

KNOYDART DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

AUGUST 2016 DRAFT

WORKING PLAN 2016 – 2025

This document provides a working summary of management actions to be taken forward to implement the Knoydart Deer Management Plan. It will be updated at meetings, twice yearly or annually as appropriate.

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OPERATION OF THE GROUP

Area & Boundaries

Action Point

- 1.1 *The 2 x Knoydart DMGs should be restructured so that Kilchoan, Camusrory and Barisdale operate a shared population model with the West Knoydart Group. The exact structure and relation ship between the 2 X Groups and an appropriate level of external oversight to be agreed by April 2016.*
- 1.2 *Population models across the 2 x Groups require to be co-ordinated, and carried out on the same basis.*

Membership

Action Point

- 2.1 *Before the end of 2016, look to recruit 2 X private woodland landholdings as members of the Group. Should they choose not to join the Group, they should be encouraged to report deer cull information, and can be added to the email distribution list.*
- 2.2 *Add these properties to the SNH list to receive statutory returns.*

Meetings

Action Points

- 3.1 *As above, look to encourage wider community participation, including invitations to community councils and grazing committees to attend meetings from this spring onwards. All such groups to be given the opportunity to contribute to the agenda of meetings.*
- 3.2 *Cull data and other relevant information to be forwarded to Group 2 weeks ahead of meetings to properly inform discussion at the meeting itself.*
- 3.3 *The Chairman currently acts as secretary as well, and minutes the meetings. It is strongly recommended that the Group take on a separate secretary so that meetings can be directed more effectively and these functions shared, and population models updated between meetings as appropriate. A number of other functions will be required, including updating the website, and answering any enquiries to the Group.*

Constitution & Finances

Action Points

- 4.1 *A constitution to be adopted at Spring 2016 group meeting.*
- 4.2 *A Group bank account to be set up before January 2016. This has been actioned.*
- 4.3 *The group will produce annual budgets, and look to increase member subscription rates so that a buffer can be built up in bank account. A realistic aim would be to have the equivalent of one year's subscription to ADMG in reserve at all times. A budget will be drawn up for the spring 2016 meeting.*

Deer Management Plan

Action Points

5.1 Endorse DMP at spring 2016 meeting following consultation on the draft plan during March..

5.2 Ensure a system of communications is in place whereby local interests have access to the plan, and can input to future development of it. To achieve this, the Plan will be published on a dedicated DMG website. The ethos behind this plan is that it will be regularly updated, perhaps twice a year, and therefore it is impracticable to circulate hard copies of the plan.

Code of Practice on Deer Management

Action Points

6.1 Ensure adherence to code at all times, both by the Group, and by individual members.

6.2 At all subsequent meetings, group members will have the opportunity to raise any issues relating to deer welfare issues or other problems that they are aware about within the Group. In all cases, members are encouraged to bring the issue up with those responsible in the first instance, or to seek the advice of the Group Chairman.

Data & Evidence gathering- Deer Counts

Action Points

9.1 Group members need to carry out thorough and consistent recruitment counts on an annual basis to inform the population model. Such counts should take place in the final week of April/ first week of May, and the recruitment % is the no. of calves expressed as a proportion of the no. of hinds, two years or older.

9.2 The Group should continue to receive and take account of West Knoydart DMG count data.

9.3 It is recommended that Barisdale and Camusrory count at the same time as West Knoydart, who already involve Kilchoan Estate in their count, and that this should commence from spring 2016 onwards.

9.4 A regular count schedule and protocol needs to be devised for the remaining properties within the Knoydart DMG, to be implemented from spring 2017 onwards.

Data & Evidence Gathering- Culls

Action Point

10.1 Update the population models and target culls on an annual basis, using recruitment and mortality data collected, as well as actual culls from the previous year.

10.2 All cull data to be collated at end of season promptly, and forwarded to all members well in advance of spring meeting.

Data & Evidence Gathering- Habitat Monitoring

Action Points

11.1 A schedule of habitat and designated site monitoring will be devised in conjunction with SNH during early 2016, and will be included in this Working Plan. (See later in document). This will include appropriate habitat targets for the Group.

11.2 The DMG will co-operate with government agencies and provide or access sufficient

resources to ensure that this programme is implemented over the ten year period of this plan.

11.3 Updated sheep information will be attained from group members for 2020 and 2025, in line with the data gathered on a five-year basis since 1995.

11.4 The DMG will liaise with grazing committees on an ongoing basis so that they are aware of any significant changes in sheep numbers or hill usage at a more local level. The relevant committees are only present within Glen Nevis Estate.

Competence

Action Point

12.1 DMG members will seek to ensure that DMQ Level 1 and Trained Hunter status are delivered as the now accepted industry standard within the area, and encouragement will be given to professional stalkers to achieve DMQ level 2.

12.2 Training or support in higher level qualifications will be encouraged where that is appropriate.

12.3 Training and support will also be sought from ADMG where that is required to help with running of the Deer Management group.

Training

Action Points

13.1 Promote and facilitate the uptake of appropriate deer management qualifications..

13.2 Be aware of the ongoing development of Best Practice Guidance and any new techniques or standards that arise from that.

13.3 Review training needs on an annual basis.

Venison Marketing

Action Points

14.1 The DMG will work with ADMG to promote uptake of SQWV within the area.

14.2 In the medium term, beyond the settling in period for this Plan, the DMG will explore options to market venison from the area in a more collaborative manner.

Communications

Action Point

15.1 Implement the communications strategy as agreed, and ensure a mechanism is in place for dealing with business and issues between meetings.

PUBLIC INTEREST OUTCOMES

Develop Mechanisms to manage deer

Action Points

PIA 1.1 Publish and endorse the new Knoydart Deer Management Plan in spring 2016.

PIA 1.2 Re-assess the Group against both the Benchmark and the Public Interest criteria once DMP has been endorsed, and then annually thereafter.

PIA 1.3 Review the Working Plan on an annual basis and minute progress and changes.

Delivering Designated Features in to Favourable condition

Action

PIA 2.1 Implement actions re: designated sites, in particular those relating to the Glen Barisdale SSSI.

- *An SRDP application is being taken forwards by Barisdale Estate and likely to be signed by march 2016. The focus of the plan is a series of woodland enclosures, focused on the more vulnerable areas of the SSSI. Deer densities will be managed to deliver a density of 7 or less in and around the SSSI area, and less than 10 on Barisdale more generally, in line with the suggested population model for West Knoydart. The plan has been agreed with SNH and FCS who anticipate that this will help bring the site forward in to favourable condition.*

PIA 2.2 Also later in Working Plan, implement the series of actions required to monitor designated sites over the ten year period of this plan. Again, this only relates to Glen Barisdale SSSI.

Manage Deer to retain existing Native Woodland cover and improve woodland condition in the medium to long term.

Actions

PIA 3.1 FE to continue their programme of gradual restoration of native woodland sites, reducing the proportion of non- native trees species, and dealing with invasive rhododendrons where applicable.

PIA 3.2 Kilchoan Estate to consider including existing native woodland remnants in their plans to take forward woodland creation on their property.

PIA 3.3 Camusrory Estate to consider taking forward management of the native woodland remnants on their property.

PIA 3.4 Barisdale to take forward their RDC application which seeks to create enclosures and return the site to favourable condition. See above. An important component of this will be to ensure an appropriate deer browsing pressure on ground vegetation outwith the enclosures.

Demonstrate DMG contribution to woodland expansion target

Actions

PIA 4.1 FE to implement their 815 ha of new native planting within the period of this plan.

PIA 4.2 Private owners on Knoydart to take forwards applications for approx 410 ha of new planting.

PIA 4.3 West Knoydart to develop further planting proposals, potentially up to 220 ha of new planting and regeneration.

PIA 4.4 All to ensure that recently planted woodland areas become properly established.

Monitor and manage deer impacts in the wider countryside

Action Point

PIA 5.1 An agreed monitoring programme for these habitats will be devised during the early part of 2016, to be endorsed and included in this plan by April 2016. See later in this document.

Improve Scotland's ability to store carbon

Actions

PIA 6.1 Maintain approx the current deer density across the DMG unless habitat monitoring suggests that a change is required. Population modelling suggests a modest decrease in the current deer density is possible, given an appropriate focus on hind and stag cull targets.

PIA 6.2 Implement the woodland creation and native woodland restoration schemes mentioned previously

PIA 6.3 Discourage any burning that might impact on peatland sites.

PIA 6.4 Contribute to River Basin Management Planning as appropriate when requests to do so are forthcoming.

PIA 6.5 Implement a wider programme of habitat monitoring across the DMG area to achieve a more accurate assessment of the current status of a range of habitats. This should then establish what condition existing peatlands in particular are in, and whether any remedial action is required to deal with these.

PIA 6.6 Consider taking any priority peatland sites forwards under the Peatlands Action programme, if applicable.

Reduce or mitigate the risk of invasive, non- native species

Action

PIA 7.1 Cull spreading sika deer throughout the Group area, especially in the woodland areas in the east of the DMG.

PIA 7.2 It is likely that a small resident population of sika will remain near Morar. Efforts will be made to ensure that this population of animals are kept within their current boundaries as far as possible.

PIA 7.3 All Group members to be vigilant for Sika deer swimming to the DMG area from either the north or the south.

PIA 7.4 Include Wild Boar on the Agenda of all future DMG meetings.

Protection of Historic and Cultural Features

Actions

PIA 8.1 The DMG will maintain communication with the local community and look to address any issues that are identified with regards to sites of cultural interest and herbivore grazing.

PIA 8.2 As required by Forestry Commission, all potential woodland creation projects, including natural regeneration schemes, will be assessed by the applicants for any negative impacts on cultural or archaeological sites.

Delivering higher standards of competence in deer management

Action Point

PIA 9.1 Continue to monitor qualifications held by estate staff, and promote a culture of continued professional training more widely.

Contribute to Public Health and wellbeing

Action Points

PIA 10.1 Maintain communication with local Community Councils re: DVCs and look to implement any mitigation which may be deemed helpful in reducing local risk, particularly around Morar. Information on accidents should be sent to www.deercollisions.co.uk

PIA 10.2 Remind DMG members on an annual basis about the dangers of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and individual members to ensure safety precautions are taken by anyone who has had recent contact with deer or habitats in North America.

PIA 10.3 DMG to highlight the risks of ticks and Lyme's Disease to their guests and the public more generally through all appropriate channels.

PIA10.4 Group members and DMG to all promote a positive and welcoming message to all those visiting the area throughout the year.

Maximize Economic benefits associated with deer

Action Points

PIA 11.1 Increase awareness of the value of deer in and around areas of population, to emphasize the point that deer in these areas provide positive outcomes as well as some negative ones.

PIA 11.2 Investigate the possibility for a local means of advertising sporting opportunities within the area, during the first 2-3 years of this plan, initially through the new dedicated website for Knoydart DMG.

PIA 11.3 Maintain larder standards across the 2 X DMG area.

Minimize the economic costs of deer management

Action Points

PIA 12.1 DMG to assess the current PACEC survey in to the value/ costs of deer management and extract information from KDMG in order to inform more fully the above narrative. Complete and adapt if necessary by spring 2017.

Ensure effective communication in deer management issues

Action Point

PIA 13.1 Take forwards those actions outlined in the Communications Policy/ Working Plan by spring 2016

Ensure Deer welfare at individual and population level

Action Points

PIA 14.1 Focus on bringing natural habitats in to favourable condition status, as measured by targets agreed with SNH, and maintain the minimum deer densities required to meet owner's objectives.

PIA 14.2 Liaise locally on significant woodland management operations where these affect shelter for deer.

PIA 14.3 Collect deer information within the Group as per agreed recommendations. This will provide animal- specific data which can be monitored and compared to identify potential welfare issues within the area.

PIA 14.4 Avoid any increase in hind numbers in the middle sections of the group.

PIA 14.5 Carry out greater analysis of information to better elaborate on the suggested movement between the Knoydart Group and the West Knoydart Group.

Population Modelling/ Five Year Cull Plan

The following model is the agreed deer management model to be followed by the group during the period of this plan. The main objective of this management regime is to *actively maintain the habitats, forage and shelter required to sustain a healthy, resilient and productive deer herd*, capable of supporting a sporting stag cull of 229 animals, and also be in keeping with the main natural heritage and woodland & crop protection objectives within the area. An agreed apportionment by Deer Management Unit of the cull for 2016-17 is also provided, although that is Confidential to group members only.

These models are still currently being discussed, and will be published shortly when they have been agreed.

Habitat Monitoring

A key part of this plan will be to agree, fund and implement a comprehensive programme of habitat monitoring across the DMG, both on designated sites and in the wider countryside.

Such a programme will consist of a combination of statutory Site Condition Monitoring (SCM) by SNH, and private habitat impact assessments (HIA), a proportion of which may be carried out by contractor, or where training may be required to bring estate staff up to the necessary level of ability to do this themselves. A key part of any programme will be agency support in identifying sample plots, and storage and upkeep of information.

It is suggested that such a programme of monitoring is established by the Group in conjunction with SNH by May 2016, with sufficient information being available to allow an SRDP application to be submitted on behalf of the Group. It is suggested that between the Collaboration Fund, the Agro Environment Scheme, individual estate input and support from SNH, that it will be possible to cover the cost of development of such a habitat monitoring programme, which is expected to include provision for training as well as the potential use of contractors.

Recommended Habitat Monitoring programme

Barisdale Estate have agreed a monitoring schedule relating to the pinewood SSSI on their property, this being designed to make sure that there is no deterioration in condition of the non- enclosed woodland areas within the SSSI. Monitoring of this area is being undertaken by SNH, in addition to SCM monitoring on this site as a whole. This is the only designated site on which habitat monitoring is deemed to be necessary.

It is suggested that, in addition to the monitoring work on Glen Barisdale SSSI, that the Group monitor two habitats, blanket bog and dwarf shrub heath, to give an indication of impacts in the wider countryside.

SNH have recommended that for each habitat type, 30 sample points be developed within each property, with a third of the plots being monitored on an annual rolling basis. Kilchoan Estate already have their own established habitat monitoring programme, which they implement in conjunction with the West Knoydart Group, and Camusrory have already committed to a similar habitat monitoring programme to what is set out here below. In practice, the following numbers of plots will be monitored:

- 30 X plots for blanket bog across each of 3 X estates (Glen Dessary, Kingie and North Achnacarry). Barisdale, North Morar and Nevis Estate do not have any significant areas of peat. 90 plots in total.
- 30 X plots for dwarf shrub heath across each of the above 6 X properties, giving 180 plots in total.
- Forest Enterprise have agreed to monitor 20 X plots of each of the two habitats within the open ground area of their holding, and they have the capacity to do this within their existing workforce.

These plots have been marked on the map **17. Knoydart Habitat Monitoring Plots**.

Knoydart Deer Management Group**Working Plan**

This would give 370 sample plots to be monitored, of which 100 plots are already accounted for via existing monitoring or where capacity is already in place.

KDMG would therefore have to deliver the remaining 270 plots, or 90 plots per year.

It is suggested that 2 X people could measure 10 X plots in a day, with perhaps 2 days required to plan for and collate information across the Group when complete. The additional 90 plots should therefore take c 9 days + 2 X days to co-ordinate and collate, or eleven days overall annually.

It is recommended that the Group take on an external contractor to lead on and co-ordinate the work in the first year, tutoring group members to do the work in subsequent years, but with a reduced co-ordination input required. The Group could then apply to SRDP to cover the external costs, allowing that this would be 50% of the total.

The external cost of doing this is likely to be £2500- 3000 in the first year, perhaps reducing to half this in a subsequent year, to maybe £600 a year once group members are proficient in carrying out their own monitoring, only then requiring some limited external co-ordination and data collation and interpretation.

Knoydart DMG Rural Development Contracts

The following group members have ongoing or proposed RDC contracts which include an element of deer management planning:

Kingie Estate

Kingie Estate have undertaken a significant woodland creation scheme under the previous SRDP scheme. It is fenced off from the red deer range.

Barisdale Estate

As mentioned in the text, Barisdale Estate are currently taking forwards a significant woodland regeneration scheme within the Glen Barisdale SSSI site. This will be fenced off from the deer range, but it will required focused hind culling within the boundaries of the woodland area. There may be a wider moorland management plan put in place on Barisdale as well.

Several other group members have smaller SRDP, SGFS or WGS woodland creation schemes in place, notably on Nevis Estate.

Potential Schemes within the period of this Plan

Glen Dessary Estate

The conifer plantations at Glen Dessary will be subject to a new Forest Plan within the period of this deer plan, and this will involve considerable felling and restocking, including a change to native species in some areas. This is likely to be a significant event within the DMG area, and is very likely to have deer management implications. For this reason, careful discussion within the Group will be required.

Kilchoan and Camusrory Estates

These two properties have both indicated that they may take forward woodland creation and/ or management of ancient woodland remnants on their properties.

Other than the Glen Barisdale project mentioned above, it is not thought that there are any other potential schemes in the pipeline at present.

Group members are encouraged to inform the Group of any upcoming plans which may impact on deer numbers