

Subject: Glen Strathfarrar Deer Management Group  
 Project: Spring meeting 2018  
 Date: 19 February 2018  
 Location: Culligran Estate  
 Present: Frank Spencer-Nairn  
           Hamish Fraser  
           Donald Fraser  
           Andrew Fraser  
           Douglas Lippe  
           Steven Potter  
           Kevin McNeil  
           Clive Meikle  
           Richard Smith  
           Steven Fraser  
           George Fraser  
           Peter Sinclair-Knipe  
           Tom Luthman  
           Greg Fraser  
           Martin Mackay  
           Sinclair Coghill  
           Linzi Seivwright

Culligran (Chair)  
 Culligran  
 Glen Cannich and East Benula North  
 Glen Cannich and East Benula North  
 West Monar & Pait  
 East Monar  
 East Monar  
 Braulen  
 Braulen  
 Braulen  
 Erchless  
 Erchless  
 Erchless  
 Struy  
 Farley  
 SNH  
 Caorunn (DMP Contractor)

Distribution: All DMG members, SNH, SCC, Caorunn

## MINUTES

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ITEM	ACTION OWNER
<b>1. Welcome and Apologies</b>	
1.1 The Chairman welcomed all those at the meeting.	
1.2 Apologies were received from:	
Michael Spencer-Nairn (Struy)	
Sir James Fuller (Glen Cannich and East Benula North)	
Anthony Fuller (Glen Cannich and East Benula North)	
Colin Stroyan (West Monar and Pait)	
<b>2. Approval of minutes of 23 October 2017</b>	
2.1 The Chairman conducted a review of the minutes. One correction was identified (the addition of Peter Sinclair-Knipe to the list of those attending the meeting).	
2.2 Donald Fraser proposed that the minutes were otherwise approved. This was seconded by Richard Smith. The minutes were approved.	

### 3. Matters arising

- 3.1 Erchless Native Woodland planting – There had been a meeting on 31 January 2018 held at Culligran and comprising various interested parties from Culligran, Erchless and Farley Estates. It was noted that the cull targets were likely to be met and no additional measures were going to be required in order to meet cull targets.

Tom Luthman provided an update advising that the fencing on the upper block of woodland was largely complete and the fence would be closed during the week of the meeting. The lower block will be fenced over the next few weeks. Planting will start in mid to late March and will last until June.

120 hinds had been culled at Erchless and 43 hinds culled on Glen Gowrie, both of which accorded with the targets set by SNH. Snow on the higher tops had helped keep the deer on the lower ground and assisted in meeting the targets.

The Chair had met with representatives of Fairburn Estate who had not identified any unusual movements on the Farley side or deer coming from Glen Gowrie.

Peter Sinclair-Knipe thanked George Fraser on behalf of Erchless Estate and the Robson family for his exceptional efforts and professionalism in achieving the cull.

Farley had not reported any unusual deer movements – in fact there had been a lack of deer present.

SNH noted that the Deer Management Group had risen to the significant challenge that the planting scheme had brought to all members and SNH was pleased that the group had successfully managed the various issues arising.

- 3.2 ECAF/SNH funding update – The DMG had made a bid for ECAF funding which was apparently successful, but at the last minute the scheme was withdrawn and is no longer available. Recognising that the purpose of the original ECAF was in part to assist with habitat impact assessment, SNH has made money available to all Deer Management Groups who wish to apply (up to £1,800 per group). The DMG has made an application for such funding and has agreed with SNH to submit an invoice for £1,800. The meeting agreed that these monies should be used for assistance with habitat impact assessment training and implementation. Linzi recommended a colleague, Dr Cathy Mayne of Mountain Environmental Services as a very able botanist who may be available to assist the group. Dr Mayne was also endorsed by Clive Meikle. Agreed that Dr Mayne should be invited to spend five days at Glen Strathfarrar during the first week in June providing training and general assistance to help estates get started on the process of habitat impact assessment data collecting.

The group had already held two training events but nevertheless further training and assistance would undoubtedly be helpful. The majority of members have not yet started habitat monitoring, and those that have still require some further assistance dealing with some of the practicalities and data management.

(Post meeting note – Dr Cathy Mayne contracted to be available to assist estates from 5 – 9 June).

- 3.3 Sporting rates – Scottish Land and Estates had recently provided some updated guidance. The members' attention was drawn to this.

#### **4. Deer Management Plan update**

- 4.1 Noted that the population model is key to the DMP update. Linzi noted that the group is on track to achieve the target density that is identified in the plan. However, much depends upon fertility and mortality rates. Accordingly, members are asked to plan for a recruitment count during the spring. Linzi will issue a request for information to help update the population model. Once this has been updated, the group will be in a better position to agree culls for the season 2018/2019.
- 4.2 Habitat monitoring – See notes above.

#### **5. ADMG report**

- 5.1 Noted that the AGM of the ADMG was to be held in Aviemore on 28 February (subsequently postponed until 22 March on account of adverse weather).
- 5.2 ADMG will be conducting a training day in the north of Scotland for Chairs, Secretaries and other interested parties.
- 5.3 South Ross Deer Management area meeting will take place at Strathconon in 2018.

#### **6. SNH report**

- 6.1 Helicopter count 2019 – SNH is understood to be keen to see a helicopter count proceed though cannot guarantee funding at this stage. It was generally agreed that the helicopter count is essential in providing the confidence required by members to carry out reduction culls. It was noted that both the Affric & Kintail and Strathconon DMGs had also set and achieved ambitious reduction targets, and all these groups will want to see the empirical data generated from a helicopter count before setting new cull targets.

The Chairman asked SNH to note that those at the meeting expressing a view would much prefer SNH directs any funding they might have for groups towards helicopter counts and not to any other group assistance.

SNH will undertake some preplanning for the helicopter count (Jimmy Irvine and Graham MacRae at SNH are the count co-ordinators). Even if SNH cannot commit to funding the count they will provide co-ordination.

Members noted that the earlier the count took place the better, albeit there are rarely suitable conditions prior to the spring. Nevertheless if possible the request at the meeting was that the count took place as early as possible in the season. This would help assist the hind cull 2018/2019.

- 6.2 Review of DMGs 2019 – A review of Deer Management Groups/The Deer Management System will take place in 2019. In advance of this, Linzi will carry out a pre-assessment check of the GSDMG's activities against the prescribed list of criteria. Some areas will require to be considered before the next (October) DMG meeting, eg applying for peatland action fund, etc. Noted there may be feasibility funding available and the group should perhaps apply for an assisted feasibility study. Linzi will liaise with the Chair and the Secretary to discuss an application for peatland restoration feasibility study.

SNH noted that whilst there had been significant changes to Deer Management Groups in recent years, ministers are now concerned about the delivery of outcomes (not just delivering a robust mechanism for planning for these). SNH is tasked to undertake a further review to establish progress in delivering the targets in all the Deer Management Plans provided by Deer Management Groups. The minister has appointed working groups (Upland and Lowland) and their consideration of the subject is ongoing.

## 7. Treasurer's report

7.1 The group had set a budget for the year to 30 June 2018 identifying income levied from proprietors with expenditure on ADMG subscriptions, secretarial costs and project costs. Noted that the group was due to receive an invoice from Linzi for various project costs incurred, including reviewing and updating the Deer Management Plan and providing the annual report. This is accounted for in the budgeted costs. In addition, the group is likely to find an additional £1,800 of income which will be used to meet the costs of Dr Cathy Mayne in providing habitat impact assessment training and implementation. As this expenditure is likely to be received and expended prior to the end of June 2018 it will fall within this year's budget. The Treasurer reported that there was no change to budget.

## 8. Any other business

8.1 In response to an enquiry from SNH regarding how they could best assist the group in meeting its aims, the response was generally that assistance with the co-ordination and cost of helicopter counts was the most significant contribution SNH could make – having an accurate handle on deer numbers across the group and the wider South Ross area allows the group to plan with confidence. Culling the right numbers of deer then provides positive outcomes for many other actions within the plan.

## 9. Date of next meeting

9.1 The next meeting will be held on 22 October 2018 at 2.30pm at Culligran House.

## DEER MANAGEMENT PLANNING FORUM

1. Review of the 2017/2017 hind season.

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

PROPERTY	HINDS SHOT	CALVES SHOT	PROPOSED STAG CULL (TO BE CONFIRMED)	COMMENTS
West Monar & Pait	51	6	30	Hinds in very poor condition with high rates of mortality identified (so far spotted 15 dead stags and some dead hinds and yearlings). Level of Loch Monar still low at the start of the season, although the level has risen now. Access issues arising therefore restricted the available stalking. There still are large areas of Pait with very few hinds.

<b>East Monar</b>	40	12	25	Hinds in poor condition owing to a long hard winter. Noted some stag mortality including a number of bigger mature stags. Access problems continued throughout the season (low water levels in the loch).
<b>Braulen</b>	338	93	130	Many hinds were shot on the north side as very few hinds seen on the south side. At no point since mid-November did Braulen have as many as 800 hinds on the estate. The deer were in poor condition from the start of the season.
<b>Culligran</b>	110	43	30	Hinds in poor condition from the outset. The calves were very small. Less disruption this season from walkers as the weather was very poor and deer were being stalked lower on the hillside.
<b>Erchless</b>	163	54	15	The deer were in reasonable condition until the end of January but poor condition later, especially in Glen Gowrie. Of those shot, 120 hinds and 40 calves were on Erchless and 43 hinds and 14 calves were in Glen Gowrie. In addition, six hinds and one calf were shot in the woodland. Sika were seen including for the first time a Sika hind.
<b>Farley</b>	23	13	10	There was much disturbance from dogwalkers. Hinds were in very poor condition.
<b>Struy</b>	30	7	25-30	The hinds were all shot on the lower ground, mainly in or around the woodland that has been opened up for access by deer. Very few were shot on the open hill. Numbers very much as expected. Groups of young stags still being seen on the estate.
<b>Glen Cannich</b>	91	27	50	The hinds were in reasonable condition until the end of January when they lost condition rapidly. There were more hinds on the ground early on but they moved away with the first snow in November.

<b>East Benula North</b>	103	58	20	The deer moved into the area early in the season and the estate targeted a higher cull reflecting the environmental sensitivity of this area. Several calves were shot without their mothers (groups of separated calves identified). Anticipating mortality will be higher than usual but hard to tell until the first snow melts out of the hollow. Less disruption from walkers this season due to poor weather.
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## 2. Review/update of population of model

2.1 Sinclair Coghill distributed the population model (although this would require updated following the collection of the full results at the group meeting).

2.2 Sinclair noted it would be useful to understand the recruitment rate being observed on the ground, ie what calves are entering the population this year. Stalkers were asked to observe how many calves are with hinds to give an idea of percentage calving, especially during the month following the meeting. Building in the real mortality rate and real calf survival can help refine the model.

**ALL**

In respect of deer impact, consideration should be given to whether stags are using areas of the SAC as wintering ground. It may be necessary to target these particular stags and areas in the forthcoming season.

A full helicopter count in 2019 will be useful.

2.3 The Chairman requested a report from each estate at the October meeting on whether there appears to be a build up of younger stags on the ground.

**ALL**

2.4 The hind cull for the year ahead will be set in October but it was noted that the group is committed to a second year of culling circa 1,000 hinds across the group, so targets are likely to be similar to the 2016/20176 season.

2.5 Linzi Seivwright requires to update the Deer Management Plan and therefore requires records and data from each estate. Linzi will circulate questions for estates to complete in order to allow the plan to be updated.

**LS**