

# NORTH WEST SUTHERLAND DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

LAIRG COMMUNITY CENTRE

Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2019

## MINUTES

### **Present:**

Pieter Bakker (PB)	<i>Vice-Chair – Altnaharra</i>	Thomas MacDonell (TM)	<i>Wildland Ltd</i>
Annette Parrott (AP)	<i>West Shinness</i>	David Allison (DA)	<i>Reay Forest</i>
Sophie Clark (SC)	<i>RISM – Gualin</i>	Duncan Shaw (DS)	<i>RISM – Gualin</i>
Charles Worsley (CW)	<i>Fiag</i>	Derick Sutherland (DS)	<i>Shinness</i>
Andrew Robinson (AR)	<i>Forestry &amp; Land Scotland</i>	David Shaw (DS)	<i>Keoldale</i>
Stewart Gillies (SG)	<i>MOD Cape Wrath</i>	Don O'Driscoll (DoD)	<i>JMT - Sandwood</i>
Iain Robertson (IR)	<i>MOD/D10 Cape Wrath</i>	Lawrence Macleod (LM)	<i>Achriesgill Grazings</i>

### **In Attendance:**

Tom Chetwynd (TC)	<i>Chair – ADMG</i>	Kirsty MacLeod (KGM)	<i>Secretary</i>
Victor Clements (VC)	<i>DMP Author</i>	Valerie Wilson (VW)	<i>SNH</i>
Holly Deary (HD)	<i>SNH</i>		

### **1. Chairman's Welcome**

TC welcomed everyone to the meeting.

DA proposed that NWSDMG should extend condolences to the Polvsen family following their recent tragic loss. This was supported by all, and acknowledged by TM who said he would pass this on.

### **2. Apologies**

Richard Osborne	<i>Rhiconich</i>	Roddy Watt	<i>Merkland</i>
Robert McHardy	<i>Poole</i>	Christopher Fletcher	<i>Shinness</i>
Martin Mackay	<i>Keoldale Stock Club</i>	Stefaan Antheunis	<i>Achnabourin</i>
David Elliot	<i>Rhigolter</i>	Barbara Sutherland	<i>Durness Grazings</i>

### **3. Minutes of the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2018**

The minutes were approved with no changes - proposed by DA, seconded by TM and AP.

### **4. Matters Arising – per agenda**

### **5. Steering Group Meeting**

Minutes of the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> March were circulated. The DMP was discussed in detail, including the potential use of sub-groups, counting and Habitat monitoring.

**Counting:** Some counting on bi-annual or annual basis. It was acknowledged that we cannot rely on SNH to carry out count so need to consider options. A paper with proposals for counting is to be delivered to the next Steering Group meeting in July.

**Deer Movement:** Large map to be provided to go over movement routes – apparent that deer are moving further and further

**Habitat Monitoring:** VC had attended the meeting as facilitator (as he was today). He had contacted all estates last year and put together a map to indicate where we are and hotspots.

However, there are many different methodologies and VC felt it would be beneficial to do the same thing, or at least the same timescale if not method. There was no need for training as everyone was doing HIA. There were some hotspots, three clusters around Foinaven, Shinness and West Strathnaver. The group is a little away from producing a meaningful HIA, there needs to be a plan of what we are doing for the next five years, with a balance of how often. Monitoring is not required every year. The key thing is everyone collecting data in the same format. There are different recording sheets for Blanket Bog and Dwarf Shrub Heath – comparable sheets would be fine if not the same sheets.

Amendments to the Steering Group meeting minutes were requested by TM (4.2 & 4.5) and PB (4.6)  
ACTION 1 – KGM to recirculate as draft.

A large part of the meeting had been taken up discussing Out of Season Authorisations (OOS) with particular reference to Loyal. TM stated that occupancy of herbivores in habitats is the issue. Desired global populations could be reached, but the deer could be in areas they are not wanted and they need to prevent damage – OOS is a tool sometimes required, it is not for mass culling. TM confirmed he would be applying again this year.

TC asked if there should be a protocol for sharing OOS applications within the Group. TM agreed that the submission of an application could be shared, but there would be no time to discuss and agree beforehand. Applications can be made publicly available. In the spirit of openness and collaboration SNH expect information within applications to be shared with the DMG. It is SNH's job to approve or not. Further discussion followed.

ACTION 2 – Draft protocol will be agreed at the next Steering Group Meeting in July.

## 6. 2018/19 Season

Cull table was circulated. KGM advised that West Shinness figures had been received but were missing from the table. Correct version to be circulated with the minutes.

***Hind season, Mortalities and Recruitment*** – Members present gave a brief summary of the hinds season. Variations in number of pregnant hinds seen. Relatively kind winter overall but reduced calving rates. Mortalities reported as being low after a relatively kind winter. Recruitment rates not all available yet. Reay Forest 22%, Shinness 28%, Altnaharra higher than expected with late calves, foetuses small.

There followed extensive discussion on counting strategy. Commitment was needed from the group to count and contribute rather than rely on Wildland and Reay, and SNH. VC stressed that the next count has to be a good helicopter count which would transform level of knowledge and modelling for next few years. SNH indicated that NWSDMG was still a priority for counting in winter 2019/2020 given the count had not been undertaken earlier this year. There was further discussion within the group about the pros and cons of a summer count and SNH indicated that if this was the Group preference then they should present the case to SNH. If DMGs can set in place how they will plan and fund counting in future, SNH would view this favourably. VC commented that the 2012 count must have been an underestimate, as the numbers culled since would otherwise not have been possible. Possibly some were hidden in forestry.

It was agreed to:

- 1) Make the case for full SNH funding for 2020 count
- 2) Set out future funding options to count at 3-5 year intervals

ACTION 3 – TC to prepare paper for next meeting

*2019/20 Cull Targets* – Targets varied from maintenance, same as last year, slightly lower or slightly more.

***Wildland Report***

A report prepared by Wildland had been circulated ahead of the meeting, outlining strategy, target densities and estimated culls. TC noted that estimated density was 2.9 deer/sq.km vs desired level of 4.0 deer per sq. km. CW found the report confusing, and painted a gloomy picture over the whole NWSDMG area.

ACTION 4 – TM will re-send report with amended cull targets for 2019/20 as there was an error in one of the tables

## 7. Deer Management Plan

**Habitat monitoring** – VC highlighted the need to agree the programme going forward and get buy in on that. This year’s monitoring would be piecemeal again. Results need to be collated annually. KGM has undertaken GIS mapping training through Coigach Assynt Living Landscapes Programme (CALLP) and should be able to do this in-house going forward, with VC’s input initially.

There was further discussion on monitoring and resources. HD suggested a collaborative approach, there are economies of scale, not all sites need to be monitored every year.

There was agreement for VC to be retained as consultant to co-ordinate HIS programme/help with co-ordinated approach along with Secretary. VC said he would still push for similar methodology to make it easier to input to spreadsheet and then map. HD reminded that the map’s red spots should be used to inform cull targets.

ACTION 5 – Steering Group to bring recommendations to the next DMG meeting. More members welcome on the Steering Group.

**Designated sites** – VW confirmed hot spots were Foinaven, Cnoc an Alaskie and West Strathnaver SSSIs. Site Condition Monitoring is no longer scheduled, but they are still visiting sites to check/walk over. Programme for Sitecheck in 2019 is to check Druim na Coibe SSSI. The previously mentioned intention to monitor Inverhope SSSI has been cancelled.

**Deer/Vehicle Collisions** – some reported. Kinlochbervie seems to be a hot spot, with more deer being seen in the village. VW mentioned deer crossing at West Strathnaver. Sarah Harkins representing Kinlochbervie estate had expressed interest in participating in DMG, having been inactive previously. KGM asked for email address for Sarah Harkins to add to circulation list. TC mentioned experience of working with non-members to deal with particular issues.

## 8. 2019 Assessment

The last assessments were in 2014 and 2016, and there was a Health Check in 2018. DA had attended the assessment meeting with TM and reported that some areas had changed up to green or down to red. The areas marked down are those discussed today, mainly ambers and reds. The perception is we are not looking after our deer properly which is upsetting. VC had also attended and felt the assessment was reasonably good, although NWSDMG was close to the bottom in terms of the “league table”. TM confirmed they all felt it was fair, and a few points had been conceded by SNH at the meeting. HD said any changes were agreed in the meeting, and it was a positive that discussions today were in the areas which had been flagged up. HD reminded the group that it is important to use the information you have to inform what you do.

PB highlighted the changes in the group, with members not previously participating, estate sales etc., which have affected DMG performance. HD said all DMGs face different challenges but similar ones on the whole. VW pointed out that the third column – Future Actions – is the one to focus on.

## 9. Administration Proposal

TC said this was potentially his last meeting as Chair, and members needed to think of a new Chair to take things forward after the Autumn elections. PB was standing down as Vice Chair after today.

This was an item for the Steering Group meeting in July: Roles of Steering Group, Chair and Secretary. Some felt a professional chair was the best way forward. TC would consider this if there was a Chair/Secretary/Facilitator arrangement. VC recommended a recognised leader for each sub-area, named as Vice Chairs, who could step in as Chair at meetings possibly on a rolling basis. VC highlighted the benefits of stalkers chairing as discussions tended to be more practical.

ACTION 6 – TC to prepare proposal outlining role of committee, calendar (schedule of meetings and work) and associated costs (5 year budget).

KGM noted that levy may need to be increased to cover additional costs. These should be fairly consistent, other than helicopter count every 3 years.

#### 10. SNH Report

SNH will report to Scottish Government in Autumn this year on progress made across the DMG assessments. SNH working closely with ADMG on DMG progress, regulatory issues etc. The ScotGov Deer Working Group would be reporting in the autumn (postponed from May). HD felt today's meeting had been positive overall, with good discussion. VW noted that it was good to see some new faces.

#### 11. ADMG

ADMG was fully involved in the Deer Review and would hopefully assist in a fair outcome.

**Sporting Rates** – majority of forestry ones agreed.

**ADMG levy** – no plan to increase this year.

**Socio-Economic Study** - this had first been discussed at November 2018 NWSMDG meeting. A scoping report had been provided by SNH, and ADMG were now taking this forward with a wider range than just NWS. It was becoming more complex the more it was considered. TM noted that Wildland were not happy about ADMG taking this over, and all sources of income, including grants and wind farms would need to be taken into account. VC and TC are leading this for ADMG, the principal and format not the actual detail. ACTION 7 – Socio-Economic Study to be discussed further at Steering Group meeting.

#### 12. Accounts

A summary of Accounts was circulated. ADMG levy for 2 years shown in last year's figures due to late reporting. Cash balance was just under £5000, once unpaid invoices settled. NWSDMG income varies as levies charged on last season's cull figures, while ADMG levy is calculated on a 5 year average. Non-members are not included in ADMG levy invoice, although these culls could be shown on the table for information (they are not currently). 2019 Invoices will be sent out soon.

ACTION 8 – Non-member cull figures to be included in table (KGM)

#### 13. AOCB

**Flow Country application to become a World Heritage Site** - TM gave a brief description of the proposal, which might affect various developments being proposed. TM is on the steering group, and asked for assistance for the Project Officer who was having difficulty contacting estate owners. It was agreed that NWSDMG could circulate information.

**Wild Fire Action Plan** – DA highlighted the need for an Action Plan. If people need help they should ask for it via the Secretary. Information should be presented in a one-sheet format.

ACTION 9 – Steering Group to agree Wild Fire Action Plan sheet (prepared by KGM)

#### 14. Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November at 10:30am, Lairg Community Centre

Meeting ended at 13:30

**Attachments:**

<b><i>Detail</i></b>	<b><i>Version</i></b>
Minutes of Steering Group Meeting on 26 <sup>th</sup> March 2019	June 2019
Cull Table	June 2019
Accounts Summary	May 2019

**Action Points agreed: 30<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

<b><u>Ref:</u></b>	<b><u>Detail</u></b>	<b><u>Action</u></b>
<b>AP 1</b>	Minutes of March 2019 Steering Group meeting to be recirculated as draft following amendments agreed.	<b>Secretary</b>
<b>AP 2</b>	Draft protocol for informing members of OOS application submissions to be discussed at the next Steering Group Meeting in July	<b>Steering Group</b>
<b>AP 3</b>	Paper to be prepared re. Helicopter Count including case for SNH count in 2020 and three year rolling programme, for consideration at Steering Group meeting July 2019	<b>TC</b>
<b>AP 4</b>	Wildland Report to be re-sent with amended cull targets for 2019/20	<b>TM</b>
<b>AP 5</b>	Steering Group to bring recommendations for HIA Monitoring Programme to the next DMG meeting	<b>Steering Group</b>
<b>AP 6</b>	DMG Administration Proposal outlining role of committee, calendar (schedule of meetings and work) and associated costs (5 year budget)	<b>TC</b>
<b>AP 7</b>	Socio Economic Study to be discussed further at Steering Group meeting	<b>Steering Group</b>
<b>AP 8</b>	Non-member cull figures to be included in cull table in future	<b>Secretary</b>
<b>AP 9</b>	Steering Group to agree Wild Fire Action Plan (single sheet)	<b>Secretary/ Steering Group</b>