

West Sutherland Deer Management Group

Annual General Meeting

at The Ceilidh Place, Ullapool

on Wednesday 13th November 2019

MINUTES

Present:

Alan Balfour (AB)	Acting Chair/Scourie	James Vestey	Benmore Assynt
David Allison (DA)	Reay Forest	Bruce Blackley (BB)	Benmore Assynt
Mark White (MW)	Glencassley	Mark Foxwell (MF)	SWT- Benmore Coigach
David Davies (DD)	Inverpolly	Claire Acheson (CA)	Galbraith - Eisg
Roddy Watt (RW)	Merkland		Brachaidh/Inver&Kirkaig
Jack Frost (JF)	Merkland	Claire Belshaw (CB)	Assynt Foundation –
Jorine Van Delft (JVD)	CCWT - Little Assynt		Glencanisp & Drumrunie
Fiona Saywell (FS)	CCWT / CALLP	Robert McHardy	Glencanisp & Drumrunie
Kenny MacLennan (KM)	Badentarbet	Mark Mackenzie (MM)	Keanchulish
Derick Macaskill (DM)	FLS	Romany Garnett (RG)	John Muir Trust - Quinag
Andrew Robertson (AR)	FLS		

In Attendance:

Kirsty MacLeod (KGM)	WSDMG Secretary	Sue Agnew	SNH - Ullapool
		Holly Deary	SNH
		PC Daniel Sutherland	Wildlife Crimer Officer

1. Acting Chairman's Welcome

AB opened the meeting by thanking everyone for coming.

2. Nominations for Chair

DA nominated Alan Balfour, seconded by DD. AB duly appointed as Chair.

3. Apologies:

Michael Ross	Ardvar	Adrian Wayne	Eisg Brachaidh
Chris Gordon	Balnagown-Invercassley	Marcus Munro	Ledmore House Estate
Andy Hibbert	Loch Assynt Lodge	Don O'Driscoll	JMT-Quinag + Kylesku
Iain Thomson	Sallachy	David & Jenny	Loch a Mhuillin
Tom Chetwynd	ADMG	Balfour	
		Anna MacKay	CCWT – Little Assynt

4. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 17th April 2019

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

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

All Action Points attended to or on Agenda, other than AP1.

6. Stags Report 2019/20 Season

Reay Forest – good condition, 3kg heavier than last season

JMT Quinag – Good condition, slow start to growing season

Badentarbet – more old stags, three of six shot were over 17 stone

FLS – Mostly sika stags culled, very good condition. Policy is to reduce sika.
Little Assynt – Eight stags, very good condition. One sika stag shot inside fence.
Glencassley – good condition +1kg on last year
Merkland – good condition, average weight unchanged
Eisg Brachaidh – below target for stags, struggling to find them
Inverpolly – same as Eisg Brachaidh. Those they did find were a good weight. Numbers fell off at rut.
Benmore Assynt – very good condition
Inchnadamph – good condition, grass took off in spring
Keanchulish – few were shot, all came in from east
Ledmore – good condition, weights back to normal averages. Increased numbers on the ground possibly due to displacement from the new Ledbeg woodland scheme. (*See attached email for further comments*)

7. Deer Management Plans

Sub Group Progress Updates / Interim Review / Health Check

West (Assynt Peninsula)

JVD reported. New Chair and Secretary required. Meeting recently held, hope to resolve office bearers situation in the next six months.

South

DD reported. Last meeting held in June, due to meet soon (postponed from today). Uncertain if Inverpolly S7 will be renewed. HD confirmed discussions were ongoing, group needs to have structure to work to its DMP rather than S7. To be discussed at next meeting.

North

DA reported. Last meeting held April 2019, minutes published on WSDM website. In recent Assessment, score was improved since previous one. DMP: achieving Spring target of 10.6 / km². As one of the tools, HIA to focus culling in “red” areas, hopefully this approach will bear fruit. Plan to count in 2020. Current DMP coming to an end so need to address that.

East (IT)

KM read out report from IT:

East Sub-group Report to Meeting on 13/11/18

DMP

Stag cull for group (excluding Caplich and Glenrossal whose figures we will add in later) was 146. The 2019 target was 155.

Habitat monitoring was carried out as planned in 2019 with 60 plots recorded in dwarf shrub heath and 62 in blanket bog. Both these habitat types continue to show low impact due to deer activity.

SNH carried out habitat monitoring work on Inchnadamph but we have not had results of this work yet.

Due to continued low impact assessments across the group, ESG hind and calf cull will likely remain at the same level of 140 hinds and 40 calves depending on the severity of the winter.

Population model and plan will be updated in spring 2020 as in previous years.

Proposed Flow Country World Heritage Site Bid

ESG will prepare a group response to the proposed bid for Flow Country World Heritage Site status before the end of the year as the latest boundary of the site includes a large area of East sub group.

8. Habitat Impact Assessments

KGM mentioned that two sub-groups had still to claim SNH funding from WSDMG. HD was concerned that this was not being progressed, as it was meant for use ahead of Assessment. In some cases Sub-groups had actually carried out work but needed to submit claims. KGM to contact relevant Sub-Groups.

ACTION KGM

KM asked about SNH position re. feral pigs (wild boar). HD to put him in touch with appropriate person within SNH to answer concerns.

ACTION HD

9. Future Structure of WSDMG

AB stated that a review will be carried out with Sub-Group chairs before next meeting. DA felt that sub-groups reporting at the main DMG meeting worked well. ACTION AB/Sub-Group Chairs

10. SNH Report

HD reported that 2019 Assessments were completed, and Review submitted to the Scottish Government, including review of S7 Agreements, lowland areas, trends in numbers and culls. Response not expected until Deer Working Group Report (due end November).

Key Messages from the Review: Good to see progress overall across the sector, but challenges remain within that. Delivery of DMPS still uncertain -important to maintain sight and delivery of DMPs and to keep in mind that those will be needing updated soon.

Importance emphasised on recruitment counting, mortality, habitat impact assessments and Actions resulting therefrom.

Designated Sites – Habitat / Herbivore impact assessments continue.

LMC (Land Management Contracts) in final year, and it is hoped that more will sign up to 5 year plans.

Site Condition Monitoring Programme is uncertain, and there will be no AECS (Agriculture Environment C Scheme).

KM mentioned that she had completed some GIS training with FS through CALLP, and would be mapping HIA results etc. in due course, which would identify “hot spots” as well as gaps in data.

11. ADMG Report

TC was not able to attend. AB mentioned the forthcoming Regional Meeting, which he and other members would be attending.

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

Deer Management Training:

- 1) DSC 1 – 10 places available, to be held locally
- 2) BDS Deer Management Course – not local, mainly theory over 3-4 days. Requires 20 attendees. Funding available from CALLP if people want to participate.
- 3) UHI module – funding available

Venison/Butchery – event due to be held in Jan/Feb at Leckmelm, 6 places available.

Marketing – FS and RG have sent out a deer and venison questionnaire to seek communities’ understanding of deer and deer management.

Fact Sheet to be put together, working with KGM

Piloting version of Hill to Grill for general public (has already been successful with Ullapool High School S2s). Volunteers sought to help out with this.

CALLP approved 60% funding towards Secretarial services for Sub-groups, total of £3000 available

GIS mapping training had taken place, with KGM and FS attending. A laptop has been purchased with software installed.

13. Accounts

KGM presented Accounts for year to 30 June 2019, and a statement of the current position..

Annual levy invoices had recently been issued, so full amount is shown as outstanding.

With DMG secretarial fee at £1000, around £1000 should be available to pay sub group secretaries, together with the 60% CALLP funding still to be claimed. KGM to liaise with Sub-groups to arrange invoicing etc. ACTION KGM

AB asked for members’ approval to sign up for online banking, with the Secretary as sole signatory for transactions up to £1000. Office Bearer approval required for transactions over this figure. Members approved this action. AB to be added to authorised signatories. ACTION KGM

14. A.O.C.B.

DA said that a count should be carried out in 2020. East Sub group had counted in 2019 so would not wish to pay for it again so soon. Counting the whole area at once was considered impractical. SA mentioned that a CALLP contribution of £5000 was budgeted for 2021.

HS confirmed that fully funded counts by SNH were a thing of the past, even for priority areas DMG/estate contributions would be required. Carbon footprint of helicopter counting was also a consideration.

East Sub Group had several estates which did not participate, but were counted anyway and the cost split between other estates,

KGM referred to email from Don O'Driscoll regarding tick-borne disease survey, to be circulated with minutes. ACTION KGM

There was a vote of thanks for the previous Chair (Gordon Robertson)

15. Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 20th May 2020

Meeting Closed at 3:10pm

MAIN ACTION POINTS		ACTION
1.	Contact details for person within SNH re. feral pigs to be provided to KM	HD
2.	Sub-Groups to be contacted re. HIA funding claim	KGM/Sub-Groups
3.	Review to be carried out of structure of WSDMG before next meeting	Chair/Sub-Group Chairs
4.	Payment for Sub-Group Secretaries to be addressed, with funding support from CALLP	KGM/Sub-Groups
5.	On-line banking to be set up, and AB added to authorised signatories	KGM
6.	Tick-borne diseases Survey email to be circulated with minutes	KGM