

**Meeting of Knoydart Deer Management Group
Held at the Alexandria Hotel, Fort William
on Monday November 26th 2018 at 10.30am**

Present

Simon Laird
Lynda Campbell
John Cameron
Alex MacDonald
John Jackson
Robert Grant
Alex Mackay
Graeme Taylor
John Fotheringham

Linzi Seivwright
Cathy Mayne

Estates/Agency

Chair/ Achnacarry Sporting
Kingie (Treasurer)
Kingie
Achnacarry Sporting
Forest Enterprise Scotland
Nevis/Morar Lodge
North Morar Estate
SNH
Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge & Achnacarry Community
Council
Secretary
Secretary (West Knoydart)

1. Welcome and Apologies.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting including John Fotheringham who was representing Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge & Achnacarry Community Council. The following apologies were received:

Sir Patrick Grant
Donald Cameron
Andrew Aitchison
Lea Macnally

Glen Dessary
Achnacarry
Nevis Estate
Glengarry Community Council

2. Draft Minutes of Meeting held on 11th June and Matters Arising (Paper 7 a&b).

The Minutes were approved by LC.

The following matters arising were discussed.

AP	Action	Who	Progress
1	<i>LC to approach private forestry owner and LS to go through Working Plan and update maps</i>	LC & LS	LC indicated that a LTFFP had been consulted on recently. LC to pass details to SNH and Chair to ask for a copy of LTFFP.
2	<i>LS to amend Constitution. RS to provide example wording.</i>	LS & NS	See Agenda Item 4.1
3	<i>Group members to coordinate foot count in spring 2019</i>	Group members	See Agenda Item 4.1
4	<i>Members to agree a future population target for Sub Population 2</i>	Members	See Agenda Item 4.1
5	<i>Members to complete Economic Survey information</i>	Members	See Agenda Item 4.8
6	<i>LS to ensure website up to date</i>	LS	Actioned

3. Estate Reports

The Group members provided the following updates for 2018/19:

Property	Stag Cull	Hind Cull	Calf Cull	Stag Wt	Stag Age	General Comments
Kingie	21	11 (54) Maybe more	0	14s 5	10.9	<p>Lot of old hinds – one 10 stone yeld. Mostly in better condition than expecting but one bad. Heard first roar on 7th September but not until 21st September – stags with hinds. Best season for 6 years (although 9 blank days down to weather). More shootable stags but overall not as heavy – light average. 18% calving in summer (55 calves and 308 hinds). Calving patchy -some groups ok , some not.</p> <p>Count done on 4/5/6 April (117 stags, 457 hinds and 66 calves) – 9.3 deer per km2. Mortality – found 7 stags and 9 hinds but not a lot of calves.</p>
North Morar	16 (1 sika)	5 (40)		14s 3 Heaviest 18 s 9	9	<p>Stag condition generally good. When went to shoot this year, short of mature stags. Stopped shooting 9th October. Weather exceptionally bad.</p> <p>High mortality of stags- April was a killer month. Counted 41 stags dead (mostly mature), high calf mortality and 10 hinds found dead. April/May stags were thin – unprecedented conditions with cold, wind and rain into Feb/March – never seen so bad. Calving -some not bad, but patchy. Some reasonable groups- some not. Well down on calf numbers.</p> <p>Count in Feb: 147 stags, 309 hinds and 129 calves but lost deer after the count.</p>
Nevis	8	1 (12)	0	11s 5 Heaviest 16s 10	6.8	<p>3 matures stags from the hill – rest were in the fence. Fence had been cut 3 or 4 times but has been fixed.</p> <p>First roar 22nd September – but rut very strange. 1 hind shot inside the fence- 11 s so not hill hind.</p> <p>April count 58 stags (17 are N Morar stags). Calving -quite a few groups where 1 in 8 calves or 4 in 8 calves- very mixed.</p>
Morar Lodge	5 sika	4 sika (10)	1			<p>There were big groups when calving -saw lots of calves but now very few. Deer that have shot are ok – all sika hinds pregnant.</p>
National Forest Estate (FES)	120 9 roe 2 sika	87	58			<p>Will continue to shoot right through – all within the fenced area. N Laggan open hill - movement into Garry end – more than has been. Seems to be drawing deer. Fence has been checked but fresh deer seen. New planting area was looking well however through the summer damage now at 95%. Arkaig – 3 stags and 1 sika. Doesn't seem to be fence leakage but possible one possible water gate suspected.</p>

Achnacarry	62	15 (80)	6	14s 17 ^{1/4} Heaviest 17.6	10.6	<p>Good season. 2nd July was first stag shot. 13th August to 18th October was main season. Weather – 1st 3 weeks good but 7 weeks poor with high winds. Stags plentiful and in good condition – plenty of fat but funny rut. Lots of days couldn't hear roaring. Mid Nov- sounded like rut in full swing.</p> <p>42 stags N Achnacarry, 4 Garry Gualach, 10 west woodland (hill stags in woodland expansion).</p> <p>1st roar 24th September, 1st stag with hinds 27th. Mortality reported at June meeting. Good stags on Loch – feeding from mid December to end April. 2 hinds and 2 calves from November had not been put to game dealer.</p> <p>Wild boar 32 (16 adults/16 juveniles)- plenty of signs. More spinners /autofeeders delivered.</p>
Glen Dessary (Provided to the meeting)	25	(40 -50)	16			<p>We shot 25 stags this season; I cut the target back from 30/35 because of last winter losses. Early on proved to be challenging but later in the season things improved a lot. In the last week we had 12 stags, all of good mature ages, some 12 or over. I have attached a group photo of the heads from the last week. I don't have average weights and ages with me and will send that in, but I can say the quality was good, but not exceptional. Our rut was strong; I hear other areas of the Highlands were not.</p> <p>Hind cull will be lower, possibly 40 to 50, because of last winter. Recruitment during the season looked to me to be in the 30% + region but we will measure it after this winter. This strikes me as low.</p> <p>Our boar culling is going well with our new system. We have culled 7 up to the date of writing but more will be taken by the year end. Our boar numbers are very low this year and I am quite sure this is because litters did not survive the last wet spring. We have not seen the groups of juveniles one would normally see in early autumn; only singles or couples.</p> <p>We will be counting next spring and will liaise with our neighbours. Colin Morrison has been gathering field data from our plots for our ongoing program of habitat monitoring.</p>

Forest Enterprise were asked about Feral Pig policy. It was reported that they shoot them when they see them but they are not actively managed. They are involved with an SNH project and had had a meeting the previous week. It was reported that they are not seeing so many in Glen Garry - Green Field – seem to be further north. Also trialling drop nets. It was noted that even if we wanted to eradicate them, it was recognised that it was probably too late. None shot by FE recently. It was noted that this topic should be discussed at future meetings, particularly the need for collaboration.

4. Deer Management Working Plan – Paper 8/2018

4.1 Group Operation

4.1.1. *Constitution -Paper 9/2018*

The Constitution was formally adopted by the members.

4.1.2 *DMG Count 2019*

It was discussed that conducting a coordinated count for the Group should be easier now that the Group was smaller. It was noted that Alex (N Morar) and Robert could count together and with Glen Dessary at the top end, there was only a handful of deer on the march. There were no deer on the face but with bad weather they might be further in. It was envisaged a full count could be done in one week (in March and ideally with snow cover) and it would be fine for Robert and Alex to work together and count their end when they could. For Glen Dessary, Kingie and Achnacarry it was agreed this would be best if Alex (Achnacarry) and John could coordinate a count eastwards.

It was noted that Jim Brown had been asked to coordinate the West Knoydart count which was scheduled for the first window of good weather between 15th Feb to 15th March. It was agreed that if there was an opportunity to carry out the counts as closely as possible it would be useful. Alex indicated that early March would suit the Group best at this stage and if it coincided with West Knoydart that would be great.

LS indicated that if the Group collected information about groups on a map, this could be easily digitised. LS agreed to circulate maps to the Group. **Action 1: LS**

4.1.3 *Recruitment Counts, Mortality Counts and Population Models*

LS emphasised the importance of good information on recruitment and mortality in order to keep the population models as accurate as possible. Estates provided information in the individual estate reports. LS would update the population models accordingly. It was also discussed that the population models should ideally have target densities that the Group were managing to. The plan had indicated simply that the Group would not let hind densities increase.

It was agreed that LS would circulate the maps and results of the HIA report produced in June and that individual estates would inform LS of their own population aspirations and of any changes in management and that the sub-groups would seek to agree a collective target moving forwards.

It was also discussed that W Knoydart and Knoydart had agreed in principle to use the same population modelling methodology and that at the recent meeting of W Knoydart, the Group had indicated a desire to share data and have the models working together. The Group agreed a reciprocal desire to have the population models working in tandem and agreed to CM and LS as respective Secretaries to the Group working together to share data and information.

The Group discussed the ADMG Health Check that had been carried out by LS and the Chair on the 5th July in order to prepare the Group for the official SNH Assessment which would be carried out in Spring 2019. LS had circulated by email copies of both the Assessment itself (which had 101 criteria) and also a summary of the Health Check which highlighted the strong and weak points of the Group. The main weakness of the Group was in the lack of an informed population target but it was hoped that the Group may be in a position to agree this by correspondence before the actual assessment which would be carried out by SNH between April and Mid May 2019.

Much of what was on the Agenda for discussion at the meeting and the updates to the Working Plan would ensure that the Group should be in the best position possible come the assessment . However, there were still some areas where more information was required and LS would be contacting members in due course.

4.2 Woodland Update

The Group discussed woodland schemes within the DMG area and agreed to send LS details of historic and any new propose schemes. Achnacarry Estate had already provided some information for the working plan.

LS explained that the results of the Native Woodland Survey for Scotland had identified that of 2743 ha of native woodland surveyed within the Group area, 80.9% of impacts had been found to be in the Low/Moderate herbivore impact class. The target that had been set for groups was 60% so the group had exceeded the target.

4.3 Peatlands

The Group discussed peatlands and the Peatland Action Feasibility Grant that was currently available from SNH. The Group agreed that the fund was probably not appropriate for the Group but that the results from the HIA which included Blanket Bog plots would be used to inform management. Results had found that 83% of browsing impacts and 60% of trampling impacts were found to be Low.

4.4 Habitat Monitoring Results

The results of the 2016 monitoring undertaken by Angus Davidson had been collated and presented at the June meeting. These had shown that for Dwarf Shrub Heath, 82% of browsing impacts and 96% of trampling impacts were in the low category.

The Group agreed to use the results of the count in the Spring along with the HIA information to help inform cull targets and population targets moving forwards.

The Group also discussed that a repeat HIA survey should ideally be carried out every three years and therefore a repeat would be due in 2019. The Group agreed in principle to carry out a DMG wide repeat survey and agreed that Angus Davidson be asked to provide costings. It would be up to individual Estates to pay for their share of the work as per the previous survey. LS to circulate costings and Group members were asked to seek agreement with owners/managers. **Action 2: LS & DMG Members.**

CM advised the Group to make sure that they asked for a full set of raw data and photographs from Angus Davidson in case of the need to use a different contractor at some point in the future.

4.5 Training

The Group were asked to provide an update on levels of training within deer managers. Of the 16 deer managers within the Group area, 16 have DSC Level 1 & Trained Hunter etc and 11 have DSC Level 2.

In addition to these qualifications, many Group members also have a range of qualifications including First Aid, ATV, Manual Handling, Lone Working etc.

Achnacarry indicated that they would be looking into holding an Emergency First Aid at Work course in March and invited other members to join if they wished. Kingie expressed an interest and asked to be included if possible.

4.6 Venison & SQWV update

Achnacarry and FE indicated that they were currently members of SQWV and Kingie were about to join the scheme. North Morar and Morar Lodge/Nevis were not currently members.

LS informed the Group that there were three online tutorials in carcass preparation available online at the Scottish Venison YouTube Channel. LS also has copies available on CD.

Members also discussed the informative trip to Simpson Game last year where there was an opportunity to look around the processing unit and learn more about the venison processing chain.

4.7 Public Health

4.7.1 Deer Vehicle Conditions. The Group discussed Deer Vehicle Collisions but there was nothing to report. It was acknowledged that it would be helpful to get feedback from the Community Council representatives on this topic should issues arise.

4.7.2 Chronic Wasting Disease. On the issue of Chronic Wasting Disease, Achnacarry reported that they issued information to incoming clients and tenants on what precautions to take to prevent the spread of CWD.

4.7.3 Lyme Disease. The issue of Lyme disease was discussed and it was mentioned that despite initial news that a vaccine had been found, little had been reported or discussed in the media since.

4.8 Economic Benefits/Costs – Paper 10/2018

At the previous meeting, the Group had discussed the importance of being able to quantify the significant investment that was put into deer management by owners as well being able to capture the benefits that are derived through employment (direct and indirect) as well as benefits to the local community through the provision of accommodation and use of local shops and services by visiting stalkers.

It was emphasised that this was an important exercise for the Group to do as a whole and that members had been asked to provide information through the survey that had been circulated. Members were asked to fill out the survey and return to LS asap. **Action 3: DMG Members**

4.9 Communications

4.9.1 Website. It was explained that as well as keeping the website up to date with the Deer Management Plan, Agendas and Minutes from meetings, there was also an opportunity for links to web pages of individual estates be put on also if requested. Members to contact LS if they would like to have their information included.

4.9.2 Local Community Council Update. JF thanked the Group for the invitation to attend and expressed an interest in the workings of the Group. It was commented that usually the involvement that Community Councils had in estates was through Long Term Forest Plans or planning applications for hydro schemes.

5. Financial Update

The Treasurer provided an update on the financial position of the Group. The balance in June had been £2,059.43. Subscriptions had been collected (£4,589.00) and expenditure had been £128.00 for hire of the meeting room and £120 for hosting of the website. The balance as of 4th December was £6,400.43.

6. SNH Update

SNH provided information relating to the 2019 DMG Assessment. SNH also provided an update on the progress of the Deer Working Group which is an independent group comprising Dr Andrew Barbour, Dr Jayne Glass and Robin Callander. The Group was expected to report to the Cabinet Secretary in April and it was likely that a report would be made public in June 2019.

7. ADMG Update

LS reported on a Regional Meeting that had been held on the 21st November in Inverness which had been well attended with an update on Forestry matters from John Risby of FCS – who had updated the meeting on the situation with Grants and in particular the availability of the Forestry Cooperation Grant which was available to DMGs wishing to scope opportunities for woodland.

8. Any Other Business There was no other business discussed.

9. Date and Time of Next meeting. The date of the next meeting of West Knoydart was likely to be either Friday 14th or Monday 17th June to be confirmed. It was suggested that once the West Knoydart meeting was confirmed it would be useful to have a meeting either before or following it. LS to fit the next meeting around W Knoydart for convenience.

Matters Arising/ Summary of Actions

AP	Action	Who
1	<i>LS to provide maps for the Group for counts in Spring</i>	LS
2	<i>LS to circulate a quote for repeat HIA and Members to confirm participation in a DMG wide repeat survey</i>	LS & DMG Members
3	<i>Group members to provide economic information for inclusion in the DMG working plan.</i>	Group members