

Subject: Glen Strathfarrar Deer Management Group
 Project: Autumn meeting and AGM
 Date: 22 October 2018
 Location: Culligran Estate
 Present: Frank Spencer-Nairn (FSN) Culligran (Chairman)
 Hamish Fraser (HF) Culligran
 Donald Fraser (DF) Glen Cannich and East Benula North (Vice Chair)
 Andrew Fraser (AF) Glen Cannich and East Benula North
 Stephen Potter (SP) East Monar
 Kevin MacNeil (KM) East Monar
 Douglas Lippe (DL) West Monar and Pait
 Clive Meikle (CWM) Braulen (Treasurer)
 Richard Smith (RS) Braulen
 Steven Fraser (SF) Braulen
 Rod Andean (RA) Bidwells (Secretary)
 Michael Spencer-Nairn (MSN) Struy
 George Fraser (GF) Erchless
 Sinclair Coghill (SC) SNH
 Linzi Seivwright (LS) Caorunn (DMP Contractor)

All DMG members, SNH, SCC, Caorunn

Distribution:

MINUTES

ITEM	ACTION OWNER
1. Welcome and Apologies	
1.1 The Chairman welcomed all those at the meeting and introduced Rod Andean of Bidwells.	
1.2 Apologies were received from:	
Martin Mackay (Farley) 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) Greg Fraser (Struy) Peter Sinclair-Knipe (Erchless)	
2. Approval of minutes of 19 February 2018	

- 2.1 The Chairman conducted a review of the minutes. No changes were identified.
- 2.2 DF proposed approval of the minutes which was seconded by RS. The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising

- 3.1 The Chairman attended the South Ross Deer Management Area (SRDMA) annual liaison meeting on 22 June at Strathconon. The Chairman reported that this continues to be a useful forum. All in attendance reported high mortality last winter. All highlighted their frustration about the 2019 SNH helicopter count not taking place. It was noted that the earliest a count may take place is January/February 2020.
- 3.2 It was also noted that Alan McDonnell of Tree for Life spoke at the meeting. He referred to a greater vision which spilled into Glen Cannich and Glen Strathfarrar.
- 3.3 Sporting rates – It was noted that the Valuation Committee hearing for deer forests is to take place on 4 December 2018. A number of members confirmed that they had appealed.

4. Habitat monitoring by members

- 4.1 Dr Cathy Mayne provided habitat training in the summer. Culligran found the training good and helpful. It was noted that Dr Mayne possibly had a more realistic/sensible approach to monitoring than others. She is understood to have been on site for 5 days and provided some advice to most of the estates (except Struy, who used someone else).
- 4.2 Those present were asked how many plots they had looked at.
 - West Monar and Pait – 2 plots with Dr Mayne but nothing else
 - East Monar – approximately 50 plots
 - Braulen – approximately 200 plots
 - Culligran – 2 plots
 - Erchless – looking at plots the week of the meeting with an expectation to be complete at the end of the week
 - Farley – Bidwells to ask Martin Mackay for an update
 - Struy – plots have been assessed. LS to ask the ecologist/botanist for information
 - Glen Cannich – looked at some plots last year
- 4.3 LS congratulated those who had gathered the data and noted that this will help build a picture of the condition of the habitats which will be useful in the future.
- 4.4 Deer Management health check – LS, the Chairman and RA reviewed the Deer Management Plan in the summer. This group is identified as one of the better DMGs but there are still things to work on. Referring to the traffic light system used to review the various criteria, LS noted that the focus should be to maintain all those identified as green and to reduce the number identified as amber. LS noted that the group has a population model – which is good, but welfare data is not as good as it could be. In order to improve this, members need to provide information on weights, condition, etc of culled deer.

It was asked if the information on weights/condition was worthwhile because the big reduction culls result in all deer being culled as opposed to selected animals. It was noted that in order to meet the various criteria, the group needs to produce this information. SC informed the group that the more information they can provide, the better. Best Practice Guidance identifies all the information which would ideally be collated but it is understood that producing all that information may be testing. It was decided that in order to tackle this matter and provide more information on welfare, LS should produce a template questionnaire for review. If the group is happy with the template, members are to complete going forward. Communication was identified as a strong point for this group

- 4.5 Spring 2019 marks the halfway point in the current plan. LS asked if the group thought that a small update report should be produced and sent out to the local community. The Chairman wondered more could be done to liaise with the local community and noted that Culligran may do something with the local primary school.
- 4.6 LS informed the group that if the Scottish Government is focussed on the management and creation of new woodlands. In 2019, there will be funding for undertaking a survey – referred to as the Forestry Co-operation grant. It was noted that a survey was currently taking place in Glen Affric. The survey involves a forester reviews the area (looking at current woodland and what could be created) and prepares a scoping report identifying things. There is understood to be funding of up to £10,000 for this.
- 4.7 Larder hygiene course – It was noted that members from most estates attended this.
- 4.8 The group was asked if any were involved in the peatland restoration scheme. No members are involved. LS was asked to check what funding might be available for such a scheme. **LS**

5. ADMG report

- 5.1 The Chairman referred to the ADMG's newsletter – Scope (summer edition). Bidwells is to circulate key points from the newsletter:
- Review of compliance with the Deer Code. Responses required by 25 October 2018. The Deer Code is available online. LS urged all to complete the consultation. It was noted that this differs from the three year review as the Deer Code covers all deer, not just upland deer.
 - The ADMG are undertaking a survey of stalking rents. This stemmed from a question at the ADMG AGM, which was "are we charging the right amount for stalking?"
 - The Scottish Government strategy for Scottish venison – This relates to a marketing plan for hill and farmed venison.
 - The regional ADMG meeting will take place in Inverness on 21 November. DF to attend or ensure someone else from the group attends.

6. SNH report

- 6.1 SC noted that as things stand, SNH hope to undertake a helicopter count in Spring 2020. The Chairman asked if the Scottish Government would take account of the lack of helicopter counts and bad weather in their review? SC noted that all groups were in the same position as this group.
- 6.2 The next review of DMGs by the Scottish Government will take place in April/May 2019. SC thinks groups will generally be in a better place than previously.

- 6.3 It was noted that the Scottish Government has established a Deer Working Group (which is separate to SNH). This group has been given a broad remit to report to the Scottish Government about deer management in general. There is no clear timeline as to when the Scottish Government may respond to the information they receive. There is a general consensus that an outcome of the review will be “must do better”. One of the threats might be that SNH will formally instruct deer managers how to operate.

7. Chairman’s report

- 7.1 It has been extremely difficult year with a long winter followed by a very dry summer. This has now resulted in depressingly low deer numbers due to high mortality rates and poor calving. The hinds appear to be in poor condition and the rut has been late/has not really happened as it usually does. As a result, 2019 calving is likely to be poor. There generally seems to be less deer. In discussions with an estate stalker in Strathconon, it seemed as though they were experiencing the same situation and noted that they had the worst year in 30 years with only 8 stags out of 25 shot.

8. Financial report

8.1 Annual accounts to 30 June 2018

- 8.2 The Treasurer presented the annual accounts, noting that the group had again finished the year with a healthy bank balance as the group had received funding from SNH towards Habitat Assessment training. Costs during the year comprised the group’s ADMG subscriptions, DMG website hosting, group secretarial costs, training costs and DMG contractor costs. Income had been received through the raising of subscriptions and a grant from SNH.

8.3 Budget 2018/2019

The Treasurer identified three main areas of anticipated expenditure being:

- ADMG subscriptions
- Secretarial fees
- Project costs (Deer Management Plan review/update etc by Caorunn)

- 8.4 Subscriptions 2018/2019 – The Treasurer proposed that subscriptions were levied on the basis of the ADMG subscription plus 125%. This will create a small surplus ahead of 2020, the year of the next deer count (when members will appreciate lower levels of subscription while they meet their share of the deer count costs).

- 8.5 This was proposed by the Chairman and seconded by RS.

9. Election of Honorary officers

- 9.1 Chairman – The Chairman stepped aside for this item. DF nominated FSN to continue in his capacity as Chair of the group. This motion was seconded by CWM and agreed unanimously by those in attendance.

- 9.2 Vice Chair – CWM proposed that DF continued as the Vice Chair. RS seconded this motion which was carried.

9.3 Treasurer – FSN proposed CWM continues as Treasurer. DF seconded this motion which was carried.

10. Appointment of Secretary

10.1 FSN proposed that Bidwells continue as Secretary. DF seconded this motion which was carried.

11. AOCB

11.1 Some members noted they were feeling the pressure of not having a chiller from the game dealer as the game dealer is not collecting carcasses as regularly because many estates have chillers. It is therefore becoming a problem for those who do not have a chiller. The Chairman was of the opinion that it would be ideal if the game dealers came every second day during the rut – especially with the mild weather.

12. Date of next meeting

12.1 The date of the next meeting will be Monday 25 March 2019.

Deer Management Planning Forum

1. Review of the 2018 stag season and proposed hind cull 2018/2019 season

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

PROPERTY	STAGS SHOT	PROPOSED HIND CULL	COMMENTS
West Monar & Pait	20	25	Not many stags early on. Not the same numbers. Season did not get going. Some on the go early but then stopped. Still hinds without stags. West Monar worse than Pait. Only a few big stags. Some of the hinds look thin. Calving percentage/recruitment very low, possibly 10%. Lost a lot of calves at the end of the hind season. Lost 45 big stags to winter mortality. The low level of the loch has not helped with access to areas.
East Monar	15	10-15	Stags were not there. Many that were about were in poor condition. No hinds about. Suffered from a lot of disturbance from walkers and think this has pushed deer onto Strathconon. Not seen many calves. Those that have been seen appear to be in poor condition. Possibly 10% recruitment. High winter mortality. Found a dead hind last week. 22 stags, 33 hinds and 33 calves found dead.

Braulen	138	129	Just exceeded the target cull. Stags disappeared in August on the north side of the estate. This happened last year as well. Usually see circa 150 stags in Coire Glas but this year only around 60 (on a good day) – at least half not there. In general, the stags were about a stone lighter than usual with the older stags lighter than the younger ones. The stags came home on 10 October. Stags were with hinds on 18 September. There were areas where stags were roaring and other areas where they were not. A maximum of 10% recruitment – been counting numbers since July. Walkers having the usual impact. 36-38 stags and 15-16 hinds found dead. The greatest number of stags ever found dead since Richard Smith has been on Braulen.
Culligran	23	40	There was little roaring. Not many stags or hinds on the ground. Stags in poor condition with little flesh on them. Hinds look in poor condition and there appears to be few calves. They were lucky to get 23 stags. Did not hear a roar until 5 October. Frank only seen two stags fighting in the last day of the season. Probably around 10% recruitment.
Erchless	15 (plus 9 shot in woodland)	20 (needs to be confirmed)	No hinds about. 20 seen on Culligran march. Stags in poor condition. Some young stags came in from Farley on the first week – probably about 100 of them, nine of which were shot. Only one stag with hinds. Nine stags shot within the new fence in April (the gates were closed on 26 March 2018). Seven of them were good stags. Deer do not seem to be really using the corridor. Winter mortality: 3 stags, one hind and one calf.
Farley	12	Possibly 20	Understood to have been a late/no rut. General lack of deer due to activities on Erchless.
Struy	28	30	Plenty of mature and young stags in July/August. Plenty of stags in October but not that great in September. Fat on stags but less flesh. Averaged about 13st. Heaviest 21st 4lbs. Recruitment possibly around 10% as this is what has been seen on Eagle Brae. They have good numbers of hinds. There have been good numbers of hinds on the south side for 10 to 15 years. Not as many on the Dumnaglass flats. Mortality hard to judge due to woodlands. Planning an enclosure opposite Culligran along the rocky face to try and get birch etc to regenerate.
Glen Cannich	42	40	The quietest the hill has been. Non-existent rut. Not seen the deer coming down the hill. Stags in

			poor condition and appeared to have shorter antlers. Few rutted stags in the larder. Wonder if the hinds have not come into season. Hinds scattered about. Group of approximately 30 stags lying together right up until the week before the meeting. General scarcity of stags. Not many calves – recruitment around 10-12%. Does not think there were any more dead compared to usual. Put a sign up for walkers about stalking – no one called, yet they parked beside the sign. DF asked how the online information can be changed.
East Benula North	14	30	Commentary as per Glen Cannich. Not short of hinds but no replacements as poor recruitment.

2. Update on DMG population model

LS – total of 307 against a target of 359. The cull may be down but due to the high winter mortality, the total reduction in stag numbers is probably about what was proposed in the DMP.

3. Discussion and planning of hind season cull

The proposed hind cull in the DMP was 359 but LS will look to update the population model to reflect the numbers provided by the group. The updated model to be sent out to the group.