

West Sutherland West Sutherland Deer Management Group – Operations Document

1. WSDMG Objectives and Targets

The purpose of the West Sutherland West Sutherland Deer Management Group (WSDMG) is to manage deer on a collective basis, in accordance with Scottish Government strategy (Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach, 2008), the Code of Practice on Deer Management (2012), and in a manner that integrates different land-use objectives, recognising that compromises over objectives may be required where conflict occurs.

2. Area & Boundaries & Membership

The WSDMG has 4 sub groups – North, East, West (Assynt) and South. It is recognised that the boundaries for each sub-group may require to be reviewed and altered. The WSDMG operates under its own constitution and is a member of the Association of Deer Management Groups.

3. Meetings

The Group holds two principal meetings each year, usually an AGM in April and a General Meeting in November. West Sutherland enjoys a very strong level of participation from estate members of the group with a good attendance at the biannual meetings with all properties being represented by owners and or stalkers/managers at meetings. These meetings are well attended by members and in addition, SNH, and other interested parties are invited to attend. The local Community Council is represented by some of the stalkers/owners. Agendas are circulated in advance for these meetings and minutes produced soon afterwards, with the minutes circulated to all Members and attendees and published on the website once approved.

The main business of the AGM is to undertake a review of the previous season

- A report from a representative of each estate
- Culls achieved against cull targets
- Any current problems in the Group area, based upon evidence gathered from monitoring procedures used by sub-groups and/or individual members.
- Agree annual accounts (year ends 30th June)

If necessary, issues will be prioritised and a plan of action agreed upon. The main business of the November meeting will be to share hind cull targets amongst the membership for the coming winter/spring, taking in to account the results of any recent information that might be relevant. The Agenda and minutes of open meetings will be published on the WSDMG Website

4. WSDMG Constitution

The West Sutherland West Sutherland Deer Management Group (WSDMG) is constituted as a stand-alone Deer Management Group (DMG), this being adopted on formation. A new Constitution was adopted in 2015. The Group operates a Membership system, where estates are members and others are encouraged to join. Anybody involved with the management of wild deer within each sub-group area, will be encouraged to

participate in the execution of the relevant Deer Management Plan. A copy of the Constitution is attached (Appendix i)

5. Deer Management Plan: Update and Review

Each sub-group has their own Deer Management Plan which provides an agreed framework for a co-ordinated and co-operative approach to deer management in the local area. The actual implementation of each of the Plans will be decided on an ongoing basis at the Group's spring and autumn meetings, with scope for the Membership to adjust and adapt the Plans to meet changing circumstances. Each Plan, with its maps and databases will be circulated along with the Agenda to all group members prior to meetings, any changes actioned, and the revised plan included with the minutes of that meeting, or at a suitable time thereafter. A review of the Plans will be conducted in 2021. Members will complete an annual return, an example of which is attached. The return will enable progress towards targets to be monitored and where necessary, any changes in management actions to be agreed. Working Plans for each sub-group will be continually reviewed and actions agreed and implemented by WSDMG members on an annual basis.

6. WDNA, Code of Practice on Deer Management & Wild Deer Best Practice Guidance

Members support and full endorse:

- The long term vision for deer populations and their management as laid out in "[Scotland's Wild Deer - A National Approach](#)".
- [Code of Practice on Deer Management](#)
- [Wild deer Best Practice Guidance](#)

7. AWSDMG Principles of Collaboration

Dispute Resolution within the West Sutherland WSDMG is covered under the Group Constitution. All Group members are encouraged to deal with disputes in the first instance with those parties concerned, be they other Group members, external parties or Government Agencies. Failing that, the Chairman of the Group will seek to facilitate an agreement. This may involve the opportunity to air relevant issues at a meeting of the Group. A request to do this should be made in writing at least two weeks prior to any such meeting. Representatives from ADMG are available to assist with disputes, should it prove impossible to resolve issues within the Group. Should this arise, The Group accepts that the findings of ADMG will be implemented.

8. Culling Operations

To maintain or reduce the deer population means that individual culling decisions become proportionately more important, including the accurate reporting of culls. Open discussion of culls will be required at all meetings.

- All WSDMG members agree to make sufficient resources available to carry out the culls outlined in this plan, and to make arrangements with immediate neighbours to assist in a culling programme where time or weather have precluded the target cull in being achieved.
- If extra resources are required for any reason, then further resources should be sought from other WSDMG members.

9. Data & Evidence Gathering: Deer Count Protocols

It has been agreed that where possible, the WSDMG will continue to count deer by helicopter every 5 years. The SNH helicopter count across the Group area in 2015/16 forms the baseline for this Plan. This will provide a very good level of consistent deer count data across the Group area.

In addition, all Group members are encouraged to undertake a sample recruitment count, every year at the end of June and again in the spring around March. This will allow more accurate population monitoring. An indication of winter mortality will be provided for each management unit along with the cull returns for the spring meeting of the Group.

10. Data & Evidence Gathering: Cull and Larder Information

For the purposes of each of the sub-group Plans, although each property is treated as a separate reporting unit, the population will be considered as a whole within each sub-group with all estates contributing proportionately to the culling of deer. This delineation is arbitrary and follows estate boundaries, as in fact many estates may share their stag population between up to three or four neighbouring estates. Although there may be a certain amount of stag movement between these areas, and stags will certainly move, it is considered that these contain reasonably discreet hind populations (possibly shared between neighbouring estates), and the consensus within the sub-groups suggests that this is a suitable working model for deer management planning purposes. Members will complete an annual return, which will include some larder data for the purposes of monitoring stag age structure and deer welfare: an example of which is attached (Appendix ii).

11. Data & Evidence Gathering: Habitat Monitoring Protocols

11.1 Background

A key element of a demonstrably effective and environmentally responsible management plan is that it should highlight habitats relevant to deer management, set out clear objectives for those habitats, carry out monitoring and detail the actions and reporting to be implemented to achieve the targets set.

The environmental objectives will be linked to Scottish Government policy but the WSDMG will be expected to manage localised deer impacts to deliver and sustain good condition of a range of designated and non-designated habitats.

11.2 Habitat Objectives for the WSDMG

Within the WSDMG area, there are three main environmental objectives:

- To deliver favourable or recovering condition on designated sites;
- To manage existing and new native woodland and to improve woodland condition where this is being impacted by deer;
- To manage impacts in the wider non-designated area such as peatland which along with woodland contributes to Scotland's ability to store carbon, and habitats which support a range of species, many of

which are unique to the Assynt area. In particular the WSDMG will focus monitoring on dwarf shrub heath and blanket bog habitats

In addition to delivering the cull plan as set out in this document, members have agreed in principle to undertake habitat assessment, particularly in those areas where there are designated sites. In 2014 some estate staff took part in a habitat assessment day organised by SNH. It is hoped that further training days can be arranged.

Habitat Impact Assessment will be conducted so as to:

- Collect and interpret habitat data on a regular basis to inform deer management;
- Set up a baseline to allow changes in impacts to be measured over time;
- Understand the methods used by government agencies.

A further aim will be to map habitat types across estates, particularly with a view to establishing areas of high carbon-sensitive habitats across the WSDMG range. All estates within the group have been sent habitat maps and should establish areas within their boundaries where there is scope for habitat improvement particularly in relation to peatland improvement work.

11.3 Wild Deer Best Practice Guidance & Monitoring data sheets

These guides describe the methods used by SNH to monitor deer impacts. These methods are also a key part of how other agencies monitor deer impacts. Copies of the Guides and Habitat Monitoring Forms for Blanket Bog and Dwarf Shrub Heath are attached (Appendices iii and iv)

11.4 Random Plot Generation

SNH has assessed areas to be monitored for each WSDMG. A series of random plots has been generated for each property within the WSDMG to enable individual properties to set up and undertake monitoring which will be representative of significant habitats within the Group area.

11.5 Timescales

Under the initial guidance of SNH, suitable sites will be selected and a monitoring schedule for each habitat agreed for the WSDMG. Each property will then be responsible for reporting on the condition of their particular habitat using the correct procedure as shown in Appendix v.

12. WSDMG Policies and Principles

12.1 Principles of Collaboration

As member of this WSDMG, we:-

- Acknowledge what we have in common – namely a shared commitment to a sustainable and economically viable Scottish countryside;
- Make a commitment to work together to achieve that;
- Accept that we have a diversity of management objectives and that we respect each other's objectives;
- Undertake to communicate openly with all relevant parties;

- Commit to negotiate and where necessary compromise in order to accommodate the reasonable land management requirements of our neighbours;
- Undertake that where there are areas of disagreement, we will work to resolve these.

12.2 Culling Policy

It is not possible to draw up a single policy for all estates. Culling policy currently varies from estate to estate, and there are different factors which govern this. Despite other commercial pressures, estates are encouraged to work with their neighbouring estates in aiming to establish an overall population target ratio of 1: 1 stags to hinds. For some estates it is policy to shoot dependants first, on welfare grounds.

12.3 Competence & Training Policy

Members of the West Sutherland Deer Management Group recognise the need for deer to be managed by trained personnel. A Trained Person is an individual who can produce evidence of training to cover the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 852/2004, and Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 as they apply to wild game. An approved qualification such as the updated Deer Stalking Certificate Level 1 or the Certificate in Wild Game Meat Hygiene (large game), is the most robust way in which stalkers can show that they have the appropriate knowledge.

The Group recognises that the requirement for deer to be culled by competent and qualified personnel is in the public interest. The WSDMG will promote and encourage competence in undertaking deer management activities through the following actions:

- As a minimum, each reporting unit, and any other individual involved in the culling of deer, will have or will have access to an individual with the above qualifications.
- Members will be encouraged to highlight changes in competency qualifications in the annual return.
- The WSDMG will assist where possible in the provision/facilitation of training for anyone lacking necessary qualifications or for individuals who wish to enhance their skills.

12.4 Communications Policy

Members of the West Sutherland Deer Management Group will promote and encourage effective communication on deer management issues both within the WSDMG and throughout the wider community in order to promote better awareness and education of deer and deer management through the following actions:

- Deer management planning will be open, inclusive and seek local consultation
- The WSDMG website will be regularly updated to include the Deer Management Plan, Minutes and Agendas for meetings as well as any other relevant information which seeks to promote openness and transparency
- The WSDMG will ensure that contact details are available for anyone seeking information or wishing to raise concerns.
- WSDMG members will actively promote deer management to raise awareness
- WSDMG will seek opportunities to promote deer management through training, educational or awareness raising events

12.5. Non-Native Policy

Sika

There are areas within the WSDMG (particularly in the East Sub-Group) where Sika deer are recognised to be established and for certain properties, may be considered to be a resource. In other areas, Sika have yet to become established and although the occasional animal is reported, members may wish to prevent where possible, their establishment. The Group will therefore endeavour to manage Sika according to local circumstances and objectives and will continue to provide a report to the WSDMG of cases of occurrences of Sika outwith their present range.

Muntjac

Muntjac are not native to Scotland and as such possible threats to their introduction or establishment must be managed. As such, Muntjac will be managed in accordance with the [Non-Natives Species Code of Practice](#).

12.6 Welfare Policy

Members of the West Sutherland Deer Management Group will promote and encourage the safeguarding of deer welfare both at the scale of the individual animal and at a population scale through the following actions:

- Carrying out all deer management activity to Wild Deer Best Practice Guidance industry standards;
- Promoting the undertaking of deer management training, continual professional development and industry recognised qualifications (e.g. Deer Stalking Certificate Levels 1 & 2);
- Discouraging unregulated stalking activity;
- Ensuring that the natural habitat supports good welfare through the provision of adequate habitat and shelter;
- Ensuring that any land management operations take into consideration possible effects on deer movements or the availability of shelter; and
- Ensuring that the necessary precautions and checks are undertaken to prevent the spread of diseases.

12.7 Policy for Chronic Wasting Disease

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a highly contagious and fatal transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) disease that affects deer. It has had devastating effects on many populations of wild and farmed deer in the USA and Canada. It is not known to affect humans. There is no evidence of TSEs in deer in the UK but if it were to become established in the wild deer population it would have major consequences for the UK deer industry. Chronic wasting disease is a notifiable disease. This means that if you suspect it you must tell your nearest [Animal and Plant Health Office \(APHA\) office](#) immediately. Failure to do is an offence. For information on how to spot CWD see <https://www.gov.uk/chronic-wasting-disease>

Members of the West Sutherland Deer Management Group will see to prevent the establishment of CWD through implementing the following:

- Ensuring that all visitors from the USA and Canada are aware of the risks and undertake the appropriate Bio-Security protocols prior to their visit.
- Raising awareness within the WSDMG and across the wider community about the risks and the symptoms of CWD.

13. Venison Production and Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV)

The WSDMG currently has no collective approach to carcass collection with each property making their own arrangements with a variety of Game Dealers.

14. Wildfire Plan/contacts

Contact List is updated regularly and circulated to members and the local Police/ Wildlife Liaison Officer.

15. West Sutherland WSDMG Contacts

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