

West Sutherland Deer Management Group

General Meeting

at The Ceilidh Place, Ullapool

on Tuesday 13th November 2018

MINUTES

Present:

Chair – Gordon Robertson (GR) (Assynt Foundation)
Vice-Chair – David Allison (DA) (Reay Forest)
Mark White (MW) (Glencassley)
Craig Ross (CR) (Inchnadamph)
Bruce Blackley (BB) (Benmore Assynt)
Fiona Saywell (FS) (Culag Community Woodland Trust – Little Assynt, and CALLP)
Romany Garnet (RG) (John Muir Trust – Quinag)
Iain Thomson (Sallachy)
Dr Jean Balfour (JB) (Loch A Mhuillin, Scourie)
Sue Agnew (SA) (SNH)
Roddy Watt (RW) (Merkland)
Alex Dunning (Bidwells) (Keanchulish)

In Attendance:

Holly Deary (HD) (SNH)
Tom Chetwynd (TC) (ADMG)
Kirsty MacLeod (KM) Group Secretary
Victor Clements (VC) (DMP Author, South Sub Group)
Carrie Meagher (UHI Student)

1. Chairman's Welcome

GR opened the meeting by thanking everyone for coming.

2. Apologies:

James Vestey (Benmore Assynt),
Claire Acheson (CKD Galbraith – Eisg Brachaidh)
Ray Mackay (Assynt Crofters' Trust – North Assynt Estate)
Jorine Van Delft (Culag Community Woodlands Trust – Little Assynt)
Don O'Driscoll (John Muir Trust – Quinag)
Mark Foxwell (Scottish Wildlife Trust – Benmore Coigach)
Alan Balfour (Scourie)
David & Roseanna Bulmer, Henry Bulmer (Keanchulish)
Robbie Galloway (RG) (Tenant, Duchally)
David Davies (Inverpolly)
Jim Sloane (Kylesku)
Marcus Munro (MM) (Highland Shooting Centre – Ledmore House)
George Vestey (Inchnadamph)
Kenny MacLennan (Badentarbet)
Chris Gordon (Balnagown - Duchally/Invercassley)
Mark Mackenzie (Keanchulish)
John MacCallum (Ledmore House)
Andy Summers (Highland Council Ranger)

3. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting Held on 27th April 2018

The minutes were agreed (proposed by IT, seconded by FS)

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

Per agenda.

5. 2018/19 Season

Stags review

Stag cull figures were circulated [copy attached] Estates reported fewer older stags, and a late rut. Some had not been able to meet targets. Higher mortalities reported, compounded by hard winter, but also the poor winter during 2009/10 may have led to lack of mature stags.

Hind Targets

Limited information provided [see attached table].

6. Deer Management Plans

Sub Group Progress Updates / Interim Review / Health Check

West (Assynt Peninsula)

Ray Mackay not present, but had provided hind targets recently agreed with SNH.

South

GR reported DMP draft now on website. The sub group had been very behind but getting there now. Health Check showed habitat monitoring was an area to be worked on,

North

DA reported the Sub-group had met last week in Inverness. Main shortfall in the Health Check was lack of Secretary. Alan Balfour had stepped in and provided minutes. Training: two stalkers doing DMQ1. Conversations had taken place about approaching East Sub-group to discuss possible merger. The DMPs would merge in 2021, however the groups could merge prior to this running a combined population model.

East

IT reported on habitat monitoring, with 85% of plots low impact. Stag target not quite reached but if FES, Caplaich and Glenrossal included it had been significantly exceeded. If targets met density would be below group objectives with no issues of habitat impact. Helicopters booked for March 2019, count brought forward from 2021 because of the hard winter. IT to arrange invoice to WSDMG ref. HIA grant.

Role of WSDMG and Sub-groups

There was discussion regarding the current set up of four Sub-groups under the WSDMG umbrella, and whether to continue on this basis. It was agreed to hold a meeting with Chairs of the sub groups plus one representative from each. SNH will attend.

TC suggested that a paper be circulated following the meeting today on what is proposed – options and outcomes – to the entire group. TC offered to send template based on another DMG restructuring proposal to GR. Restructuring paper to be circulated with minutes [attached]. ACTION TC/GR/KM

Health Check

VC carried out three of the Sub-groups (not required for East). North Sub-group was fine. South and West had improved. Results to be considered and reports issued.

Habitat Impact Assessments

IT said it takes around a week per property to set up, then 2-3 days for assessments/analysis. They have been doing HIA every year since 2015 (Inchnadamph longer due to S7), but it is only required every 2 years.

FS reported on CALLP HIA Project. Cathy Mayne had been appointed to take this forward. GPS

Training was the first stage, with a reasonable take up. A reminder to be sent out to members. [See attached Note].

ACTION KGM

7. SNH Report

Interim Review/2019 Assessment

HD reported that feedback to Sub-groups will continue past the next review, and will hopefully agree with the ADMG Health Checks by Victor and Linzi Seivwright. DMG Sub Groups know their areas of strengths of weakness so should know where to focus efforts. It was a mixed bag for the four sub-groups. Re-Assessments will take place in less than 6 months, and Sub-groups will need to demonstrate that issues are being addressed.

Hind Targets not fully discussed in Item 5 were reported on now. Notes of Sub-group meetings where targets discussed may not have been shared – each group should keep minutes and update population models. ACTION Sub-groups

The key things to feed back to Sub-group/DMG are Count, Cull and Mortality data, Recruitment rates – these to be fed into population models – and HIA results.

8. ADMG Report - TC

- The ADMG Report following the Health Checks will be published at the same time as the SNH Review. Sub-groups will continue to be assessed individually by SNH.
- Sporting Rates - Members urged to continue to appeal Valuations. AF did not appeal – exempt due to charitable status.
- Forestry Consultation to 2029
- SQWV still offering free larder assessments
- Stalking Survey – members asked to complete if they have not already done so.
- Members urged to attend ADMG Regional Meeting on Wednesday 21st November, Inverness – there would be feedback on DMG Health Checks, looking forward to 2019 Review. Also presentations from Trees for Life and Moredun Institute.
- There was some discussion about venison market increasing, with Chinese buying up NZ venison. Farmed venison also increasing in the UK.

9. CALLP (Coigach-Assynt Living Landscapes Partnership) - FS

- HIA covered in 6. Above. [Note attached]
- Venison Marketing project
- ‘Hill to Grill’: next event in January with Ullapool High School pupils. Expanded to include camera stalking, larder and cookery.
- John Muir Trust open day end November

DA reported that Reay Forest now have a venison licence, and would be talking to butchers and dealers. GR felt that a collaborative approach was needed.

10. Accounts

Accounts for the year to date were circulated. Copy attached.

KGM highlighted the increase in Group levy so there was a small surplus, which could potentially be used for Sub-group admin costs.

SNH was encouraging DMGs to put aside funds for aerial counting, which is a significant cost. SNH does still have a programme of counts, with 50% contributions for interim counts also being requested. Focus would be on S7 areas as usual.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The Secretary will circulate members in Feb/March for a date in April/May. ACTION KGM

12. AOCB

- HD asked about the link between CALLP and Sub-groups in relation to HIA. WSDMG does not have a feel for take up.
- GR reported on forestry project – native woodland planting – for Assynt Foundation. Neighbours are aware but there was a need to report on progress at meetings.
- There is a News page on the website, which members can provide items for via the Secretary. ACTION All Members
- GR had received enquiries for summer camera stalking up to £300 a day.
- IT asked about the gaps in cull figures from FES properties. FES normally reports in April/May after the end of the season. KM to contact by telephone. ACTION KGM
- DA had attended Ardgay Game with other invited practitioners to go through what is and is not acceptable in terms of carcase quality.
- “Evening of Game” event had been held in Lancashire, and the possibility of a similar event in West Sutherland was suggested. To be discussed further. Possibly approach Shin Visitor Centre operators, The Pier in Lairg. ACTION KGM

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending.

Meeting closed at 3:30 pm

MAIN ACTIONS		
1.	Sub-Group Chairs, representatives to meet to discuss future of WSDMG/possible restructuring, ideally before the end of this year, with SNH and ADMG attending. Paper on future of WSDMG/possible restructuring to be circulated to all members ahead of meeting [with minutes].	Chair / Secretary / Sub-Groups
2.	East Sub group to send invoice to WSDMG re. HIA work	IT
3.	Secretary to send out reminder re. CALLP HIA Project – assistance available to members	KGM
4.	Sub Groups to prepare and send minutes to Secretary for circulation	Sub-Groups
5.	Secretary to circulate members in Feb/Mar to arrange next meeting date in April/May	KGM
6.	Members to provide News items for the WSDMG website	All Members
7.	Secretary to contact FES by telephone to obtain cull figures	KGM
8.	Possibility of Evening of Game event to be discussed further	KGM/Agenda