

**MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
 HELD AT LEDGOWAN HOTEL, ACHNASHEEN  
 TUESDAY 22<sup>nd</sup> MAY 2018**

Present:	Randal Wilson Alasdair MacDonald Stuart Allison Ruari Matheson Jake Buckthorp The Hon Mrs A J MacLay Gary Ross Norman Kelman Mark Lorimer Craig McIntosh Lauchlan MacDonald Donald MacLeod Barbara MacDonald Andrew Oliver Ronnie Ross Kenny Ross Kevin Frediani George Seligman David Bennett Donald Macrae Willie Lamont	Chairman Dundonnell Eilean Darach Fannich Foich Gruinard Gruinard Heights of Kinlochewe Inverbroom Inverbroom Inverbroom Kinlochewe Letterewe Letterewe Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich NTS Poolewe Strathbran Strathbran Strathvaich Forest Enterprise
In Attendance:	Ken Bowlt Caroline Cook Ben Lennon Graeme Taylor Tamara Lawson Tom Turnbull Terry Doe Pete Mayhew	Secretary/Treasurer Bowlts Chartered Surveyors Bowlts Chartered Surveyors SNH SNH Association of Deer Management Groups Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council Cairngorms National Park Authority
Apologies:	Angus Davidson Roddy Legge Mark Seligman Derick Macaskill Natasha Hutchison Kenny MacLean Sinclair Coghill Ndurie Abah	Fannich Letterewe Strathbran Forest Enterprise West Ross Biosphere Garve and District Community Council SNH SNH

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**I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIRMAN**Action

The Chairman, Randal Wilson (RW), welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited all attendees around the room to introduce themselves. He confirmed that the Group had had another year of steady progress as we aim to improve our Deer Management Plan ratings ahead of the 2019 SNH Deer Management Plan (DMP) reviews. On that note, he advised that the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) are conducting an internal update of all deer groups' DMPs and as part of this process, confirmed that a request had been submitted to have the West Ross Deer Management Group's DMP reviewed so that we can be informed in good time of any action required. This internal update by the ADMG of our DMP will take place at some point over this coming summer.

RW indicated his confidence that as a result of our steady progress he expected to see a more favourable assessment of the DMP, confirming the positive direction of travel of the Group.

The SNH helicopter spring count of the deer population gave a sound foundation for our evolving Population Model with data more relevant to our own Group's circumstances being added in due course, an example of this being mortality and recruitment.

A request is being made to the Forestry Commission for a collaborative forestry grant to map opportunities for new woodland on a Group-wide basis and RW advised that we would hear more of that from Dr Ben Lennon (BL) from Bowlts' forestry department later.

RW confirmed that the Group members will all be revisiting their habitat impact assessment plots again this year and that the grant of £1,800 from SNH to help gather and collate the information in a digital map format was a welcome assistance. He confirmed that this work was being undertaken by Caroline Cook (CC), the GIS Manager from Bowlts.

RW outlined his proposal with regard to annual subscriptions for us to include two years' Secretary/Treasurer fees this time round as the way the funding was managed at the moment, our Secretary/Treasurer did not get paid for his year's work till 18 months in arrears. He explained that this was simply due to the change in date of our AGM from October to May the following year and that Ken Bowlts (KSB) would provide a more detailed explanation later in the meeting.

The Chairman welcomed Tom Turnbull from Inveraray and Tyndrum DMG, the new Vice-Chair of the ADMG, and advised that he would give an update of ADMG progress and thoughts on the pending workshops and meetings in Birnam and Inverness next month and further, he would answer any questions that members may have on the ADMG's activities and the wider deer world and politics.

RW then welcomed Dr Pete Mayhew (PM), who is the Director of Conservation and Visitor Experience at the Cairngorm National Park Authority, who is going to talk to us about "Natural Capital". The topic of estate values relative to sporting culls was mentioned at/

at our last meeting and RW suggested that PM's talk provides an alternative and additional view to that thought process.

In concluding his welcome, RW reminded the Group that he had now served as Chairman for seven years and that he thought it was time for the Group to collectively look for a new Chair in the not too distant future. He suggested that if there is anyone who would like to discuss this with him, he would be delighted to have the conversation. He also clarified that the position can be filled by anyone who has an interest in and is a member of the West Ross Deer Management Group so he hoped the thought process could commence.

## 2. **MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 25<sup>th</sup> MAY 2017**

### 2.1 **Adoption**

The meeting adopted the Minutes as an accurate record of the previous meeting, this being proposed by Barbara MacDonald of Letterewe (BM) and seconded by Ronnie Ross (RR) of Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich.

### 2.2 **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising, it being agreed that all of the issues noted as being actionable in the previous Minutes would be dealt with through items on the Agenda.

## 3. **DRAFT FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2017**

KSB ran through the income and expenditure accounts for the Group as previously circulated to the membership.

The one page report for the year to 30<sup>th</sup> September showed actuals for the year to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2015, 2016 and the most recent previous year, 2017. He indicated that these showed the pattern of expenditure which was fairly similar for all years, subject to the DMP costs, less grant, appearing largely in the year to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016. The increased management fee for the Secretary/Treasurer was noted in the year to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017, but otherwise he confirmed that the income and expenditure was very similar.

KSB highlighted the comparison of the actual figures for the year to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017 with the budget for the same period which were shown adjacent to one another on the income and expenditure accounts. Again, the figures looked very much in line with expectation, other than the outlays were somewhat reduced from budget, there therefore being an underspend of just short of £500, this being reflected in the bank balance as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017 being around £500 more than anticipated.

There being no queries from the floor, the figures were adopted by the meeting, proposed by George Seligman (GS) of Strathbran and seconded by BM.

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#### 4. **BUDGET FOR THE YEAR TO 30th SEPTEMBER 2018**

##### 4.1 **Budget**

KSB drew the meeting's attention to the column shaded green on the income and expenditure account page, these being the figures for the remainder of the year to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018, again explaining that these figures were very much in line with the previous year's. He did, however, draw the meeting's attention to the issue raised earlier by RW; namely that due to the movement of the AGM date, this inevitably led to a delay in the Group being able to settle the Secretary/Treasurer's annual charges. Therefore, if one year's subscription was raised at this time, only once that had been collected would the Group be able to settle the Secretary/Treasurer's charges for the year to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017. Thus, the intention was to raise two years' management charges and this was reflected in the figures highlighted in green. KSB also drew the meeting's attention to the income of £1,800 from SNH funding and the expenditure for the same amount and explained that this had been entered in the accounts by way of a "journal" as the money hadn't actually gone in and out of the account, but rather an invoice had been raised by KSB's office for the work being carried out and settled direct by SNH.

There being no questions from the floor, the budget was proposed as approved by GS and seconded by BM.

##### 4.2 **Members Subscriptions**

The meeting reviewed the proposed subscription schedule previously circulated. However, KSB then broke the welcome news that the National Trust for Scotland had agreed to join the Group and that therefore, they would also be paying a subscription, which had not yet been incorporated into the schedule. Therefore, KSB suggested that once this was done, on the basis of the minimum of five stags, all of the proposed subscriptions would be tweaked downwards slightly.

Having provided the above outline the meeting agreed to the proposed subscriptions, this being proposed by BM and seconded by GS.

#### 5. **DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The Chairman reminded the Group that the next time the assessments of the DMPs are carried out, that assessment will be based largely on the progress that groups had made in terms of their action plans. Therefore, it was important that we continued the work being carried out under the framework of the Plan, creating our priorities each year and being able to record progress within our Plan.

##### 5.1 **Review of Actions Arising from the DMP**

RW acknowledged the work being undertaken by various members of the Group over the last year, this being recorded in separate Minutes of the interim meetings that had taken place. He reported as follows:-

5.1.1/

### 5.1.1 Designated Sites

RW indicated that the Group's general direction of travel was to incorporate the Section 7 Agreement outcomes within the Group thinking. Graeme Taylor (GT) of SNH confirmed that SNH would be open to this. In doing so, he also confirmed that the annual meeting for the Fannich Hills Section 7 Agreement was currently minuted and these Minutes would always be available but it was generally thought a good idea to bring the Section 7 Agreement discussions into the Group's discussions.

RW also mentioned the possibility of funding to do some work on developing a Management Plan focussed on the An Teallach SSSI area. The general drift was that funding might be available from SNH to fund some management advice and with this in mind, Tamara Lawson (TL) agreed that SNH would contact Eilean Darach, Dundonnell and Gruinard with a view to having a tripartite discussion to see what could be done to adjust the management so that the habitat could be brought back into an improving status.

### 5.1.2 Woodland

BL gave an account on the status regarding the habitat assessments in the NWSS data. He explained that the data set was static and may or may not be repeated in years to come. He advised that Deer Management Groups have been asked to capture information on where changes in large herbivore impacts had taken place due to active management, particularly where impacts have been reduced. He advised that a target had been set of 60% of sites to be in the medium or low categories. Further, he advised that the West Ross Deer Management Group is already at a figure of 68% so is already sitting comfortably above target. Any new surveys that are carried out need to have parity with the original survey and with each other across the ADMG. Therefore, he suggested that this needs to be agreed at ADMG level before any surveys took place. RW noted the general consensus of the meeting was therefore to push this one up to the ADMG before any unilateral action was taken.

KSB

Tom Turnbull (TT) confirmed that the ADMG was looking at this issue and that Linzi Seivwright was working on it. GT advised that the West Lochaber Deer Management Group had resurveyed high impacted sites and that it might be helpful if we got a copy of the report produced by Taylor Wildlife. GT kindly confirmed that he would try to obtain a copy of this report for us.

GT

BL indicated, so that everyone could have an idea on the quantum of the issue, that high or very high impact sites extended in total to about 1,000 ha over 270 polygons.

At this point in the meeting, Willie Lamont (WL) of Forest Enterprise advised of the restructuring taking place within Forest Enterprise which from some point in 2019 would be reincorporated as Forest and Land Scotland./

Scotland. He advised that the number of management areas would be reducing from ten to six and that deer management would be effected on a regional basis.

WL advised that over time, he expected there to be a reduced presence at the DMG meetings and that we probably wouldn't be seeing much of him in the future.

RW thanked WL for providing some of the background to the Forest Enterprise restructuring and also for all his input over the years.

#### 5.1.3 Woodland Expansion

On RW's request, BL outlined the Woodland Creation Opportunities mapping project and reported a useful meeting with FC Conservator, John Risby. BL confirmed that Mr Risby had offered support in principle and felt that it would fit well with the forestry cooperating funding stream. He advised that this could be applied for directly via Bowlts with letters of support from DMG members, which had been forthcoming. BL undertook to submit the application and estimated a project duration of 6-12 months. RW thanked BL for the update.

BL

GT advised that any new plantings had to be recorded, mapped and fed through the DMP to the Deer Population Model.

#### 5.1.4 Carbon Sensitive Habitats

RW asked BL to update the meeting on the peatland feasibility study project being considered. BL indicated that this was similar in nature to that of the Woodland Creation Opportunities mapping project. He advised that he had a recent and encouraging conversation with Ndurie Abah of SNH in which she encouraged an application for the study to be carried out at a strategic group area level. The deadline of this round of applications was 31st May and BL undertook to make the application by that date. He advised that the timescale for the project, if approved, would be similar to the one for woodland expansion.

BL

#### 5.1.5 Habitat Monitoring

RW confirmed the receipt of funding from SNH for collating and mapping the data, with Caroline Cook (CC) confirming that work was being undertaken, but also that an impediment was that we didn't have everyone's data. Therefore, RW encouraged everyone to ensure that their habitat monitoring data was fed through to KSB.

All

GS suggested it would be good if the info could be fed back to the estates and CC confirmed that that would be done.

CC

#### 5.1.6 Public Access

RW confirmed significant progress with the submission of entries for Heading/

Heading for the Scottish Hills website, with KSB confirming that all of the properties who hadn't yet submitted details had been written to and so further progress was anticipated, leading to comprehensive cover for the Group's area.

#### 5.1.7 Deer Population Model

RW, in inviting CC to make a presentation of the Deer Population Model, reminded the Group that the Model was a tool to help inform decision making about the management of the population. It was a guide and could never provide a definitive answer to culling levels, etc.

CC then ran through, by way of a presentation, the workings of the Deer Population Model, explaining how the different data was entered and its impact on the population numbers projected by the Model. She stressed the importance of good base data, this being currently provided by the SNH spring helicopter count. The cull figures provided good data, but she stressed the importance of getting good mortality and recruitment figures for the Model. After the presentation, she explained that a sheet was being prepared which would be circulated to all members shortly, asking for a return, which information would be used to feed into the Model and hopefully make it increasingly more useful as time passed.

CC

After the presentation, RW threw the issue to the floor to encourage discussion.

GS queried how, with such a simple Model, we could hope to cope with the lumpiness and ups and downs that the deer population had to cope with. CC responded by saying that it was vital that data was collected regularly by properties and the more data that could be put in, the more reliable the Model would be. She also confirmed that in projecting forward, the Model would have to take account of the fact that every so often, there would be abysmal winters and therefore she was adjusting the Model so that we could vary the mortality and recruitment rates each season rather than using the same assumptions over time.

GT confirmed that he is currently using different mortality rates for stags, hinds and calves. He also advised that he expected a bad year probably once in five and therefore he was now tending to build that into his Deer Population Models.

After some discussion, it was agreed that a lot of data was required to make the Model useful and that at the moment, it should be considered very much as a work in progress.

RR indicated that he was expecting very low calving this year as a result of the poor condition that the hinds were in following the winter and he suggested that it would take two years in decent conditions before recovery could start.

#### 5.1.8/

5.1.8 Deer Welfare

RW confirmed that a form will be distributed, requesting larder weights, etc, and he asked members to do their best to have this completed and returned.

KSB

5.1.9 Non-Native Deer Species

RW asked the meeting to note that this action had been completed and the appropriate policy adopted within the Deer Management Plan at the last AGM.

5.2 **Proposed Priorities for the Coming Year**

RW set out the priorities for the forthcoming year, as agreed, as follows:-

- Habitat monitoring;
- Deer Population Model;
- Carbon sensitive habitats;
- Woodland expansion;
- Survey of high impacted native woodland.

TT was pleased to note that these priorities were also those identified by the ADMG as their priorities.

5.3 **Budgetary Implications**

RW suggested that there were no significant costs in the current budget year envisaged in moving forward with these five priorities and the Group would continue with the interim meetings between AGMs to move things on. He also confirmed that where significant pieces of work were being anticipated, funding was being sought.

5.4 **Funding**

GT confirmed that the SRDP was now finished and that there was no further funding available through this. However, it was acknowledged that some other alternative means of funding would probably be created which everyone would find out about in due course. It was acknowledged that the peatland funding was still there and would hopefully assist the Group in pulling together its strategic review.

5.5 **Talk on Natural Capital – What Does it Mean for Deer Management?**

RW introduced Pete Mayhew (PM).

PM confirmed that natural capital (NC) basically sees natural resources as an asset that can deliver great benefit to people, whether through food production, clean water, pollination, timber, etc. In this sense, it is similar to the concept of 'ecosystem services'. NC is reckoned to be worth trillions to the world economy. In Scotland, it is fully supported by Scotgov and SNH produces a 'Natural Capital Index' which assesses/



assesses whether the natural resources of Scotland are increasing or decreasing. In the Cairngorms National Park, their natural heritage objective basically seeks to build the NC of the Park through working with estates to increase woodland cover, restore peatlands and improve flood plains and water catchments in order to reduce the risk of downstream flooding. All these things will also increase the biodiversity in the Park. As regards deer management, the CNPA works closely with deer management groups to ensure that deer populations are managed to assist this development of NC. For example, where NC is not being enhanced, they would encourage deer densities to be reduced to around (or below) 10 per km<sup>2</sup>. This is not a 'stick' but a guideline to help discussion with deer management groups. The NC debate is also relevant in terms of future estate valuation and also the economic benefits and costs of deer to the Scottish economy.

## 6. CULL STATISTICS

RW drew the meeting's attention to the cull statistics previously circulated, with various areas highlighted in yellow indicating the absence of data. KSB confirmed that we continue to press for the data that was missing and given that this data would be fed into the Deer Population Model, it was agreed that no further discussion was required.

## 7. DEER COUNT

GT confirmed that they were happy to get the West Ross Deer Management Group's spring count done. It was acknowledged that it had been a bit of a struggle with the weather, it being difficult to find suitable days to carry out the count.

RR suggested that there had been significant calf mortality since the count.

Kenny Ross (KR) highlighted the difficulty in distinguishing between calves and yearlings on the photographs taken during the count and this undoubtedly made it difficult for the Group in establishing exactly where recruitment lay. GT offered to make their photographs available for any properties that wanted to look at them.

RW suggested that perhaps a summer count to establish recruitment might be useful. GT suggested that if the Group was going to do a further count, SNH could try to help, providing sufficient warning was given.

In considering the deer count figures, GT highlighted the reduction in deer numbers, acknowledging that the weather would have moved the beasts westwards. Therefore, the suggestion is that there are more deer in the western estates. He also advised that in the Section 7 area, there were about 500 deer less and in Letterewe, 200 more.

It was suggested that SNH might produce a map for the An Teallach SSSI area and GT confirmed that this would be possible.

GT

GT also confirmed that Sinclair Coghill (SC) would liaise further with CC and BM on the Deer Population Model and would make digital data available to them on the deer count.

Lastly, /

Lastly, BM indicated that they would advise the Group when they were planning undertaking their summer helicopter count and then this could perhaps be coordinated with any other counting going on within the Group area.

BM

8. **POACHING**

David Bennett (DB) of Strathbran advised that there had been quite a number of poaching incidents between Garve and Achnasheen. He indicated that Daniel Sutherland, the local Wildlife Officer at the Police Station in Dingwall, had been fairly diligent in coming out. GS also confirmed having found dead carcasses near the road and therefore the meeting noted that poaching had been a problem.

9. **ASSOCIATION OF DEER MANAGEMENT GROUPS**

TT advised that there was a lot going on at Association level. The report submitted following the 2016 review had not resulted in any further legislation, which we welcomed, but various actions had been taken, including the setting up of a Lowland Deer Panel which would be reporting later this year.

However, looming on the horizon was the 2019 reassessment of DMPs and currently the ADMG is querying with SNH what is expected. He advised that the assessments would probably narrow their focus, looking for designated sites to be improving, native woodland condition to be improving, looking for progress on the expansion of woodland and also on peatland action.

He mentioned the mock DMP assessments being offered by the Association and that the West Ross Deer Management Group had committed to this. TT mentioned the seminars, which although targeting Chairman/Secretaries, also welcomed others. He mentioned the first one on 6th June at Birnam, Dunkeld, and another one on 7th June in Inverness.

TT talked about YouTube tutorials on habitat impact assessment and carcass handling, the indicating being that “Best Practice” was moving online.

RW thanked TT for his attendance and for coming all the way up to speak to us.

10. **SNH**

GT confirmed that SNH were working with the ADMG on the 2019 assessments and redefining the criteria by which they might be judged. Currently he advised that SC and GT were covering a big number of groups, and therefore moving forward, we were more likely to see more of TL.

11. **GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATIONS**

CC advised that as a Group, we need to be GDPR complaint. She confirmed that an email will be issued shortly.

CC

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12. **ELECTION OF OFFICE BEARERS**

Both RW and KSB agreed to step down to allow the election of office bearers, but were re-elected unopposed, in both cases proposed by GS and seconded by Mark Lorimer (ML) of Inverbroom.

13. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

14. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

RW confirmed that a date for the next management meeting would be set for some time in early September. However, subsequent to the conclusion of the meeting, this was revised to November.

15. **THANKS**

In drawing the meeting to a close, RW thanked all of the Group members involved in the interim management meetings for all their help, and also thanked the speakers, PM and TT, for attending the meeting.

KSB/AM 0025  
25<sup>th</sup> May 2018