

West Sutherland Deer Management Group

South Sub Group

Meeting at Lochinver Village Hall Community Room

at 10am on Tuesday 11th June 2019

MINUTES

Present:

David Davies (DD)	Chair – Inverpolly	Henry Bulmer (HB)	Keanchulish
Mark Foxwell (MF)	SWT – Benmore Coigach	Claire Belshaw (CB)	Assynt Foundation – Glencanisp/Drumrunie
Claire Acheson (CA)	Galbraith – Eisg Brachaidh		

In Attendance:

Kirsty MacLeod (KGM)	Minute Secretary	Claire Macdonald (CM)	Galbraith
Sinclair Coghill (CG)	SNH		

1. Chairman's Welcome

DD opened the meeting by thanking everyone for coming, having taken on the role of Acting Chair following Gordon Robertson's departure.

2. Apologies:

Adrian Wayne	Eisg Brachaidh	Rebecca Macleod	Assynt Foundation
Kenny Maclennan	Badentarbet	Craig Ross	Inchnadamph (East sub grp)

3. 2019 Assessment

CB, MF and GR had attended the SNH Assessment meeting, and were largely satisfied with what was a reasonably fair assessment. A couple of points were downgraded after the meeting.

CG pointed out that the Deer Management Plan had only been finalised a year ago, and the group now needs to take forward delivering on that plan. First Actions were highlighted in red. The Benchmark is a working DMG. In Public Interest, additional things being asked as deer managers. In Working Plan, elements had been highlighted which the group should be acting on.

4. SNH Report

DD noted the overlap between the DMP and the existing Section 7 Agreement, and asked if SNH will require a new S7 including all estates in the sub group. SNH had been doing more detailed Habitat Impact Assessment monitoring than requires on the whole, and would this continue.

SC reported that the 5 year rolling helicopter count programme (for priority areas) was continuing, but under pressure. SNH would be looking for at least 50% contribution. MF noted the commitment to 5 year counts within the South Sub Group DMP. DD mentioned immigration of deer as an issue in the area.

5. Deer Management Plan

SC summarised that counting early spring, mortalities over season and a recruitment count in May (calves/hinds %) should give a good feel for population going forward and culls required to meet deer density targets. DD pointed out that the lack of keepers in this area would make it difficult to do the recruitment count in particular. MF said they had tried to combine with HIA, but saw no deer. They had some figures but should be treated with caution.

The last Count was in 2016. It was felt that the hinds were more or less hefted to the area, while stags were moving significant distances, but it was not clear where the migrations are coming from. Management and changes in management could affect this.

MF mentioned that Victor Clements (DMP Author) had felt the boundary may need to be adjusted, but how. CG said if neighbouring estates were brought in (Langwell / Ledmore / Inchnadamph) it would

become unwieldy. Not a perfect situation but if you have a good handle on what is happening in those areas it can inform the DMP.

DD mentioned a shortage of good stags in the rut (2018). CG said it was the same all over, not much of a rut. DD said young stags moved in early but other didn't get started for a while. CG said hinds were depleted after the winter. The summer has been OK, quite dry but less grass. Calving this summer was just starting so recruitment not known until next [recruitment] counts.

Asked about lack of mature stags, DD explained about hinds usually drawing them in, but numbers coming in have been down the last 3-4 years so he is worried there just aren't enough around. CG said that was a risk if you were relying on immigration. DD said cull targets might need to be reviewed.

Foot counts were carried out in South Ross, but considered less accurate. Does the group need to count more? This was expensive to do.

MF said stag culls (i.e. sporting income) were not an issue for SWT, but they were interested in numbers/movements. CALLP has a budget for deer management which might help. There was discussion about use of drone photography, used in forestry but not currently practice in deer management but could be something for the future.

Inland areas worse affected [by poor weather]. Survival might be improved by providing forage and shelter. MF mentioned tagging to prove what we think we know, but resource intensive.

Recruitment counting in May could prove problematic due to resources on the ground. CB mentioned AF had leased stalking to Robert McHardy, and would speak to him about recruitment counting.

HIA provides information as well.

Population Model – culls to be fed in to model. DD to speak to Victor about this.

2018/19 Actual culls 130 stags (target 141), 153 hinds (120) and 73 calves (45).

CB to be added to circulation list for main DMG.

A WSDMG Steering Group meeting was due to be held to discuss movements between the sub group areas.

MF said that other data could be collected, e.g. GPS readings of where stags were shot, larder weights, ageing or dealer tickets, and mapped. Corner well fenced now at Ledmore/Elphin, AF and Benmore.

HB reported Keanchulish culling heavier but mainly in North Ross DMG area.

It was agreed to stick to 2018-19 levels for the coming season.

2019/20 cull targets 120 stags / 120 hinds / 45 calves

2020/21 cull targets 120 stags / 171 hinds / 65 calves – but review after 2019/20

6. **Habitat Monitoring**

SNH advise 30 points per habitat type – blanket bog and dwarf shrub heath are main types in this area.

SNH does monitoring on S7 areas (Polly/Eisg Brachaidh), SWT monitoring on Coigach. Drumrunie also covered by SNH. AF now set up to do monitoring on Glencanisp. Inver & Kirkaig mostly croft land.

MF asked about woodland assessments, concerned about impacts. DD reported that Coigach regeneration was less evident at Badagowan, maybe deer were in there in winter. Polly side was less affected. There was some discussion about responsibility for dealing with deer in woodland enclosures and repair of fencing (crofters?) and it was felt that more could be done to encourage regeneration. HB said he would speak to the clerk of grazings for Strathkanaird. HB also reported that Keanchulish was being counted using drone photography three times a year.

There is SNH funding still to be claimed from WSDMG for habitat monitoring for the sub group, which could be used for monitoring and/or collating and analysing data.

7. **Election of Office Bearers**

DD was elected as Chair. A Vice-Chair is required, look for nominations early in 2020.

8. **Date of Next Meeting**

TBC, possibly the morning of the main WSDMG meeting (Wednesday 13th November)

9. **AOCB**

DD had met with Dougie Baird of Outdoor Access Trust to discuss potential improvements at Stac Pollaidh, including a bigger car park, possibly charging for parking, and path improvement.

HB mentioned the Postie's Path car park at Keanchulish, MF will contact HB about this.

KGM mentioned the issue of deer in Lochinver. SC mentioned similar issues in Achiltibuie.

MF highlighted CALLP activities, including assistance with HIA. One of the other projects was to do with venison, and there as an opportunity for a collaborative approach with the number of deer shot in the WSDMG area. There was a £20k budget for the Deer Management Project overall.

KGM reported that she and Fiona Saywell had undertaken QGIS mapping training through CALLP, and a laptop was being provided with the software installed.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending.

MAIN ACTION POINTS		ACTION
1.	Population model to be updated to reflect 2018/19 culls – contact VC	DD / Sec
2.	CB to be added to circulation list (for Assynt Foundation)	Sec
3.	Members to progress habitat monitoring, and provide data to Secretary for mapping	All / Sec
4.	Sub-Group to claim HIA funding from WSDMG	Sub-Group Chairs/Secs
5.	Nominations for Vice Chair of Sub-group sought for early 2020	All