

Autumn Meeting

Lairg Hall
26th October 2016 at 2 pm

MINUTES DRAFT

1 Welcome

Present: Richard Cooke (ADMG, Chair), Pieter Bakker (Altnaharra, vice- Chair), Victor Clements (acting secretary), Duncan Shaw (Gualin), David Allison (REay Forest), Annette parrott (West Shinness), Thomas McDonnell (Wildland Ltd), Craig Rigby (Syre/ North Lochnaver), Peter Voy (Sutherland Estates), Roddy Watt (Merkland), Iain Robertson (MoD), Valerie Wilson (SNH)

Richard Cooke of ADMG chaired the meeting in the absence of George Woods. Although advertised as the AGM, this meeting was not actually such, the AGM taking place in the spring time to tie in with end of financial year.

2 Apologies

George Woods (Merkland), Charles Worsley (Fiag), David Elliot (Rhigolter), Ross peters (Achnabourin), Richard Osborne (Rhiconich), Holly Deary (SNH), Sebastian Green (Syre/ North Lochnaver), Derick McAskill (FES), Don O'Driscoll (JMT).

3 Previous Minutes

The minutes were taken as read, allowing for one change of wording suggested by Holly Deary of SNH. Proposed by David Allison, seconded by Pieter Bakker.

4 Matters Arising (office bearers)

As it was not the AGM, office bearers were not discussed. PB indicated a willingness to step down at the next opportunity. The Group did not have a secretary at present, and it was important to address this. David Allison, Thomas McDonnell and Peter Voy all had some options which they agreed to follow up on and report back.

VC would deal with administration work until further notice in an interim capacity, and would provide a specification for the secretary position.

5 DMG Finances

An up to date account was not available, but it is believed that all subscriptions had been received and that there was a significant buffer in the finances at present.

6 2016-17 Season

The stag season on Syre/ North Lochnaver had been very poor with only a few animals culled.

Reay Forest had a good season, achieving target nos of animals. Weather had been excellent. Hind cull set for winter in line with projections.

Since the spring meeting, Wildland Ltd had confirmed the purchases of Strathmore, Eriboll and Polla, and confirmed that they also had a more formal arrangement with Tongue estate for deer management on that property. The culls on existing properties were in line with projections. The priority on the new properties was to set an appropriate hind cull for the coming winter. Large stag numbers had therefore not been sought this year.

Gualin was down in numbers, but Keodale was OK.

Merkland had slightly fewer stags than normal, with no big groups, but overall reasonable numbers of animals.

The MoD had culled their normal nos of stags, and regarded the season as a good one.

Tongue culled no stags.

Altnaharra achieved their nos, but the age structure was not as expected, with very few middle aged animals. Few animals on their northern boundaries.

Achnabourin reported achieving their usual cull. A reasonable season.

7 Deer Management Plan (VC)

VC Chaired this item, and all progress against the Working Plan is noted in the updated October 2016 Working Plan document. ***Please refer to Working Plan for important action points and updates on progress.***

The priority task for the group was to organize a foot count in spring 2017, which Peter Voy agreed to take forwards, and would set up a pre-count meeting to discuss how this was to be done.

VC to update population models based on 2016 count data to advise on hind cull and distribute.

Merkland would reduce their hind cull a bit to protect stocks following management changes on neighbouring ground.

Syre too would reduce hind cull as their numbers were under very significant pressure.

Reay Forest would be targeting their hind cull on Foinavon SSSI/ SAC.

NORTH WEST SUTHERLAND DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Wildland distributed their intended hill cull. There would be reduction culls on Eriboll and Strathmore, to bring densities down to below 5 per sq km over two seasons. Modest reduction culls would be taking place on Loyal and Hope estates, with no reduction hind culls being anticipated on Polla, Melness Crofters estate or Kinloch, all of which were currently at or below required densities.

A farming plan for Eriboll would be available by the spring time. There would be stock fences so that sheep could be managed, but no deer fences.

8 SNH Comment

The properties surrounding Foinavon SSSI/ SAC had met in June, agreed action points and cull levels, and agreed to sign a Statement of Intent as to how they would progress with this in the next 3-4 seasons. The Sol had yet to be signed by several properties and this was being pursued.

9 ADMG Comment

Good progress was being made with deer plans but ADMG wary of complicated politics. It was important to keep people motivated, and to maintain high levels of oversight and transparency. 33 X plans were available online. It was important to maintain communications outwith groups. Strong group leadership is important.

ADMG positive about the 2 X experienced cabinet secretaries, and the balance was good.

The new Scottish Parliament committee seems to be well balanced.

10 AOCB

Mention was made of the non-participating members of group, with the turn out for this meeting relatively low. However, it was the case that all cull information had been collected, subscriptions received and spring counting had taken place on all but 2-3 properties. In these respects, the key functions of the group were still working.

11 Date of next meeting

Wed 24th May, 2pm, Lairg.