

**MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
 HELD AT LEDGOWAN HOTEL, ACHNASHEEN  
 FRIDAY 29<sup>th</sup> MAY 2015**

Present:	R Wilson Esq	Chairman
	A MacDonald Esq	Dundonnell
	B Fraser Esq	Eilean Darach
	R Matheson Esq	Fannich
	J Hagon Esq	Fannich
	J Buckthorp Esq	Foich
	The Hon Mrs J MacLay	Gruinard
	B Whyte Esq	Gruinard
	Ms M Henderson	Gruinard
	N Kelman Esq	Heights of Kinlochewe
	M Lorimer Esq	Inverbroom
	C King Esq	Inverbroom
	Mrs B MacDonald	Letterewe
	R Legge Esq	Letterewe
	M MacKenzie Esq	Letterewe
	K Ross Esq	Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich
	W Lamont Esq	Forest Enterprise
	G Seligman Esq	Strathbran
	D Bennett Esq	Strathbran
D Macrae Esq	Strathvaich	
In Attendance:	K S Bowlt Esq	Secretary
	Mrs C E Cook	Bowlts Chartered Surveyors
	S Coghill Esq	SNH
Apologies:	G Crawford Esq	Eilean Darach
	F van Dedem Esq	Fannich
	M van Dedem Esq	Fannich
	H J E van Beuningen Esq	Foich
	T Richmond Esq	Foich
	D Lilley Esq	Heights of Kinlochewe
	P Wilson Esq	Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich
	R Ross Esq	Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich
	M Seligman Esq	Strathbran
	E Seligman Esq	Strathbran
	J Seligman Esq	Strathbran
	P Creasey Esq	Strathvaich
	D MacAskill Esq	Forest Enterprise
	R Cooke Esq	Association of Deer Management Groups
	Ms M Gibson	SNH
	K MacLean Esq	Garve & District Community Council

Item	Notes	Action
1.0	<p><b><u>Welcome and Introduction from the Chairman</u></b></p>	
	<p>The Chairman, Randal Wilson (RW), welcomed everyone to the AGM at our new venue. He reported another busy year for the Deer Management Group, with plenty demands being made on our sector. He highlighted that the last year had involved:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agricultural Holdings Review;</li> <li>• Land Reform Review;</li> <li>• Scottish Independence Referendum;</li> <li>• General Election.</li> </ul> <p>He confirmed that deer continued to be high on the Scottish politicians’ radar with increasing pressure on the Group to not only perform, but to be seen to perform. He highlighted that deer managers faced another review of the “voluntary principle” which was going to be looked at in 2016 to see whether it was working.</p> <p>The Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) is clear that a great deal of progress is being made, but by 2016, all Deer Management Groups will have to have a Deer Management Plan in place. Not only a Plan, but a Plan which meets certain criteria set out by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), essentially having sufficient detail to demonstrate that all the basics are being done and that public benefits are being identified and secured. “Benchmarking” of Deer Management Plans has been the talk of 2014/15 and it is clear that Deer Management Plans have to come up to the necessary standard.</p> <p>RW confirmed that he and Ken Bowlt (KSB), the Group secretary, had spent time last year going through our Deer Management Plan with Sinclair Coghill (SC) of SNH, assessing it against the benchmark, and found that a number of improvements could be made.</p> <p>RW confirmed that the ADMG and SNH have worked hard to come up with a benchmarking system that was acceptable to the sector and having completed the assessment for our Plan, the areas for improvement have been identified.</p> <p>RW suggested that on public interest/benefit, the Group has nothing to fear. His view was that a well-managed deer herd with all of our actions identified would tick both the private and public benefit boxes at the same time. RW advised that we had a new Minister for Environment, Climate and Land Reform in Dr Aileen McLeod. She is clearly a polished politician who has been tasked with delivering a portfolio which is high up on the Scottish Government’s agenda. Her foreword in “<i>Scotland’s Wild Deer – A National Approach</i>” in which the ADMG is a contributor to the steering group, sets out her stall, and RW recommended that everyone take the opportunity to read it.</p>	

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	<p>In summing up, RW suggested that we know what is expected of us and that we must continue to work with the agencies and demonstrate that the extra effort that we are putting in to being more accountable is working and we are all benefitting, including the deer population. A more comprehensive Deer Management Plan would make us all think about all aspects of deer management in greater detail and is therefore making us all better deer and land managers and so there are plenty positives from the updating exercise.</p> <p>RW indicated that in his view, the proposed revisions to our Deer Management Plan were essential and he hoped that the Group would support our progress as one of the Groups who have reacted quickest to change and led from the front.</p>	
<b>2.0</b>	<b><u>Minutes of Meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2014</u></b>	
2.1	<u>Adoption</u>	
	<p>The meeting adopted the Minutes as an accurate record of the previous meeting, this being proposed by Bill Whyte (BW) of Gruinard and seconded by Ruari Mathieson (RM) of Fannich.</p>	
2.2	<u>Matters Arising</u>	
	There were no matters arising.	
<b>3.0</b>	<b><u>Draft Financial Position as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014</u></b>	
	<p>KSB ran through the figures previously distributed for the period to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014, which were highlighted in yellow in the income and expenditure accounts circulated. The figures showed subscriptions totalling £6,112.85 having been collected, with costs amounting to £5,541.06. It was noted that at the end of the year, there were creditors of £369.60 and a bank balance of £1,901.76.</p> <p>KSB highlighted that roughly £2,500 was paid to the ADMG with the balance comprising meeting expenses, secretary/treasurer costs and outlays.</p> <p>There being no questions from the floor, the figures were adopted by the meeting, proposed by Mark Lorimer (ML) of Inverbroom and seconded by RM of Fannich.</p>	

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<b>4.0</b>	<b><u>Budget for 2015/16</u></b>	
4.1	<u>Budget</u>	
	<p>KSB ran through the figures for the remainder of the current year to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2015 and also the budget for the following year. He confirmed that the budgets were very much in line with the previous and current year's figures with the exception that the budget included provision for the Deer Management Plan upgrading costs, less 50% grant from SNH.</p> <p>There being no questions from the floor, the budgets were proposed as approved by The Hon Mrs J MacLay (JM) of Gruinard and seconded by Barbara MacDonald (BM) of Letterewe.</p>	
4.2	<u>Members Subscription</u>	
	<p>The meeting considered the schedule of subscriptions previously circulated to all members of the Group. There was no discussion on the detail and the subscriptions for the coming year were proposed as approved by Kenny Ross (KR) on behalf of Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich, and seconded by Norman Kelman (NK) of Heights of Kinlochewe.</p> <p>Willie Lamont (WL) of Forest Enterprise advised that his organisation would be able to contribute £500 towards the upgrading of the Deer Management Plan and asked that the schedule be adjusted accordingly. RW thanked WL for this and asked KSB to effect the change to the schedule.</p>	KSB
<b>5.0</b>	<b><u>Deer Management Plan - Revisions</u></b>	
	<p>RW asked SC of SNH to open the discussion on the proposed revisions to the Deer Management Plan and this he kindly agreed to do.</p> <p>SC firstly commented on the existing Plan, saying that it was considered in the sector as an exemplar and was considered as a starting point for Groups who didn't have a Plan and were starting to put a Plan in place. However, he reinforced the comments made by RW during his welcome talk and confirmed that this was a time of change. There was an evolving political climate which saw deer management being high on the Government's agenda and groups coming under increasing pressure to demonstrate that they were managing the deer population and their habitat properly. In 2013, the Rural Affairs Committee took views from all stakeholders and agreed to continue with the "voluntary principle" but this was up for further review in 2016 and it was important that the sector was able to demonstrate solid progress.</p>	

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	<p>SC then turned to the “benchmark assessment” which had been distributed to the Group previously. SC highlighted how the red, yellow and green worked, with the general theme being green good, red bad and yellow somewhere in between. He highlighted that in terms of how the West Ross Deer Management Group operated, there was a lot of green. The boundaries of the Group made sense, the members meet, there was a Deer Management Plan, training was being given some thought and in general the Group was doing quite well.</p> <p>However, when the 14 areas of public benefit were assessed, there was very limited green, quite a bit of yellow and some red, and it was noted that in absorbing public interest into the Plan, many of the updates were required. There then was a general discussion on the merits of updating the Plan, the general consensus being that most members felt it was a good idea to progress.</p> <p>However, it was acknowledged that it involved considerable expense and SC highlighted that some funding was available and that an application that had been received from the Group was currently under scrutiny but it was hoped that it could be approved in early course.</p> <p>After considerable debate, the revisions were proposed as approved by ML of Inverbroom and seconded by RM of Fannich.</p>	
<b>6.0</b>	<b><u>Cull Statistics</u></b>	
	<p>The Group reviewed the cull statistics for the 2014/15 season, the omissions being noted. These omissions were Corriemoillie, Garve (Gordon MacKenzie), Corriemoillie (Friday family), Lochluichart and Tournaig. SC agreed on behalf of SNH to provide missing figures for Tournaig, Lochluichart and both Corriemoillies. RW asked that KSB submit a written request to SNH for returns from other occupiers within the Group area.</p> <p>The omissions apart, there was no further discussion on the cull statistics, other than mention of the need to include cull figures from other landowners within the Group area.</p> <p>There was then some discussion on Licences/authorisation conditions in reference to authorisations granted within the Group area to parties other than members. There was also discussion on Night Shooting Licences and the definition of fit and competent applicant.</p> <p>When asked how many Licences had been issued over the last year within the Group area, SC indicated probably about six.</p>	SC/KSB

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<b>7.0</b>	<b><u>Deer Count</u></b>	
	<p>RW acknowledged that the weather had been difficult to enable a coordinated count to be carried out and this was generally acknowledged by the Group.</p> <p>RM suggested that the deer in the Western Highlands had suffered dramatically over the last two months and made mention of a figure of some 80 dead stags at Attadale, Lochcarron. He also mentioned that probably about 90% of last year's calves (i.e. yearlings) had been lost and young stags found dead in the wood. He suggested that it might take some five generations for the population to recover.</p> <p>David Bennett (DB) of Strathbran mentioned that at the beginning of the winter, he had 38 calves coming into feed with the hinds and now there were only four.</p> <p>NK confirmed that his experience was similar in that he had never seen a winter which had been quite as hard on the deer. There was even mention of goats and sika dying off.</p> <p>George Seligman (GS) of Strathbran queried how all the deer count data was assembled and whether it ended up back with the secretary. KSB indicated that some of the data did, but not all, but that he would circulate the count data that he had and if anyone had additional data for their estate, he asked that they furnish it to him so that the records for the Group could be as comprehensive as possible.</p> <p>Mention was made of the Section 7 count with Fannich and Lochrosque figures down, although it was accepted that during inclement weather, deer from Fannich and Lochrosque often made their way over to Foich and if a count was done when the deer were over there, the figures were clearly distorted. RW made a strong call for these deer not to be culled whilst at Foich, otherwise the stocks could be depleted even further.</p> <p>DB suggested that restraint needs to be shown on culling as the winter had caused carnage with the deer population in the Western Highlands.</p>	KSB/All
<b>8.0</b>	<b><u>Habitat Monitoring</u></b>	
	<p>KSB conveyed the apologies of Linzi Seivwright (ex SNH) who now operates independently. She had hoped to attend the meeting to discuss habitat monitoring, the collection and collation of data. However, she had advised that she hopes there will be a prototype version of the deer management database in place by the autumn and indicated that she would be happy to organise sometime in the autumn to demonstrate the deer management database if this was of interest to the Group. The deer management database is currently being piloted and once tested, should be available generally.</p>	

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	<p>She did mention that SNH had recently updated some of its monitoring methodology and suggested that everyone make sure that they checked that the methodology they were using for collecting the habitat monitoring data was correct and that the correct data sheets, etc, were being used.</p> <p>There was some discussion within the Group on the frequency of monitoring and frustration expressed in the delay in the processing of data.</p> <p>ML highlighted the problem where properties may remove sheep from grazings with a view to improving the habitat but then ran the risk of falling foul of SGRPID's working farmer rules. In his case, he had to increase sheep numbers to 1,350 ewes in order to comply with the SGRPID regulations, the net result of which was more degradation of the habitat. He appealed for more joined up thinking.</p>	All
<b>9.0</b>	<b><u>Poaching</u></b>	
	There was no comment from the floor on poaching.	
<b>10.0</b>	<b><u>Association of Deer Management Groups</u></b>	
	<p>As above, Richard Cooke (RC) of the ADMG had sent his apologies, but RW sits on the main Committee of the ADMG and he updated the membership on the Association's activities.</p> <p>He reiterated the increase in pressure on the deer sector, with the 2016 review looming. He highlighted that deer management and control had been brought into the Land Reform Review, notwithstanding some opposition and sound arguments against it.</p> <p>The Land Reform contained possible limits on size of ownership and new powers of compulsory purchase and RW suggested that everyone do what they can to keep abreast and to participate in any consultations as they progress. He confirmed that the ADMG had had a meeting with Dr Aileen McLeod, the Minister for Environment, Climate and Land Reform, and that dialogue would continue.</p> <p>RW highlighted the work of the Land Reform Review Group, noting the following issues:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• proposed removal of exemption from sporting rates;</li> <li>• more powers to SNH as a backstop if the voluntary principle did not deliver;</li> <li>• the difficulties in implementing sporting rates were also highlighted.</li> </ul>	

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	<p>Lastly, RW discussed rural land management and public interest, highlighting biodiversity, delivery of sustainable development, deer management in terms of public benefit and that the key is delivery of an effective Deer Management Plan and hence the benchmark agreed between the ADMG and SNH which identified 14 areas of public benefit. It was confirmed that SNH had assessed 44 Plans against the benchmark and were looking at many of the Plans being updated with a grant being available from SNH for 50% of the cost of the updating. RW indicated that the proof will be in the delivery of action and that the key was collaboration.</p>	
<b>11.0</b>	<b><u>Scottish Natural Heritage/Deer Commission</u></b>	
	<p>BW mentioned issues arising in dealing with SNH. In particular, Tamara Lawton was mentioned and it was hoped that sensible dialogue between SNH and Group members could be encouraged.</p> <p>BW and Brian Fraser (BF) mentioned that they had been dealing with Tamara Lawton in terms of tweaking the Deer Management Plan for the An-Teallach area, in order to reduce impact. BW confirmed that they were looking at localised target culling.</p> <p>SC suggested that everyone try to deal with these things through the Deer Management Group's Plan and that any changes BW makes to his own estate plan should be fed through. RW indicated he was very happy to see if he could facilitate a discussion, if required.</p>	
<b>12.0</b>	<b><u>Election of Office Bearers</u></b>	
	<p>Both RW and KSB stepped down, only to be re-elected, as follows:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RW, Chairman – proposed by BW on behalf of Gruinard and RM on behalf of Fannich.</li> <li>• KSB, Secretary – proposed by BW on behalf of Gruinard and RM on behalf of Fannich.</li> </ul>	
<b>13.0</b>	<b><u>Any Other Business</u></b>	
13.1	<u>Dedicated Radio Frequency</u>	
	<p>RW confirmed that KSB had been asked to submit an application to Ofcom for a dedicated radio frequency which we could have all our stalkers and estate staff tune into to cover the Wester Ross area. It was discussed that the costs were reasonably low at £75 for the licence for a five year period, there being no limit to the amount of radios that could use it.</p> <p>However, DB mentioned the “poaching frequency” already available to the estates and it was agreed that everyone would try to use this frequency.</p>	



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13.2	<u>Mountain Rescue - Dundonnell</u>	
	Mention was made of the Dundonnell Mountain Rescue Team's proposal to develop a new base at Dingwall, with the Mountain Rescue Team wondering whether the membership would be willing to contribute to their cause. The suggestion could be that it could be seen as another public benefit that our Deer Management Group would be contributing to, but it was felt to leave this with the membership. The contact for the Dundonnell Mountain Rescue Team is Angus Hughes (angushughes@hotmail.co.uk).	
13.3	<u>Air Ambulance Charity</u>	
	The work of the Air Ambulance charity based in Perth was highlighted and it was noted that the Air Ambulance charity was now teaming up with Scottish Land and Estates. If anyone was interested in supporting this cause, which serves our area, they could make contact with J Bullough (j.bullough@scaa.org.uk).	
14.0	<b><u>Date of Next Meeting</u></b>	
	There was talk about a possible meeting on Tuesday 3 <sup>rd</sup> November, again at the Ledgowan Hotel.	