

Subject: Glen Strathfarrar Deer Management Group
 Project: Autumn meeting and AGM
 Date: 23 October 2017
 Location: Culligran Estate
 Present: Frank Spencer-Nairn Culligran (Chair)
 Hamish Fraser Culligran
 Donald Fraser Glen Cannich and East Benula North (Vice Chair)
 Andrew Fraser Glen Cannich and East Benula North
 Stephen Potter East Monar
 Kevin MacNeil East Monar
 Douglas Lippe West Monar and Pait
 Clive Meikle Braulen (Treasurer)
 Richard Smith Braulen
 Mike Spencer-Nairn Struy
 Greg Fraser Struy
 George Fraser Erchless
 Patrick Porteous Erchless
 Tom Luthman Erchless
 Martin Mackay Farley
 Sinclair Coghill SNH
 Linzi Seivwright Caorunn (DMP Contractor)

Distribution: All DMG members, SNH, SCC, Caorunn

MINUTES

ITEM	ACTION OWNER
1. Welcome and Apologies	
1.1 The Chairman welcomed all those at the meeting.	
1.2 Apologies were received from:	
Angus Spencer-Nairn (Struy)	
Sir James Fuller (Glen Cannich and East Benula North)	
Anthony Fuller (Glen Cannich and East Benula North)	
Members of the Stroyan family (West Monar and Pait)	
Charlie Thomson (Farley)	
Steven Fraser (Braulen)	
2. Approval of minutes of 27 March 2017	
2.1 The secretary apologised for the delay in issuing the minutes.	

- 2.2 The Chairman conducted a review of the minutes. One correction was identified (at page 6, reference to stalking conditions at East Benula North should read “stalking difficult in wind due to difficulties in anchoring”).
- 2.3 Richard Smith proposed approval of the minutes which was seconded by Andrew Fraser. The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising

- 3.1 Erchless native woodland planting – Patrick Porteous explained that the estate had now moved the management of the area in question to John Clegg & Co/Strutt & Parker. Mr Porteous recapped the planting scheme and the earlier discussions with the DMG. Regarding the corridor which was to be created by dividing the planting area in two, it was noted that members of the DMG had asked in March if the corridor could be located at the southern end of the proposed planting scheme (adjacent to the existing forest edge). Mr Porteous reported that this proposal had been rejected by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) as it did not allow for any link with the habitat of the existing forest. Until and unless the Erchless cull has been achieved the DMG asked that Erchless does not move to close the fence before then.

Mr Porteous advised that the estate had already committed to purchase trees which were currently being grown on order from seed, and there would be a financial penalty for this should the scheme be delayed. Furthermore, the contract with FCS had now been granted and, accordingly the estate required, for welfare reasons, to find solutions for the deer that rely on this ground. There was some debate around what this meant in practical terms. Erchless Estate had still to clarify with FCS the number of deer that require to be culled to facilitate the planting scheme.

It was noted that fencing and mounding were ongoing and accordingly the deer may have moved off this ground at present. Considered that the deer may now be on Culligran and Farley. The Chairman reported large numbers of hinds had moved to Culligran when the work had started but had now moved elsewhere (Farley also reporting a lack of deer at present).

Mr Porteous considered the chances of achieving the target cull was slim as the deer were not currently on Erchless. It was noted that the severity of the winter will likely inform how many of these deer will try to return to the planted area.

Tom Luthman provided an update on the works including the ongoing fencing and mounding. The “island” area will be fenced shortly but possibly with areas of fence left open. The southern planting area (adjacent to the existing forest) has been mounded but not yet fenced other than along the existing forest boundary. Fence posts will be installed to the outer boundary of this southern area but netting will not be applied at present.

Mr Porteous offered the assistance of Erchless with a collaborative deer cull across the boundaries with neighbours.

The Chairman noted that the current forestry activity would end on 30 November leaving 10 weeks of the hind season for potential culling. After discussion the DMG members proposed the following:

- The fence should not be closed until and unless the cull required by SNH at Erchless has been achieved.
- The DMG will discuss further at its next meeting (on 19 February 2018).
- If extreme weather occurs during the hind season, the Chairman will call an extraordinary meeting to discuss the cull to date (the Chairman will monitor month by month the deer culls across the DMG area).

The DMG members present strongly expressed their disappointment that this situation has arisen and considered this to be caused by Erchless Estate and the unilateral approach it has taken to these planting proposals.

- 3.2 ECAF/SNH funding update – Linzi Seivwright has identified to SNH the parts of the DMG’s ECAF bid that related to habitat impact assessment (in the hope that this element at least may be funded by SNH) but had received no feedback as yet. Sinclair Coghill reported that no additional funding was going to be available for groups that had qualified but not received ECAF funding, but there may be a more general fund available to all DMGs but the level of funding will be restricted. Likely to be available during the financial year 2017/2018, and therefore will require to be committed/spent fairly quickly.
- 3.3 SNH habitat monitoring final report – SNH conducts habitat monitoring on the estates covered by the special area of conservation (SAC) on a five year basis. The meeting discussed one or two points mentioned in the most recent report, including that the herbivore impact on Glen Cannich and East Benula North (on the Mullardoch face) is likely to be largely a result of cattle activity and not deer. In addition, some of the herbivore impact issues at East Benula North (especially higher up) are likely to be from goats. Agreed that Linzi Seivwright will incorporate the habitat management report into the deer management plan and provide interpretation as to the herbivore impact on the habitat.
- 3.4 South Ross Deer Management Area liaison meeting – The SRDMA meeting took place in May and was attend by the Chairman, who reported that this continues to be a useful format. Noted that it is worth using this forum to keep pressure on all groups and SNH to ensure that the count scheduled for February/March 2019 takes place.

The Chairman reported that the 2018 meeting would be hosted by Strathconon.

4. Habitat monitoring by members

- 4.1 LS had provided a brief update on habitat monitoring in her report (Section 1.2). The Secretary was asked to circulate Linzi’s report with the minutes.

Noted that a training event had taken place which had been hosted by Braulen Estate who were thanked for their hospitality.

5. Financial report

- 5.1 Scottish Government Deer Sector review and revised SNH approach – Noted that where Deer Management Groups work well together, SNH will likely rely on those groups to continue delivering positive outputs. This would seem likely to apply to the Glen Strathfarrar DMG.

The Chairman reminded the meeting that SNH had produced a letter updating its current approach to deer, and recommended members review this communication.

Noted that the Scottish Government's Deer Working Group is undertaking a review of the sector on behalf of the Scottish Government. Noted that DMGs will require to continue to demonstrate that they are bringing a resolution to issues of deer management that have been identified.

6. ADMG report

- 6.1 The Chairman had attended both the annual meeting and a regional meeting at Glenfinnan. ADMG is keen to encourage members to participate in the deer health survey where samples are being taken from carcasses and provided by estates, samples subsequently being tested for E. coli and Cryptosporidium.

- 6.2 The next regional DMG meeting is to be held in Inverness (Kingsmills Hotel) on 23 November 2017.

- 6.3 Sporting rates were discussed, including ADMG advice on this subject.

7. Annual report

- 7.1 Chairman's report - The Chairman provided a review of the past year, noting the many uncertainties affecting all those involved in the management of upland deer, many of which issues had been discussed during the meeting.

The Chairman also commended the work being undertaken by Linzi Seivwright, including her annual report on progress against the adopted deer management plan. The Chairman made a plea for members to supply information to Linzi in order to allow her to provide useful and accurate information in her reports. The Chairman suggested that Linzi will issue a pro forma to allow stalkers to identify the age (young, medium and old) of deer and average weights.

- 7.2 Deer Management Plan – Linzi had provided in draft a DMP Working Plan 2017-2018 which sets out the most up to date information on culls, counts and population targets as well as a summary of specific actions the DMG will undertake. The meeting reviewed the Working Plan and noted the following points.

- Woodland operations (plan item 1.9.5) – To be addressed in a forthcoming agenda.
- Peatland (1.10.16) for further discussion.
- Scottish quality wild venison (1.15.1) – Letter to be circulated to all members.
- Collaborative collection of carcasses (1.15.2) – Some progress has been made.
- Marketing venison locally (1.15.3) – Good progress via Ardgay Game who is able to return venison to estates to sell directly if required.

LS

- DMG boundary (1.15.5) – The issue of fencing on the DMG boundary where appropriate is to be the subject of an agenda item at a future meeting.
- Signage (1.16.5) – Further progress anticipated in 2018.

8. Financial report

8.1 Annual accounts to 30 June 2017

The Treasurer presented the annual accounts, noting that the group had finished the year with a healthy bank balance, having raised subscriptions in anticipation of undertaking various works to be co-funded by ECAF. However, following the withdrawal by Scottish Government from the ECAF scheme, funds had not been committed to these activities.

Costs during the year had comprised the group's ADMG subscription, a contribution towards DMG for website hosting and group secretarial costs.

8.2 Budget 2017/2018 – The Secretary identified three main areas of anticipated expenditure being:

- Deer Management Plan implementation.
- ADMG subscriptions (now levied at a rate of £4 per stag, £2 for hinds and calves and £1 for other species).
- Secretarial fees.

8.3 Subscriptions 2017/2018 – The Secretary proposed that subscriptions were levied on the basis of the ADMG subscription plus a 150% uplift on that subscription rate to pay for group activities. This would provide £3,000 to be spent on project costs.

It was agreed that the secretarial fee be raised by £100 to £1,100 plus VAT.

Donald Fraser proposed that the budget rate and subscription rate be approved by the meeting, this proposal being seconded by the Chairman. The budget and subscriptions were approved.

9. Elections of honorary officers

9.1 Chair – The Chairman stepped aside for this item. Donald Fraser proposed that Frank Spencer-Nairn continue in his capacity as Chair of the Group. This motion was seconded by Clive Meikle and agreed unilaterally by the meeting.

9.2 Vice Chair – Richard Smith proposed that Donald Fraser continue as the Vice Chair. Frank Spencer-Nairn seconded this motion which was carried.

9.3 Treasurer – Frank Spencer-Nairn proposed that Clive Meikle continue as Treasurer. Donald Fraser seconded this motion which was carried.

10. Appointment of Secretary

10.1 The Chairman proposed that Bidwells was reappointed as Secretary at a moderately increased fee of £1,100 plus VAT per annum. This motion was seconded by Mike Spencer-Nairn and carried.

11. AOCB

11.1 Sporting rates – This was discussed earlier in the meeting under ADMG.

12. Date of next meeting

12.1 The next meeting will be held on Monday 19 February 2018 at 2.30pm at Culligran House.

DEER MANAGEMENT PLANNING FORUM

1. Review of the 2016/2017 hind season.

Those present gave a verbal report on the numbers of stags culled and identified the likely numbers of hinds to be targeted during the season. This is summarised in the table below.

PROPERTY	STAGSHOT	PROPOSED HIND CULL	COMMENTS
West Monar & Pait	29	72	Dougie Lippe observed that stags had moved on and off the ground during the season, reappearing towards the end. Access had been very difficult owing to the low level of Loch Monar, and although the loch level had risen it was not enough to make a significant difference to getting to the ground and recovering carcasses. High levels of water in the watercourses contributed to access difficulties.
East Monar	26	40	Steven Potter reported limited numbers of stags with not much movement. 75% of stalking days were affected by disturbance by hillwalkers. The low level of the loch was also a problem for East Monar.
Braulen	126	369	Richard Smith reported that stags were heard roaring in the vicinity of Braulen Lodge on 22 August but then disappeared before reappearing towards the end of the season. Relatively few stags on the north side of Braulen for all of September. The rut seemed early at Braulen (though not so elsewhere). Some walker disturbance on some weekends, especially the last weekend of September.

Culligran	30 (28 at Culligran and 2 in the Orrin)	75	Hamish Fraser reported that the rut commenced late. Culligran started stalking on 18 September but the first stag was not shot until 21 September. A short season at Culligran. Many hillwalkers were seen as usual.
Erchless	35 (15 on Erchless, 20 on Glen Gowrie)	160 (80 plus 80 in relation to proposed forestry)	George Fraser reported stags first appeared on 27 September. There were no opportunities to shoot early stags and all but one of the stags were shot in October. The northwest wind brought stags onto the ground, several of these being good stags in good condition. Only a few stags were shot with hinds. The rut was late with the first stag being seen with hinds on 9 October. Hillwalking and other general access causing disturbance pushed the deer off the ground in August and September.
Farley	13	20 (higher numbers will be shot if available).	A late rut was reported and considerable disturbance suffered from walkers. The stags shot were in good condition.
Struy	27	30	Greg Fraser reported there were plenty of stags on the ground at Struy and there were no real difficulties in achieving the target cull.
Glen Cannich	50	90	Donald Fraser reported a late rut, with stags in good condition. Many days were ruined by walkers emphasising the requirement for walkers to make contact prior to setting off. Some new hills were now being targeted by hillwalkers (the Grahams).
East Benula North	16	83	Commentary as per Glen Cannich above.

2. Update of the DMG population model

- 2.1 Calving - Sinclair Coghill sought feedback on calving rates. Braulen reported above average calving whilst Glen Cannich reported an average calving.
- 2.2 Sinclair requested feedback from stalkers on how many calves make it through to April and therefore become yearlings. Request that stalkers count some groups of hinds and calves to give an indication of survival rates for population model.
- 2.3 Sinclair noted low levels of mortality in the 2016/2017 winter.
- 2.4 Population model to be updated and circulated with minutes.

3. Discussion and planning of the hind season cull 2017-2018. Hind target numbers noted in the table above. Agreed that continuing efforts were required in order to implement the agreed reduction cull which had started in the 2016/2017 season.