

Subject: Glen Strathfarrar Deer Management Group  
Project: Autumn meeting and AGM  
Date: 21 October 2019  
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  
Richard Smith (RS) Braulen  
Steven Fraser (SF) Braulen  
Rod Andean (RA) Bidwells (Secretary)  
George Fraser (GF) Erchless  
Sinclair Coghill (SC) SNH  
Linzi Seivwright (LS) Caorunn (DMP Contractor)  
Greig Fraser (GF) Struy

Distribution: All DMG members, SNH, SCC, Caorunn

## MINUTES

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### ITEM

#### 1. Welcome and Apologies

1.1 The Chairman welcomed all those at the meeting.

1.2 Apologies were received from:

Martin Mackay (Farley)  
Michael Spencer-Nairn (Struy)  
Peter Sinclair-Knipe (Erchless)  
Douglas Lippe (West Monar and Pait)  
Clive Meikle (Bidwells)  
Charlie Thomson (Farley)  
Members of the Stroyan family (West Monar and Pait)  
Sir James Fuller (Glen Cannich and East Benula North)  
Edward Fuller (Glen Cannich and East Benula North)

#### 2. Approval of minutes of 25 March 2019

2.1 Corrections to minutes: paragraph 4.7, third sentence, should be changed to note that three sika have been shot on Glen Cannich and some have been seen on Culligran.

2.2 Paragraph 8.3, fourth sentence, should start Sir James Fuller.

2.3 On the basis of the corrections being made, the minutes were proposed by DF and were seconded by RS.

### **3. Matters arising**

- 3.1 a) SRDMA liaison meeting – The Chairman reported the 2019 Liaison meeting, hosted by our DMG, took place on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019 at Struy Lodge, with thanks to Michael and Angus Spencer-Nairn & family for their hospitality. As usual, it was a useful forum for representatives of the 5 DMGs in the South Ross Deer Management Area to keep in touch. Next year's host will be the Glenmoriston DMG. The Chairman took the opportunity to inform the DMH that North Affric Estate had hosted a meeting of the proposed East West Wild Project being promoted by Trees For Life. It is understood that whilst the main area being looked at is focused on Glen Affric, it could include parts of the Glen Cannich, Struy, Braulen and Pait. It is understood that the Glen Affric Deer Management Group are commissioning a report to identify positives of their proposed project. It was noted that none of the Estates within the Glen Strathfarrar Deer Management Group have been approached by Trees for Life or the Glen Affric Deer Management Group in relation to this proposed project and so there is no detail on what this project may entail.
- 3.2 b) Sporting rates – It is understood that most, if not all, Estates within the Group have agreed their rateable values with the District Valuer and there is nothing further on this point.
- 3.3 c) Forestry co-operation grant – It was identified at the previous meeting that there was potentially funding of up to £10,000 available for undertaking a forestry based review of the land within the Glen Strathfarrar SSSI which covers four of the Estates (Braulen, Culligran, Struy, Glen Cannich) within the Deer Management Group. A consultant, Carol Robertson of Native Woods Co-operative (Scotland) Ltd, was contacted and discussions took place surrounding how matters might progress. However, in order to progress with the application for the funding and for Carol Robertson to be the representative, each of the four Estates were required to sign a letter consenting to Carol Robertson undertaking the works and signing up to the requirements of the funding. However, Braulen was unwilling to sign a consent letter as it was not clear to them how the money was being used by the consultant and indeed what the outcomes may be to the Estate once the work had been undertaken and reports submitted to Scottish Forestry and SNH. As a result, the Group missed the application deadline for this year. It was however identified that there may be an opportunity to apply for the funding next year, although Linzi Seivwright was asked to establish if the three Estates, Culligran, Struy and Glen Cannich would be able to apply for the funding themselves. SC explained that he was not aware of anything binding on the Estates within the contract. It was noted that Glen Cannich, Culligran and Struy were all disappointed that this did not go ahead.
- 3.4 d) SNH assessment – As explained at the spring meeting, the Group liaised with LS to undertake a health check of the Group in advance of the SNH Assessment. The Group received a good report but there were some points that required some work in advance of the SNH Assessment. This work was undertaken by the Group and LS. The Assessment took place at SNH Great Glen House. Representing the Deer Group were FSN, DF, RS, RA and LS. From SNH was SC and Tamara Lawton. The Group and SNH agreed an excellent result for the Group with all assessment points passing. It is noted that a traffic light system is used in the Assessment; red identifying problems, amber that work was still required and green that the criteria was met. Therefore, all points assessed were green for the Group. This does not mean that the Group has nothing to do as there remain points to continuously review/progress.

### **4. DMP and HIA updates/reports (Linzi Seivwright)**

- 4.1 a) Summary of habitat monitoring – It was confirmed that none of the Estates represented at the meeting had undertaken HIAs this year but there was a plan to try to undertake HIAs in 2020. Across the Group there are understood to be 177 HIA plots. SNH confirmed that they did not plan to undertake their own HIA of the SAC within the Group's area. However, this may change depending on the deer count this winter.

- 4.2 b) Deer Management Plan update – LS continues to update the Working Plan as and when required. She informed the Group that she had previously updated a section on social economics in relation to deer management within the Group. She also updated the section on training for those undertaking stalking. It was acknowledged that the Group are at present on track to deliver everything identified at the outset of the Deer Management Plan. The Chairman asked LS to send the updated Working Plan to relevant members for their own reference.
- 4.3 c) Deer condition and welfare feedback – There was a general consensus that the weather this summer had been good for the deer population with vegetation growing well and thus providing plenty of food for the deer. It was however noted that there were a lot of hinds without calves.
- 4.3 d) Training – Nothing to report.
- 4.4 e) Invasive species
- **Sika deer:** One sika was seen on the open hill on Struy. Glen Cannich heard sika calling in the wood. Erchless heard sika calling in the wood. Culligran heard them in the wood.
  - **Feral pigs:** It was noted that on Struy some ground had been turned over at the side of a wood, but no pigs have been seen and no other damage has been seen.
  - **Feral goats:** Numbers are thought to have potentially increased although they have not been counted. It was acknowledged that SC had sent the Group SNH's policy for managing goats on the Island of Rum.
- 4.5 f) Community engagement for this meeting – So far the Community Council have not responded to the agenda or minutes from the spring meeting.

Deer Management Plan mid-term review – It is understood that the Glen Affric Group wondered if a joint public meeting with our DMG (as we did before) after the 2020 count would be worthwhile. It was decided that the Chairman should look to liaise with the Affric Group and invite the Affric Chairman, Willie Fraser to attend the Glen Strathfarrar spring meeting.

- 4.6 g) Access and signage
- Culligran - Nothing to report in relation to impacts on deer stalking from public access.
  - Glen Cannich – Noted that members of the public now appear to walk wherever they like and do not ask if there is any stalking taking place or how this may impact on where they walk. This season there has been the least number of telephone calls and/or people stopping at the stalker's house to confirm the situation. More members of the public were identified to be walking "off-piste" as opposed to following designated routes. There is understood to be a sign at the bailey bridge stating that culling is in progress and that members of the public should stop at the stalker's house before going to the hill. Members of the public appear to park in front of this sign and do not pay attention to it.
  - Braulen – Braulen disturbance is generally confined to the defined route following the ridge line of the Munros. The only issue experienced during the stag season this year was with people camping for three days in the Inchvuilt Wood. This prevented stalking in that area.
  - It was noted that LS can add information to the Group's website regarding access in order to try and help inform the public.

## **5. ADMG report**

5.1 Regional meetings, AGM and Holyrood – The ADMG summer regional meeting was held at Alladale Estate. The Chairman and LS attended the meeting. The Chairman has minutes from the meeting if members wish to review them. He also has an agenda for the forthcoming regional meeting to be held in Inverness on 21 November 2019. There is to be an ADMG parliamentary meeting at Holyrood in Edinburgh on 11 December 2019 (now postponed to the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2020). This meeting will give ADMG members an opportunity to liaise with MSPs. The Chairman and LS hope to attend this meeting. Copies of the latest addition of ADMG's Scope magazine were provided to those attending this meeting. It was acknowledged that the E-scope email produced by AMDG continues to be sent out to the Group by the Secretary, although some may receive it direct from the ADMG.

## **6. SNH report (Sinclair Coghill)**

- 6.1 a) SNH still plan to undertake the helicopter count this coming winter. It was acknowledged that the South Ross area is a key target for SNH this winter. It is acknowledged that the costs of the helicopter count are split 50:50 between SNH and the various Estates. The time the helicopter spends covering each Estate is recorded thus allowing the costs to be divided between the Estates. Culligran Estate will bill the individual estates rather than the DMG; thus enabling VAT to be recovered where possible. Jimmy Irvine of SNH is likely to be the co-ordinator for the count. Count co-ordinators from the Group will be RS, HF and DF and any others who wish to participate.
- 6.2 b) Review of DMG's 2019 – SC confirmed that SNH reported their findings (post DMG Assessments) to the Scottish Government in September 2019. To date, no feedback has been received.

## **7. Annual Report (Chairman)**

- 7.1 The Chairman was delighted that the SNH assessment went well and that all amber points turned to green. This does not however mean that the Group should not continue to progress and evolve.
- 7.2 He noted that it had been a mixed stag season in relation to changeable weather conditions, deer health and timings and length of the rut. However, it was acknowledged that the summer had generally been good for the deer with plenty of vegetation allowing them to regain condition after the long dry winter and the previous dry summer.
- 7.3 He informed the Group that he understood that as of 1 November, West Monar and Pait would be under new ownership. He is not aware of who the new owners are, but noted that the deer group should look to welcome them into the Group as soon as possible and inform them of the agenda for the winter, in particular the situation with the SNH deer count.

## **8. Financial Report (Treasurer)**

### **8.1 a) Annual Accounts to 30 June 2019**

RA of Bidwells referred the Group to the draft annual accounts produced by the Treasurer for the year to 30 June 2019 including the proposed budget for 2019/2020. The Group started the 2018/2019 year with an opening bank balance of £6,724.25. Income was received from subscriptions totalling £6,926. Expenditure consisted of ADMG subscriptions, DMG website hosting, group secretarial costs, irrecoverable VAT and DMG contractor costs, all of which amounted to a total of £6,456.

There was therefore a surplus for the year of £470. At the end of the financial year (30 June 2019), the Group's closing bank balance was £7,582.60.

## 8.2 b) Budget 2019/2020

The Treasurer proposed a budget from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020 on the basis of a 100% uplift on the ADMG subs as opposed to 125% in the previous year. The Chairman informed the Group that Bidwells had requested an increase to their secretarial fee going forward which was not accounted for in the proposed budget. Bidwells' proposal reflected the significant loss being incurred by Bidwells in fulfilling the secretarial role. Bidwells' proposed charging half of their annual fee for the period 1 July to 31 December 2019 and from 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2020, charging a fee of £1,500 plus outlays and VAT. The Chairman proposed that the Group discuss how to move forward in relation to the secretarial role at the spring meeting (2020).

The Chairman proposed that Bidwells remain as Secretary until 30 June 2020. DF seconded this proposal.

As part of this proposal, the Chairman identified that the budget would need to be updated to reflect the increase in secretarial fees, with the deficit being absorbed by the Group as opposed to increasing subscriptions. He noted there was sufficient funds in the Group's bank account to cover the additional costs.

## 8.3 c) Subscriptions 2019/2020

ADMG subscriptions remain at the following levels:

- Stags - £4.00
- Hinds and Calves - £2.00
- Others - £1

## 9. **Election of Honorary officers**

The following were elected by the meeting:

- 9.1 a) Chairman - DF proposed FSN as Chairman, RS seconded this. FSN agreed to maintaining the position of Chairman but informed the Group that he will retire from this position at the point of a new Deer Management Plan being discussed/created.
- 9.2 b) Deputy Chairperson – DF proposed Sir James Fuller as Deputy Chairperson. RS seconded this.
- 9.3 c) Treasurer – The Chairman informed the group that Clive Meikle will stand for Treasurer for one more year before retiring from the position. FSN proposed Clive Meikle as Treasurer, DF seconded this.

## 10. **Appointment of Secretary**

- 10.1 Please refer to section 8. Bidwells will remain as Secretary until 30 June 2020.

## 11. AOCB

- 11.1 The Chairman informed the Group that he had been approached by Ewen Cameron (who is understood to have been the second warden when Glen Strathfarrar was a NNR) about the Hill Land Use and Ecology Discussion Group (which he chairs) visiting Glen Strathfarrar on 27 May 2020. It is understood they will be based in Beauty but would like to visit Glen Strathfarrar and discuss deer management and land use. The Chairman will continue to liaise with Ewen Cameron on this matter, however he noted that he felt this could be a good PR opportunity for the Group to demonstrate the good work that they are doing.
- 11.2 SNH peatland restoration – SC informed the group that the Scottish Government had identified that there was a Climate Emergency. He therefore proposed that the Group may wish to review its position in relation to peatlands and if there were any opportunities for restoration programmes within the Group. SC will provide the Group with an internet link to a presentation from the Chair of SNH in relation to climate change. The link provided by SC at the end of the meeting is as follows:  
***<https://www.nature.scot/not-too-late-act-climate-change>***
- 11.3 DF informed the Group that someone has cut and opened up a section of the deer fence between Glen Cannich and Forestry and Land Scotland's ground. This has resulted in deer moving from the open hill into the forestry ground. Although Forestry and Land Scotland have not confirmed numbers of deer shot. DF identified stalkers removing at least 8 or 9 stags from the woodland. However, the number of deer being shot in the woodland as a result of the fence cutting may be significantly higher.
- 11.4 DF is to contact Russell Cooper (Forestry and Land Scotland) to try and establish how many deer have been shot and who might have cut the fence and what has been done to ensure that this is repaired and does not happen again.
- 11.5 The old fence between Struy and Glassburn continues to cause problems with deer getting through the fence. It may be that a section of this fence will have to be replaced.

## 12. Date of next meeting

- 12.1 The Chairman proposed Monday 16 March 2020 at 2:30pm at Culligran House.

## Deer Management Planning Forum

### 1. Review of the 2019 stag season and discussion and planning of hind season cull 2019/2020 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	12		Understood to have been a poor season primarily due to low levels of the Loch preventing access to stalking grounds. There was also a week of wind and rain which impacted on stalking. No information on the forthcoming hind cull was provided.
East Monar	19	15-20	Stags were in good condition early in the rut but quickly lost condition resulting in light carcass weights. It was noted that low Loch levels did not help with access to areas on the Estate and the loss of one of their garrons prevented them from accessing areas. In general, there did not appear to be many calves with the hinds and there was generally a lower number of hinds.
Braulen	127	80-100	Stags appeared to be in good condition early in the stalking season but lost condition rapidly through the rut resulting in light carcass weights. In general, it was a bit of a struggle to find stags this season, especially prior to the stags breaking out. In the past the north side of the Estate used to be the best area for stags, but this has changed with stags disappearing in August and only returning in the middle of the rut. In particular it was noted that this was the third year running that there were no stags in the area known as Coire Glas. They seem to disappear from August with some returning in the middle of the rut. 80-100 hinds will be shot up to the end of December. Thereon numbers will be assessed before anymore culling takes place. Recruitment of yearlings was thought to be approximately 20% and this year's calving (2019) approximately 20%.

<b>Culligran</b>	30 (5 of which were in the Orrin)	40	In general, it was a difficult season to find stags although the target was met. The rut appeared to last about one week in early October, although there were stags with hinds prior to that stage. It was noted that the stags did not appear to be “run” as they usually would be come the end of the rut and most big stags disappeared after the first week. Weights of stags appeared to be low, the heaviest stag was 15 stone 10lbs, but most were in the region of 13 stone. Carcasses appeared to lack flesh. In general, it seemed that the rut is getting shorter. Yearling recruitment estimated at 10% and this year’s calving at 20%. This year’s calves are very small probably due to a late calving. There appears to be damage to heather from heather beetle.
<b>Erchless</b>	13	15	There was a lack of stags and they struggled to get the 13. The east wind during the rut did not help stalking on Erchless there were no shootable stags on the Glen Gowrie side. Calving rate estimated to be 10%. Hind numbers appear low, possibly in the region of 20 hinds inhabiting the Estate. There are anecdotal reports of influxes of deer on Fairburn and that there was a large influx of deer on to Strathconon after the big cull on Erchless.
<b>Farley</b>	6		No other information provided.
<b>Struy</b>	28	30	Stags generally in better condition than previous years. It was a short rut. Yearling recruitment around 20% and calving around 20%. Appears to be damage to heather from heather beetle.
<b>Glen Cannich</b>	46	30-40	First roar heard on 9 September, but the rut only started around the first week or two in October - only lasting about one week. The big stags finished the rut early. Carcasses of stags shot early had fat on them but once the rut started they lost condition quickly and it was noted that there was a general lack of flesh on all carcasses. Recruitment of yearlings approximately 15% and calving 15%. There appears to be some significant damage to heather by heather beetle.
<b>East Benula North</b>	14	30	Struggled to find stags with several blank days. A lot of deer were far out and so they could not stalk them. Recruitment of yearlings approximately 15% and calving 15%. There appears to be some significant damage to heather by heather beetle.

## 2. Update on DMG population model

LS – Having regard for information received at the meeting, the model was suggesting there to be approximately 2,800 hinds. This equates to 13.4 deer/km<sup>2</sup> which is slightly lower than the Deer Management Plan target of 14 deer/km<sup>2</sup>. In order to maintain the target population density, a cull of approximately 305 hinds will be required this season which is slightly less than the 367 hinds culled last year. The Chairman informed SNH that there generally appeared to be less deer, resulting in less income to the Estates and less income to the local economy via sporting guests, etc. This all may result in less jobs which will have a detrimental impact on the local economy and indeed the number of people living in the local area.