

NORTH WEST SUTHERLAND DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

DRAFT Note of Meeting held in Lairg Community Centre

Wednesday 25th March 2015

Present:

Andrew Marsham (AM) – Chairman & Rispond
Pieter Bakker (PB) – Altnaharra & Vice-Chair
Annette Parrott (AP) – West Shinness
Craig Rigby (CR) – North Loch Naver
David Allison (DA) – Reay Forest
Derick Macaskill (DM) – FCS
Derik Sutherland (DS)- Shinnes
Don O’Driscoll (DOD) – JMT Sandwood
Duncan Shaw (DS) - Gualin
Heather Gow (HG) - Strathmore
Henrietta MacGurach – West Shinness
Hugh Montgomery (HM) – Kinloch (Wildland Ltd)
John Spence-(JS) Strathmore
Peter Voy (PV) - Sutherland Estates
Roddy Watt (RW) – Merkland
Ross Peters (RP) – Achnabourin
Thomas MacDonell (TM) – Wildland Ltd

In attendance:

John Dodd (JD) - *Strath tirry*
Valerie Wilson (VW) – SNH
Donald Fraser (DF) - SNH
Victor Clements (VC) – DM Plan Author
April Conroy (AC) – Secretary

Apologies:

James Clark - Eriboll
Richard Osborne – Rhiconich

1. Welcome

The Chairman AM welcomed everyone to the Spring Meeting. Apologies were noted as shown above.

2. Previous Minutes

The Minutes from the last meeting were reviewed, and approved, No issues were raised, and where proposed by DA, seconded by PB.

3. Matters arising

Matters arising were invited. None were raised.

4. Constitution Vote “Does the NWSDMG accept the Constitution put before them?”

AM invited comments on the constitution. HG asked for further time to review it. AM suggested a further 10 days to review and return any issues.

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AM proposed the constitution as circulated, be accepted in principle. No objections were noted. It was passed unanimously, pending a further 10 day review period.

ACTION 1.1: All Members to review the Appendix 1: Constitution and return comments by 4th April 2015.

5. Deer Management Plan (Victor Clements)

VC introduced the components of the NWS DMP and drew attention to the Operating Plan.

VC confirmed that the document, once formally approved would be published via the ADMG website.

VC introduced each of the maps in order opening and describing Maps 1, 2, 3, and 4. Whilst explaining map 5, VC noted that there has been a shift in deer populations towards the coast particularly in areas where there has been a reduction in sheep populations.

Map 6, VC noted the location of the 19 grazing committees & the 6 community councils. He noted some have shown an interest in the activities of the DMG. VC indicated that community engagement with these parties may benefit both.

Map 7, 8, 9 were explained. In looking at map 10, VC indicated that many of the areas shown as red / unfavourable conditions are not always a result of the impact of deer. There may be factors that are not a result of deer management, such as in the Durness area which is impacted by sheep populations.

Map 11, VC commented that although the woodland population looks small on the map the proportional increase in woodland has been a third increase in the last period.

Map 12, VC drew attention to the 4 main clusters of woodland to be addressed in the DMP.

Map 13, VC explained the key.

VC indicated there are 8 appendices. He reviewed each in turn. Appendix 1, the constitution, first. Appendix 2, the contact list, second. VC confirmed that the **contact list remains confidential** to members and that this document would not be published on the ADMG website. Members were encouraged to check their details and confirm the details are correct. VC suggested that this list should be reviewed periodically.

ACTION 1.2: All Members to review their contact details in the Appendix 2: Contact List.

DM asked what constitutes a group member. AM confirmed that a member is a person or estate is involved in the management of deer. VC confirmed that the **members must subscribe**. VC confirmed that non subscribing members should be encouraged to join. VC confirmed that were a vote required, only paid voters would officially have a right to vote.

Appendix 3, listed the designated sites and whether the status is favourable or otherwise. VC reminded that the status may have no relevance to deer, and that the comments from SNH for each site must be read to understand the individual situation.

VC drew attention to the information that should be collected annually via the deer count, each spring.

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VC indicated each spring the cull targets should be agreed in advance. Appendix 5 contains suggested cull targets for 2015 and VC confirmed this document should **remain confidential to members only**.

Appendix 6, monitoring and designated features, VC indicated that those that are not relevant to deer have been 'greyed out' or 'yellow' if the status is a result of sheep only. This focuses attention on the 39 sites where the current status is related to deer many of which are in favourable condition. VC has included an indication of the potential surveying where the site status is unfavourable and is relevant to deer.

Appendix 7, contains population data starting with the helicopter survey data. He indicated for example, that the North West and North East may benefit from a lighter cull for a period. TM asked for clarification. VC indicated that each of the areas in NW and NE had increased their cull slightly over previous years and adding this to the higher cull in the wild land ltd, it creates a collectively increased deer cull.

VC commented that the south group, would be advised to continue as they do now and only review the situation after the next helicopter count.

Appendix 8, shows the habitats within the group boundaries and that this data was derived by taking ariel photography and then classifying the land use.

VC indicated that the largest document, containing all of the policies is entitled 'NW Sutherland DMP – Background Information'. VC drew attention to the paragraph describing each estate area and he asked that each member review the descriptions and feedback any revisions required as soon as possible especially as this document will be published to the public.

ACTION 1.3: All Members to review the description of their estate.

VC indicated that the table on page 29 should be updated each year, when cull targets are agreed.

Page 41, leaves a space for a URL where the DMP will be published. This may be the ADMG website.

VC commented on the number of trained staff to Level 1 and Level 2 Deer Management Qualification Standard was higher in NW Sutherland than in many other groups.

VC summarised that the important function for the group will be to decide how to take forward the actions from the DMP. VC commented that there are lots of activities taking place that contribute to this. The DMP is a document that should be discussed and revised as it is taken forward.

AM invited questions.

RP thanked the Steering Group and Victor Clements for producing the plan and collating such a large amount of valuable information.

AM noted the contributions in particular of Heather Gow and Pieter Bakker.

DOD asked whether there was anything in the plan for Bracken and whether it was still possible to get funding. VC commented that this may be a localised issue as it did not come up at a group level.

ACTION 1.4: All Members to send back all final comments on the constitution & DMP no later than the 4th April 2015.

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6. Deer Management Plan Vote “Does the NWSDMG accept the Deer Management Plan put before them?”

AM proposed that the group agree the plan in principle, pending a further 10 days for review. No objections were raised. Unanimous support was shown.

7. SNH comments (Valerie)

VW reiterated that a great deal of work has gone into collating the information in the report, with particular thanks to Victor and Pieter.

VW commented that we are in a new era in which there is more scrutiny of DMPs and in particular community interests, which SNH will look to follow up. VW suggested that in the future, meetings may take on a different format, in particular seeking more discussion and involvement and may include external parties.

VC noted the large improvements in the status of many areas within NW Sutherland and that this was a credit to many of those within the Group.

VW suggested the role for SNH going forward was in a role of support and advice.

DF commented that NWS is one of 46 DMGs in Scotland and that the production of this DMP was not a localised activity. This is significant for the Deer Management Community nationally. In 2016, this will be reviewed nationally and that NWS will be well placed. The key activity is now to adopt and take forward the DMP.

8. DMG Finances

AC provided a brief overview of the status of current payments of the DMP Levy, 2013/14 Levy and the invoices now due.

TM asked for clarification on the payment due for Melness Crofters.

VC commented that the deer cull figures that he had collated would now be passed to the secretary so that the 2014/15 levy invoices could now be issued.

9. Comments and questions

AM proposed that the Steering Group should be taken forward and to take forward the actions in the DMP. AM invited any current members to resign and others to step forward. No changes were suggested. AM suggested the group be taken forward. All agreed.

AM thanked Mrs Gow for 20 years as the group secretary with a gift. AM noted that Mrs Gow's contributions have been far and wide and that including her recent contributions to the DMP.

AM notified the group that he would not be accepting a nomination for Chairman at the AGM Meeting in November.

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| ACTION 1.5: Consider nominations for Chairman |
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10. AOCB

None raised.

11. Date of next meeting

TM noted that the population modelling looked at the percentage of recruitment within an area and that this should be reviewed. AM suggested a recruitment percentage should be surveyed in May. VC suggested that a few spot surveys, noting down the make-up of a group whenever and wherever spotted.

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| ACTION 1.6: Recruitment percentages to be noted and returned for May 2015. |
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Next Steering Group Meeting to take place on Friday 29th May at 10 am at the SHN Office in Golspie. *VW to confirm a room is available.*

The DMG AGM Wed 28th October 2pm in Lairg Village Hall.

AP has confirmed a room in Lairg Village Hall.

Nominations for the Chair will be welcomed prior to the meeting.

DA requested that Action points be numbered and reported going forward.

CLOSE 15:45