**NORTH WEST SUTHERLAND DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP**

**LAIRG COMMUNITY CENTRE**

**Wednesday 20th November at 1:30pm**

DRAFT MINUTES

***Present:***

|  |  |  |  |
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| Pieter Bakker (PB) | *Vice-Chair – Altnaharra* | Thomas MacDonnell (TM) | *Wildland Ltd* |
| Roddy Watt | *Merkland* | David Allison (DA) | *Reay Forest* |
| Stephen March (SM) | *Reay Forest Estate* | Duncan Shaw (DS) | *RISM – Gualin* |
| Derick Macaskill (DM) | *Forestry & Land Scotland* | Derick Sutherland (DS)  | *Shinness* |
| Andrew Robinson (AR) | *Forestry & Land Scotland* | Robert McHardy (RM) | *Poole* |
| Richard Williams (RW) | *John Muir Trust* | Lawrence Macleod (LM) | *Achriesgill Grazings* |

***In Attendance:***

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

1. **Chairman’s Welcome**

TC welcomed everyone to the meeting, which followed a Steering Group Meeting in the morning.

1. **Apologies**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Richard Osborne  | *Rhiconich* | Sophie Clark | *RISM – Gualin* |
| Annette Parrott | *West Shinness* | Don O’Driscoll | *JMT - Sandwood* |
| David Shaw | *Keoldale*  | Stefaan Antheunis | *Achnabourin*  |
| Georgie Woods | *Merkland* | Stewart Gillies | *MOD Cape Wrath* |
| David Horsburgh | *N Loch Naver / Syre* | Iain Robertson  | *MOD/D10 Cape Wrath* |
| Craig Rigby | *N Loch Naver / Syre* | Stefaan Antheunis | *Achnabourin* |
| David Elliot | *Rhigolter* | Simon Peters | *Achnabourin* |
| Ian Thompson  | *Laurence Gould/Rhigolter* | Jock Sutherland | *Durness Grazings* |
| David Bell | *Tongue (Tenant)* | Barbara Sutherland  | *Durness Grazings* |

1. **DMG Administration Proposal**

This had been discussed in the morning by the Steering Group. Proposal was to have a paid Chair, Facilitator and Secretary. Funding of this will be discussed in more detail at the next Steering Group meeting in March 2020, with a paper put to the main meeting in May 2020. **ACTION POINT 1**

TC agreed to continue in the role of Chair for a year or more on a professional basis (working pro bono until now) as long as he has the support of a Secretary and Facilitator. Once proposal agreed by the Group at the next meeting in May 2020, there would be an election of the Committee at the autumn meeting. VC pointed out that the Constitution states elections of Chair and Vice Chair are annual, but not at the same time (in order to maintain continuity). TC would like a Vice Chair to be elected, ideally a practitioner rather than an owner. **ACTION POINT 2**

1. **Minutes of the meeting held on 30th May 2019**

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting. Proposed by DA, seconded by PB.

1. **Matters Arising** – per agenda
2. **Steering Group Meeting**

TC reminded those present that all are welcome to attend Steering Group, at which a whole range of issues are discussed.

Main points of this morning’s meeting:

* Administration proposals and financial implications had been discussed, and a proposal will be put forward following the next SG meeting in March. **ACTION POINT 1**
* Summer helicopter count - this was discussed in detail. It was apparent that there was more movement within the DMG are than people had realised, and deer were appearing in areas not usually seen. VC will produce model of NW, NE and South sub group areas, so that the DMG can take a view on proposed culls and model going forward for the next 5 years. **ACTION POINT 3**
* Habitat Impact Assessment – there was general agreement to try to co-ordinate and an updated report will be prepared in autumn 2020. **ACTION POINT 4**
* Culls – everyone planned to increase hind culls this winter
* Wildland had kindly provided a report on objectives and proposals, given they are a major landowner in the group area.

TM confirmed the intention to cull 654 stags and 632 hinds this season to prevent impact and get population back to where they want it to be. He was content that the count was accurate, and will be the basis for the increased cull. Out of Season Licences will be used. He did not wish to leave the increase cull level until next year, and urged others to do the same.

VC said there was no doubt that the population has gone up by 2-3000. There was little confidence in the 2012 count.

DM asked if inaccuracy of last count or movement into the area was responsible. VC said it was a combination of the 2012 count and underestimated recruitment level. The SG felt the area was fairly secure.

1. **Deer Management Plan**

**7.1 Deer Count - August 2019**

The count was discussed in detail at the SG meeting. RW expressed some concerns about the count; having seen some herding and worried that large groups had moved over long distances and may have been counted the day before on Reay Forest land. The large numbers counted on Merkland were not there afterwards, so where had they gone.

HD offered to go over Merkland data if it would help. She went on to say that the weather was good, and time was available to do it carefully. There was a separate discussion to be had about numbers at different times of the year. A lot of money went into this summer count, and we need to accept the results in order to move forward. There are inevitably overlaps and occasional double counting. TC stated that it provides a snapshot and if anyone has concerns they need to raise it now as the count data needs to be accepted as the best information available. The timing of the count will be picked up in the population model. TM added that the global population is clear, need to decide where to cull specifically. TC then asked if people accepted the count of 10,870 deer.

DA, AR said we have to accept it. RW said he would be culling the same amount as last year, [foot] count in February then shoot more if necessary. All present accepted the results of the count.

VC reported the SG discussion regarding periodic reporting of progress during the hind season, to ensure members were meeting the increased targets.

**7.3 2019/20 Cull Proposals & Targets**

TC asked if anyone had fallen short of their [stag] target. RW said he was a few short. TM reported that Wildland had sold 130 sporting stags, better than expected. DA said average weights at Reay were up 4kg on previous year; those in northern beats were heavier than those in south. Rut appeared to be going on later. DM said there was evidence of the effects of climate. A few people said that calving rates were down. Some were planning to stay at 2018/19 levels for hinds.

VC will be modelling in the next week or so, and said no one will be able to not increase. He will issue numbers for each estate, and then ask for cull numbers at the end of November, start of January and end of February so progress towards overall target can be monitored. Aim was for 5/km2 global population, and this count showed 7/km2 – population had increased despite Wildland culls. Counting in this area can only be done periodically, due to cost and practicalities. HD said if you have good information post count – recruitment, mortality and HIA – you don’t need to count more often. TC urged everyone to reply to VC with their figures. VC will chase up and share so everyone knows what everyone else is doing. **ACTION POINT 3**

**7.4 Habitat Monitoring**

The group was looking at co-ordinating monitoring from 2020. Data to be submitted to VC late summer so report can be produced. Detail to be agreed at SG meeting in March. Then it can be left for 2 years. There is also scope to reduce number of plots all done at the same time. TM said that as discussed at the May meeting there are differences in methodology. VC felt that could be taken into account. If the results look good the model can be adjusted. Map produced last year showed a clear red area at Foinaven and two corners of the group area, and an amber area in the middle. TM pointed out that the Foinaven SSSI is 50% rock; HD responded that that had been taken into account. VC confirmed that no training was required and everyone was doing it. **ACTION POINT 4**

**7.5 Designated Sites**

VW reported there had been no recent monitoring by SNH, but they know where the hot spots are – Foinaven, West Strathnaver and Cnoc an Alascaig. These are the areas they are looking at to be addressed in modelling**.**

**7.6 Deer/Vehicle Collisions**

There seemed to have been fewer DVCs. Sinclair Coghill (SNH) had a map and spreadsheet but this only covers reported DVCs. LM mentioned the stretch at Durness was still a bit of an issue, and Laxford-Rhiconich. The helicopter count had shown 39/41/8 for Rhiconich, but he had seen 60 in one township alone.

TC had sent a FOI request to Network Rail for ESDMG – there were 31 deer strikes on the Lairg to Kinbrace stretch in the previous year. In the period 2009-2018 there had been 346, with approximately 132 deer killed in one strike in Winter 2010-11. The fence height was in between that of stock and deer fencing, this was a welfare issue. VW mentioned the recording of speed of cars across Moine had an average speed of 72mph. Local information can be useful.

1. **2019 Assessment**

TC thanked DA, TM and VC for attending the assessment meeting. Feedback showed NWSDMG as one of the poorer performing DMGs.

HD reported that the collated data from the 2019 Assessment had been sent to the Scottish Government, and publication date was awaited. The [separate] Deer Working Group report was due end of November, so ScotGov may be considering both together. The DWG considered the system, while SNH report looked at delivery of collaborative deer management.

The recent count was a game changer for this group, as lack of data was a negative/gap in the assessment. The count does not put the DMG where it thought it was, so how it respond is key. It should be seen as an opportunity for the group.

TM commented that Wildland properties were mostly designated, and sites were not in a poor condition relatively speaking. A neighbour in Cairngorm has a population of 25/m2, for example. He also commented that the function of the group was under scrutiny as well as delivery of actions.

HD said there had been significant progress in terms of governance of groups and collaboration, but that now needs to translate into agreed actions and delivery of those actions.

1. **SNH Report**

Covered in 8. above

1. **Socio Economic Study**

TC reported that this was a work in progress. SNH had produce a scoping document, and VC and Wildland had put forward views on this. It would be discussed further by the SG in March, with paper to the main meeting in May 2020. **ACTION POINT 5**

1. **ADMG**

There was a lot going on between ADMG and SNH in the lead up to the 2019 Assessment, and ADMG was now awaiting the report. The Holyrood meeting scheduled for December had been postponed due to the forthcoming General Election.

ADMG Regional Meeting was taking place in Inverness tomorrow (21st November)

1. **Accounts**

A summary of the financial position was circulated.

DA asked about the possibility of online banking. AS this would require single authority TM felt it was best to stick to two signatures in order to protect the Secretary. KGM to investigate whether dual authorisation was possible for online banking, failing which a “view only” set up so that she did not have to wait for statements to check payments/balances. **ACTION POINT 6**

1. **AOCB**

Richard Williams informed the meeting about a study on tick-borne encephalitis, which had gaps in data for the North West highland area. KGM to circulate forwarded email from Don O’Driscoll with details of survey and request for sampling (of ticks and blood). **ACTION POINT 7**

DM mentioned a new policy with Forestry & Land Scotland (FLS) to no longer pay for new fencing or repairs to fencing without contribution from neighbours, unless there is a legal responsibility to do so. They may still assist if there is strategic/collaborative need. They have also been told to increase culls – more broad leaf trees planted and the level of damage is unacceptable. Culling is at no cost to the taxpayer [due to leasing and carcase sales].

VW pointed out that private forestry schemes are grant aided by Scottish Govt and require to be fenced. TM said there was no increase in grant with or without fence, but you can get a grant for fencing. Fencing industry does however contribute to the economy/tax revenue. VC commented that you need a stock fence for a forestry scheme anyway, which is 70% of the cost of a deer fence.

There was some discussion about the funding of ADMG.

1. **Date of Next Meeting**

Wednesday 27th May 2020, Lairg Community Centre at 1:30pm

preceded by Steering Group at 10:30am

(first Steering Group Meeting of 2020 to be held Wed 4th March at 10:30am)

**Attachments:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Detail*** | ***Version*** |
| Cull Table | November 2019 |
| Accounts Summary | November 2019 |

**Action Points agreed: 20th November 2019**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Ref:** | **Detail** | **Action** |
|  |  |  |
| **AP 1** | Administration and Funding Proposal to be put to members following the Steering Group Meeting March 2020 for discussion at May 2020 meeting | **Steering Group** |
| **AP 2** | Election of Office Bearers at autumn 2020 meeting | **Secretary (Agenda)** |
| **AP 3**  | Model to be updated using latest count data and cull targets circulated to members | **VC** |
| **AP 4**  | Members to send HIA data to Facilitator and updated report to be prepared in Autumn 2020. Detail to be discussed by SG in March. | **VC** |
| **AP 5** | Socio Economic Study to be discussed further at Steering Group meeting in March 2020 | **Steering Group** |
| **AP 6**  | Dual-authority online banking to be investigated  | **Secretary** |
| **AP 7**  | Secretary to circulated tick survey  | **Secretary** |