.

Rhiconich: 9 Stags were taken including 3 from common grazing. It was suggested that members from the Common Grazing Committee be invited to the Deer Management Meetings or that meetings could be arranged in local Grazing committees to discuss 'Good Practice'.

Gualin: 7 Stags were taken on Gualin and 16 on Keodale. A shortage of mature Stags was reported on Keodale.

Rhigolter: 14 Stags were taken.

MOD Cape Wrath: 17 Stags were taken, though 20 were planned. It has been noted that sheep are moving back onto the Cape.

<u>Wildland Ltd.</u>	<u>Target</u>	<u>Shot</u>
<u>Eribol</u> :	109	112
<u>Hope</u> :	62	62
<u>Kinloch</u> :	26	30
<u>Loyal</u> :	16	54
<u>Melness Crofters</u> :	9	9
<u>Polla</u> :	1	1
<u>Strathmore</u> :	200	141

The 'shot' numbers don't match the 'target' numbers due to deer movement. Deer moved from Strathmore to Loyal therefore the numbers shot on Loyal are higher and the number shot on Strathmore are lower than their targets.

The desired population on Strathmore is 154 Stags and 137 Hinds.

The March count numbers on Strathmore was a total of 560-600 Deer. To get the numbers down, Wildlands might apply for an out of season authorisation to shoot.

Shinness: 4 Stags taken and 1 Sika

Merkland: 16 Stags taken. They were in good condition.

Altnaharra: 60 Stags taken. The habitat was fine, the weather has been terrible, which may be the reason for the Rut being late and short.

Next year's Foot Count was discussed, provisionally taking place at the end of February/early March. Reay Forest and Wildland Ltd to co-ordinate a helicopter count. Whether a foot count could be organised at the same time was suggested and that as much notice as possible would be useful.

## 5. 2017 Cull

	16/17 Stags	16/17 Hinds	16/17 Calves	17/18 Stags
<b>ACHNABOURIN</b>	7	10	3	5
<b>FCS BORGIE</b>	65 & 6 Roe 2 sika	4 & 11 Roe	29 & 10 Roe	No info
<b>HOPE</b>	8	31	11	62
<b>KINLOCH</b>	15	0	0	30
<b>MELNESS CROFTERS</b>	3	0	0	9
<b>NORTH LOCHNAVER</b>	8	12	1	5
<b>SYRE</b>	2	4	1	0
<b>POOLE</b>	-	-	-	
<b>TONGUE</b>	14	34	9	
<b>BEN LOYAL</b>				54
<b>ALTNAHARRA</b>	60	59	33	60
<b>FIAG</b>	6 & 5 sika	1	0	6 & 4 sika
<b>MERKLAND</b>	16	13	4	16
<b>SHINNESS</b>	5 & 1 sika	2 & 6 sika	-	4 & 1 sika
<b>STRATHMORE</b>	80	0	21	141
<b>WEST SHINNESS</b>	14 & 15 sika	30 sika	0	
<b>MOD CAPE WRATH</b>	15	35	0	17
<b>KEODALE</b>	17			16
<b>SANDWOOD</b>	17	18	12	
<b>KINSAILE</b>	0	0	0	
<b>RHICONICH</b>	6	8	7	9
<b>GUALIN</b>	8	0	0	7
<b>RHIGOLTER</b>	11	17	0	14
<b>BALNAKEIL</b>	6	7	0	
<b>RISPOND</b>	-	-	-	
<b>POLLA</b>	-	-	-	1
<b>ERIBOLL</b>	20	107	24	112
<b>REAY-ARKLE</b>	16	46	28	13
<b>REAY-LONE</b>	35	51	24	32
<b>REAY-GOBER</b>	24	21	14	23
<b>REAY-AULT</b>	35	27	13	37

**6. Matters Arising.**

George Woods was proposed as Chairman by David Allison, seconded by Pieter Bakker.

Pieter Bakker agreed to be Vice-Chairman until the Spring meeting, but would then like to resign.

**7. DMG Finances**

The Bank Balance was £4516.16.

It was agreed to increase the levy to £6 per Stag (Red and Sika),

£4 per Hind (Red and Sika)

£2 for calves and Roe (no increase)

**8. SNH Comment**

SNH are focussing their efforts on poorer performing DMGs.

The SSSI site on Foinabhein is in unfavourable condition. Cull targets need to reflect a means to bring Deer numbers down.

The Peatland site on West Strathnaver has an issue with Deer trampling so information on cull target figures for that site would be useful.

**9. ADMG Comment**

E-coli and Chronic Wasting Disease in the deer population are an issue, though they are not causing a concern for public health.

Tissue samples and stool samples from groups could be taken and sent for analysis. Holly has the information of where to send them.

Ardgay Game is being stricter with the condition of the animals, refusing the poorer carcasses. This may put up prices.

Humane dispatch of Deer hurt by traffic. A data base of dispatchers would be useful from local Police.

**10. AOB**

Christopher Fletcher sent information that UNESCO is looking at an area in Caithness and Sutherland for a new World Heritage Site. The area has no boundary yet, but there is a map of the basic areas that could qualify for the site, which would be ecological in nature. Information on the new site may encourage tourists to stay longer in the area.

**11. Date of next meeting**

**Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2018 at 12pm in Lairg.**