

West Sutherland Deer Management Group

Annual General Meeting

at The Ceilidh Place, Ullapool

on Wednesday 17th April 2019

MINUTES (DRAFT)

Present:

Gordon Robertson (GR)	Chair/Assynt Foundation	Alan Balfour (AB)	Scourie
David Allison (DA)	Vice Chair/Reay Forest	Chris Gordon (CG)	Balnagown-Invercassley
Craig Ross (CR)	Inchnadamph	Robbie Galloway (RG)	Duchally (Tenant)
Bruce Blackley (BB)	Benmore Assynt	Adrian Wayne (AW)	Eisg Brachaidh
Iain Thomson (IT)	Sallachy	Willie Macleod (WM)	North Assynt Estate
Mark White (MW)	Glencassley	Don O'Driscoll (DoD)	JMT – Quinag
Derick MacAskill (DM)	Forestry & Land Scotland	Mark Foxwell (MF)	SWT – Benmore Assynt
Michelle Allsop (MA)	Forestry & Land Scotland	Roddy Watt (RW)	Merkland
Andy Robinson (AR)	Forestry & Land Scotland		

In Attendance:

Kirsty MacLeod (KGM)	WSDMG Secretary	Vanessa Ling (VL)	Assynt Community Council
Tom Chetwynd (TC)	ADMG		
Sue Agnew (SA)	SNH		

1. Chairman's Welcome

GR opened the meeting by thanking everyone for coming.

2. Apologies:

James Vestey	Benmore Assynt	Claire Acheson	Galbraith - Eisg Brachaidh
Jorine Van Delft	CCWT – Little Assynt		/Inver & Kirkaig
David Davies	Inverpolly	David Bulmer	Keanchulish
Jim Sloane	Kylesku	Roseanne Bulmer	Keanchulish
George Vestey	Inchnadamph	Marcus Munro	Ledmore House
Michael Ross	Ardvar	Mike Daniels	John Muir Trust
Andy Hibbert	Loch Assynt Lodge	David Balfour	Loch A Mhuillin
Margaret Turner	Oldany	Jenny Balfour	Loch A Mhuillin
Victor Clements	DMP Consultant/Adviser	Elaine MacAskill	CALLP
Holly Deary	SNH	Fiona Saywell	CALLP / Little Assynt
PC Daniel Sutherland	Wildlife Liaison Officer	Boyd Alexander	CALLP
		Phil Jones	Assynt Community Council

3. Election of Office Bearers

Office Bearers stood down and AB took over the meeting.

GR was proposed as Chair by AB, seconded by DA. In the absence of any proposals GR was duly re-elected.

KGM was proposed to continue as Secretary by AB, seconded by GR. In the absence of any other proposals, KGM was duly re-elected.

AB was proposed as Vice Chair by DA, seconded by GR. AB duly elected as Vice Chair.

4. Minutes of the Meeting Held on November 2019

The minutes were agreed (proposed by DA, seconded by MW)

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

Per agenda.

6. Deer in Lochinver (*under AOCB but brought forward to start of meeting*)

VL highlighted the issue of deer roaming in the village of Lochinver, which was now at the stage where Assynt Community Council felt it had to do something. Fencing may be possible with the co-operation of landowners, and ACC is looking for commitment from the relevant landowners to take this forward. A plan with a timescale would help to calm things down. It was acknowledged that some individuals feeding the deer was unhelpful.

GR said that this was exactly what collaborative deer management was about. He reported that Elaine MacAskill of CALLP has already done a lot of work on this. Estimated cost of fencing repairs and new fencing could be in the region of £150,000. Creative planning including woodland could allow some funding assistance. Inver & Kirkaig Fishings (Vestey family), Assynt Foundation and Culag Community Woodland Trust are the relevant landowners.

GR was invited to attend the next ACC meeting to put forward the plan.

ACTION GR

TC mentioned a similar issue in Lochcarron which had been dealt with in the South Ross DMG, involving fencing repairs, and a Section 10 order had been avoided. ADMG can provide a template. DM pointed out this was a Public Interest issue. Timing is important in terms of minimising numbers remaining within the fenced area, high summer/August is best.

7. Steering Group report on future structure of WSDMG

A meeting had been held prior to the DMG meeting, with representatives of the four sub-groups present. Following discussions it was agreed to stick with where we are for the time being, but reviewing this each year. It was agreed to prepare maps showing deer movement between Sub-group areas. Also discussed were Collaboration, Public Interest, estates who are not currently members, and the importance of feeding back Sub-group updates to the DMG.

ACTION Sub-Group Secretaries

8. 2018/19 Hinds Season

An up to date cull table was circulated. KGM apologised for lack of Sika/Roe table and confirmed this would be circulated with the minutes.

ACTION KGM

Those present gave a brief summary on the season. The general theme was a late start, reduced culls due to calf mortalities last year, improvement towards the end of winter.

GR reported on culling around the planting activity. 165ha planting within 325ha fenced area, ended up with 150+ hinds inside. Got help from Inchnadamph estate to move them out. Next plantation planned south of Loch Assynt, timing lessons learnt.

Recruitment counts and mortalities will be requested by the Secretary in May.

ACTION KGM

9. 2019/20 Targets

Targets are set via Sub-groups, based on HIAs, previous culling and modelling.

There was some discussion about stag numbers on FE land at Achany.

DM reported that a new DMG was being set up for SE Sutherland. IT said part of that wood was completely open to the hill to the north. DM invited IT to meet to discuss and look for solutions.

10. Deer Management Plans

Sub Group Progress Updates / Interim Review / Health Check

West (Assynt Peninsula)

WM reported DMP in place. Assistance with HIA from Cathy Mayne through CALLP. Densities agreed. Healthcheck 90 score vs 15 previously. Assessment score 80% vs 14. Fencing contractor finally obtained for Ardvar side of SSSI, now progressing.

South (GR)

Plan by Victor Clements in place. Assessment meeting took place 11th April. Some red areas which will be worked on. Next review in three years. More regular meeting, minutes, consulting with neighbours. Last sub-group to have a DMP in place, with consultant providing that push.

There was some discussion about densities required for Glencanisp and Drumrunie. GR also mentioned the loan from Wildland and confirmed this would be repaid in 2 months.

North (AB)

Getting geared up for Assessment meeting on 29th April. Met to go through DMP and updated as appropriate. Minutes to follow. DA talked about map of culling areas in relation to higher impact areas, mainly showing moderate to improved.

East (IT)

Area counted in one day, 11½ hours with two helicopters, within budget of £2900 per property (5 properties). Results were still to be mapped and verified. Numbers down 10.6% since 2016 count. Calf ratio 11.6% to 32.2%, average 19.2% about as expected. Pop model had predicted 9.2 density, helicopter count 9.5 so roughly in line. Assumptions and information were fed in to model – higher than standard mortalities and lower calving rates. Cull level to be set in next few days, based on HI and count, likely to be much the same. Assessment meeting to take place on 24th April.

IT confirmed Sika not counted on open hill, they are mainly in woodland which is enclosed. Sika not incorporated into DMP. There were differing policies among members on Sika policy, not formalised but will be in due course.

11. SNH Report

Interim Review/2019 Assessment:

In absence of Holly Deary, SA confirmed Assessments underway and Health Checks have been done. Once completed, that is it until next Review in 2022. There are a lot of positives, thanks to the Sub-groups for co-operation. The Assessment meetings are an opportunity to discuss the assessment and ask about marking up (or down) on particular points. The progress on HIA is a very positive step.

AB noted that there appeared to be no mechanism to report back on actions being taken on ‘red’ points quickly. There would be in a ‘non-compliance’ under something like ISO 14001, requiring a report back when rectified.

DA noted that without up to date population model, mortalities, recruitment count and proposed culls, amber/red would be scored under deer welfare, and urged sub-groups to make these happen before assessment meetings if possible.

GR asked about help with peatland monitoring, SA said there were SNH staff who could come out and talk people through it if a request was made.

12. ADMG Report - TC

The Assessment process is the main focus currently. Two of the four sub-groups still to have meetings with SNH. Help available from ADMG if needed.

Ongoing review of Deer Management by Scottish Government. DWG deliberating on report, before reporting to the Secretary of State to ensure effective management and the public interest. In respect of Lowland areas, avoiding setting up DMGs but focus on shared larders and public interest.

13. CALLP (Coigach-Assynt Living Landscapes Partnership) – FS

In absence of CALLP staff, GR reported their continuing support with deer management.

The ‘Hill to Grill’ events with Ullapool High School pupils had been successful again.

There is an opportunity to promote deer management through venison sales/adding value. Reay Forest Estate now has processing licence. Evening of Game had been suggested. MA talked about butchery day at Ardgay Game.

Report per Fiona Saywell received via email:

Habitat monitoring training has been taking place over the winter with sessions on using a GPS, general habitat monitoring and setting up of individual plots being delivered. See the following blog for a report on the GPS training sessions.

<https://coigach-assynt.org/2018/12/warmer-warmer-colder-gps-training-for-habitat-condition-monitoring/>

A number of estates participated, including Culag Community Woodland Trust, Eisg Brachaidh, Keanchulish, Assynt Crofters Trust, Ben Mor Coigach, John Muir Trust & Assynt Foundation with several representatives from each estate involved in all aspects of the training programme. A total of 14 individuals received training.

The next stage will be to input all the data already gathered during the training and also that which will be gathered this spring into a central GIS system. Training for this will be taking place shortly.

14. Accounts

Accounts for year to 31 May 2019 and current year to date were circulated. Copy attached.

KGM highlighted the HIA grant from SNH which three of the four sub-groups still had to claim, and that there are funds available for Sub-groups to pay someone to take minutes. ACTION Sub-Groups

Invoices for 2019 will be issued soon. ACTION KGM

GR proposed an increase to the Secretary's fee to £2000 per annum. This was agreed [*comment post meeting: subject to sufficient funds being available, KGM*]

15. Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 13th November in Lochinver

16. AOCB

DoD asked if the list of humane dispatchers was up to date. He was aware of 12 DVCs between Skiag and Lochinver. KGM had sent a contact list to the Police WLO, but perhaps a map-based list would be more useful if they were unfamiliar with the area/estate names. SA to check details for WLO as there may have been a change in personnel, and forward contact details to KGM. ACTION KGM/SA

DA reported on Peatland Restoration Project, and a school visit to Reay Forest.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending.

Meeting closed at 3:30pm

MAIN ACTION POINTS		ACTION
1.	GR to attend ACC Meeting to put forward plan for deer fencing around Lochinver	GR
2.	Sub Groups to forward minutes of meetings	Sub-Group Secretaries
3.	Cull tables to be circulated with Minutes including Sika/Roe	KGM
4.	Recruitment % and Mortalities to be provided, Secretary to request in May	KGM
5.	Sub-Groups to claim HIA funding from WSDMG	Sub-Group Chairs/Secs
6.	2019 levy invoices to be issued	KGM
7.	Police Wildlife Protection Officer details to be checked and forwarded to Secretary. Secretary to make further contact.	SA/KGM