

West Sutherland Deer Management Group

Meeting held at The Ceilidh Place, Ullapool,

on Thursday 3rd November 2016

MINUTES

Chairman – David Allison (DA), Reay Forest; Secretary – Kirsty MacLeod (KGM)

In Attendance:

Jim Payne (JGP) (Ardvar)
Michael Ross (MR) (Ardvar)
David Davies (DD) (Inverpolly)
Mark White (MW) (Glencassley)
Roddy Watt (RW) (Merkland)
Dr Jean Balfour (JB) (Scourie)
Brendan O'Hanrahan (BOH) (Assynt Foundation – Glencanisp/Drumrunie)
Gordon Robertson (GR) (Assynt Foundation – Glencanisp/Drumrunie)
Rebecca Macleod (RM) (Assynt Foundation – Glencanisp/Drumrunie)
Fiona Saywell (FS) (Culag Community Woodland Trust – Little Assynt)
Ray Mackay (RMcK) (Assynt Crofters' Trust – North Assynt Estate)
Mark Foxwell (MF) (SWT – Benmore Coigach)
Henry Bulmer (HB) (Keanchulish)
Mark Mackenzie (MM) (Keanchulish)
James Vestey (JV) (Benmore Assynt)
Bruce Blackley (BB) (Benmore Assynt)
Craig Ross (CR) (Inchnadamph)
Don O'Driscoll (DOD) (John Muir Trust – Quinag)
Romany Garnett (RG) (John Muir Trust – Quinag)
Kenny Macaskill (KM) (Badentarbet)
Claire Acheson (CA) (CKD Galbraith – Eisg Brachaidh and Inver & Kirkaig)
Andrew Hibbert (AH) (Loch Assynt Lodge)
Sue Agnew (SA) (SNH)
Richard Williams (RW) (CALLP)
Sinclair Coghil (SC) (SNH)

1. The Chairman opened the meeting

DA welcomed everyone to the meeting. There had been some progress in the area [Deer Management Plans] but still a bit behind versus elsewhere in the country. Of the four sub-groups, some in place, others in progress.

2. Apologies:

John Venters (Assynt Foundation), Alistair Campbell (Bidwells), Mike Daniels (John Muir Trust), Iain Thomson (Sallachy), Derick MacAskill (Forest Enterprise), Holly Deary (SNH), George Vestey (Inchnadamph)

3. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 14th April 2016

The minutes were agreed (proposed by BOH, seconded by JGP).

4. Matters Arising from the minutes of the last meeting:

JB asked if the maps referred to were circulated. Some estates had received copy but not the DMG.

Constitution and Operations Document will be uploaded to the website.

ACTION SNH

ACTION KM

Venison CWD. Food Hygiene/E-Coli. British Deer Society updates had recommended tying off back passage as well as oesophagus to prevent contamination/infection. Dealers removing flank and back end.

Sporting Rates – GR felt that while local assessors understood, they are led by central office which did not. They are struggling though as no staff to do the work. Hopefully estates managing deer sustainably will not be subject as they tend not to make money. It should be done on books/accounts rather than deer numbers. DA reported that Richard Cooke/ADMG have been lobbying on this issue. Target date is 2017 but realistically later than that.

All other items per Agenda.

5. Estate Reports

Cull Statistics for the Group were circulated.

Keanchulish – MM disappointed as short of deer. Population 30-45 hinds/calves now. 5 stags shot (3 on Coigach), no hinds. No plans to reduce other than on welfare. Benmore Coigach – MM looks after East side for SWT. 28 hinds/calves.

Glencanisp/Drumrunie – BOH reported 11 stags shot on Drumrunie, 51/52 on Glencanisp. Good condition.

Quinag – DOD reported 40 stags shot, plus 6 at Kylesku and 1 Sika.

Scourie – very little to report

North Assynt – RM reported 60 stags shot, part of big reduction cull required by SNH. Good condition. May not manage hinds target, talking to SNH about this.

Little Assynt – FS reported 3 stags shot

Loch Assynt Lodge – AH said last year was difficult, despite the count which he felt was too high and did not allow for movement overnight. Counted on their own in August and numbers were less than April. They have shot fewer over the years. Cancelled two stalking groups this year and looking at alternative uses for the ground.

Inverpollly – 17 stags shot, less than target. East wind did not help, nor did accuracy (!). Good condition.

Benmore Coigach – MF said Gavin still collating cull data.

Inchnadamph – CR reported 50 stags shot (11 Inchnadamph, 27 Stronchrubie, Cronc Ledmore 6, Glen Coul 5). Target of 50 hinds, if possible.

Benmore Assynt – BB reported 33 stags shot. In good order, fat around kidneys. Also shot some old stags. Young ones seen. Rutting noisy but not much activity. No mortalities found. East wind, good weather.

Badentarbet – KM reported 6 stags shot. Good season. 4 hinds shot, barren last year. Late born calves in Aug/Sep. First time deer counted by helicopter, previously done on foot and little seen. Bigger migration, smaller groups of hinds. Many changes seen since he started working there. 11 roe deer shot, and Sika seen for the first time.

Glencassley – MW 30 stags shot as planned, good weight, more fat than meat. Early rut. 50 hinds target.

Merkland – RW 30 shot open ground and 1 in the trees. Great weather. 30-40 hinds planned.

Eisg Brachaidh – CA 20 stags and 5 sika. Hinds target 30-35.

Ardvar – MR 17 stags shot. Good condition. Lack of hinds on the ground.

Reay Forest – DA 115 stags shot. S & E wind, long days. Stags in good condition, but less heavy. In the rut, stags soon ran out of steam. Hinds target 190 plus calves. Mixed condition.

Sallachy – KM read out IT's report, 18 stags on open hill. No hinds will be culled this season.

6. Sub Group Reports – Deer Management Plans

West (Assynt Peninsula)

(Ardvar, North Assynt, Quinag, Little Assynt, Middle Inver, Loch Assynt Lodge, Kylesku)
RM reported Draft Plan was ongoing. SNH reasonable happy with progress made. Hopefully in place by Christmas.

Lochinver South

(Glencanisp, Drumrunie, Inver & Kirkaig, Eisg Brachaidh, Inverpollly, Keanchulish, Benmore Coigach)

BOH reported that half the work was done in May. Renewed efforts now, population model done, draft hopefully ready by end November.

North (Reay Forest, Scourie, Merkland)

DA referred to recent meeting in August when final document was agreed. This will be on the website shortly. Draft has been on the website since January 2016.

East (Inchanadamph, Benmore Assynt, Glencassley, Sallachy, Invercassley/Duchally, Caplich, Glenrossal)

KGM read out update from IT. East group plan has been finalised and is on the website. He will update the plan in March 2017 to include the actual stag and hind cull and add the recent habitat monitoring data.

DA spoke about the ADMG website with map-based links to DMG websites. East Sutherland DMG also has four sub groups, and uses a standard format for each sub-group Deer Management Plan so that data can be viewed easily to show what is happening with populations. It was suggested that WSDMG does the same. Sub Groups to email model spreadsheets along with the PDFs of their DMPs to KGM so that the figures can be collated and shown on the website.

<http://www.deer-management.co.uk/> <http://wsutherlanddmg.deer-management.co.uk/>

ACTION Sub-Groups/KGM

7. SNH Report

In the absence of Holly Deary, SC reported on behalf of SNH. The assessment process took place by the end of June, covering all 44 DMGs, to update the 2014 assessment. Findings were collated and a report sent to Roseanna Cunningham (Minister for Rural Affairs) earlier in the week. Holly Deary had been frustrated by the lack of progress. WSDMG is a step behind, and it is important to move forward and deliver on the DMP, not just to have one.

8. ADMG Report

DA said that the second assessment has been uncomfortable for him as area representative. We must have DMPs that work and are workable. DA went on to remind the meeting that he has been considering his position [as Chair of WSDMG] for some time, He will continue for the time being.

SC advised that SNH's review of Authorisations took place earlier in the year and report was sent to the review panel. SNH accepted all recommendations. Authorisation process should continue, be more transparent and better. There should be collaboration and interaction [by applicants] with the local DMG so that authorisation is not a surprise. FCS made representations on this.

KM brought up the issue of crofters downloading authorisation forms, and they do not tend to engage with DMGS. SC confirmed that there is no record kept of who downloads general authorisation forms (for shooting deer on improved land and enclosed woodland in daylight).

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) – DA mentioned the good information on the British Deer Society website with regard to minimising risk.

DA brought up the shortfall in funding of £50-75,000 required for the next deer count. GR mentioned that if there are two estates not participating/contributing to the DMG, there must be others in the country, and this doesn't seem fair.

DA thought it was possible that there would be a change in legislation making membership compulsory rather than voluntary. SC felt this was unlikely given the political climate, and that more time was likely to be given [to the industry]. The Land Reform Act includes a 3 year review.

There followed some discussion about community landowners, which often have charitable status and grant support. GR felt there was more focus in community landownership towards paying their own way. Assynt Foundation was discussing putting money aside for the next count.

DA felt that there should be half of the required funds in place for the next count in 2020, and asked if there should be a separate account to build up funds. Agreement was needed on whether this should be an annual levy for the next 4 years, and whether that should be based on area or stags culled. SC mentioned ECAF (Environmental Co-operation Action Fund – SRDP) which opened last year and closed in January, with 2 of the 4 applications successful. JV asked if there would be another round. DD's rough calculation based on £40,000 worked out at £16 a stag. RW mentioned that CALLP had a budget of £5000 towards a helicopter count. Most favour helicopter count over foot count, due to lack of manpower. BOH agreed, comparable data was needed despite flaws (double counting etc.) Drones with thermal imaging cameras were mentioned, but there are legal implications currently with a 500m range limit. It was agreed to set up a sub group to research, discuss and present options to the wider group.

ACTION BOH/GR/IT/RM/KM

9. CALLP (Coigach-Assynt Living Landscapes Partnership)

RW reported that CALLP was now in the implementation phase. There are 28 projects to deliver over five years, to September 2021. These include native woodland planting, Outdoor and Woodland Learning, HHS/LPS/APS. Repairs to the Sulven path going ahead next year. Achlochan project already underway. Deer management – as well as the funding support for the next count, there was habitat monitoring in Year 2, the venison feasibility study (GR and BOH involved in that) and training in the form of subsidised DSC1 and DSC2 courses (60% covered so 40% to pay). KM to email members to gauge demand, with aim of organising DSC1 soon. There was also a 'Hill to Grill' project with RG and FS aimed at engaging with high school-age children.

Website <http://coigach-assynt.org/>

10. Accounts

Accounts for the year to 30 June 2016 were circulated. Approval proposed by MF, seconded CA.

Net income for the year was £132.17. Outstanding levy payments had been chased up and paid, with the exception of a few smaller amounts.

2016 invoices had been issued in August, with just over £1,035.69 still due.

There would be a bank balance of about £175 after payment of the main ADMG levy (£4005.90) secretarial fee and hire of meeting room, rising to £411 after the FES payment is received.

The FES element of the ADMG levy (£1067.25) is calculated slightly differently and invoiced separately. This was not yet settled. *[Received and ADMG paid shortly after the meeting].*

The WSDGM levy of £1.20 per red/sika stag (five year average) just about covers costs at present. DA asked about increasing the levy. To be discussed at next meeting.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place in March/April 2017. Secretary to contact members 2-3 months ahead of meeting with a list of potential dates as this had proved effective in maximising attendance.

ACTION KGM

DA stated that the Group should be looking to appoint a new Chair at that meeting.

12. AOCB

KGM still to contact Police Wildlife Officer with contact list for humane dispatch requirements. *[contact details provided by DoD post meeting, contact now established]*

ACTION KGM

KGM mentioned that there had been continuing concerns raised by residents in Lochinver, including some letters in the Assynt News. KGM had written a brief letter to the Assynt News on behalf of WSDMG with the website address and contact details.

DA mentioned a First Aid Course coming up in Kinlochbervie at £100 per person. KGM to circulate group.

ACTION KGM

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending. Meeting closed at 3:40pm