

**MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE WEST ROSS DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP
HELD AT ACHNASHEEN HALL
WEDNESDAY 31ST AUGUST 2016**

Present:	Randal Wilson	Chairman
	Ruari Matheson	Fannich
	Barbara MacDonald	Letterewe
	Kenny Ross	Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich
	Derick Macaskill	Forest Enterprise
	George Seligman	Strathbran
	David Bennett	Strathbran

In Attendance:	Ken Bowlt	Secretary/Treasurer
	Sinclair Coghill	SNH

Randal Wilson (RW), as Chairman, explained that the purpose of this meeting was to follow up the adoption of the Deer Management Plan (DMP) and in particular to focus in on the actions required to implement the DMP.

The Chairman led the Group through the action areas, as follows:-

Item	Notes	Action
1.0	<u>Designated Sites</u>	
	<p>RW explained that he had taken over the lead on this from Bill Whyte (BW) of Gruinard.</p> <p>He confirmed that further information on the An Teallach SSSI was awaited from Tamara Lawton who was off at the moment and he explained that we may have to wait until she gets back to work. Further, it was agreed that KSB would email Graham Taylor for an update on the status of all designated sites within the Group area so that any actions proposed were informed by the up to date information from SNH.</p>	KSB
2.0	<u>Woodlands</u>	
	<p>Derick Macaskill (DM) explained that the Native Woodland survey data was collected over the period 2006 to 2013 but published two years ago. It was agreed that KSB should write to Willie Lamont (WL) with copy of relevant plans within the existing DMP, asking if he could put together a questionnaire which would subsequently be issued to Group members in order to gather information on what members are doing/have done to retain and improve the condition of the existing native woodlands as highlighted on map 6 within the DMP.</p>	KSB

	It was further agreed that the same would be done for the woodland shown on map 8 of the DMP with George Seligman (GS) preparing a questionnaire for circulation to the members.	GS
3.0	<u>Carbon Sensitive Habitats</u>	
	<p>RW confirmed that he had looked at the area of hags above the Achnasheen village and was possibly going to have a Moorland Management Plan put together to enable some work to restore the peatland to be carried out.</p> <p>He explained that he was having his Moorland Management Plan put together by Angus Davidson with Heights of Kinlochewe joining in and GS indicated that Strathbran might also consider coming onboard. RW welcomed this suggestion on the basis that it showed collaboration between the proprietors in one of the key action areas for the DMP.</p> <p>Ruari Matheson (RM) of Fannich confirmed that they already had a Moorland Management Plan in place.</p>	
4.0	<u>Habitat Monitoring</u>	
	In the absence of Norman Kelman (NK), RW explained the difficulties that SNH were experiencing in funding the completion of the SWARD programme which would be used to collate and analyse the data collected during habitat monitoring. He made mention of the Association of Deer Management Group's fighting fund which hoped to raise around £50,000-£75,00 to cover a development programme over the next three years involving a number of specific projects, including the SWARD data handling system, Wild Deer Best Practice and the DMG Accreditation Scheme.	
5.0	<u>Public Access</u>	
	<p>RM advised the Group that not a lot of progress had been made. It was agreed that Sinclair Coghill would try to get Fiona Cunningham of SNH to contact RM with a view to getting Fannich up and running on the "Heading for the Scottish Hills" website.</p> <p>Barbara MacDonald (BM) explained the problems experienced on Letterewe with access, with RM stressing the importance of being tactful with walkers.</p> <p>It was agreed that RM would put a questionnaire together for circulation to the membership in terms of gathering information.</p>	<p>SC</p> <p>RM</p>
6.0	<u>Deer Population and Population Model</u>	
	BM circulated the questionnaire which she had prepared and confirmed that base data was required in terms of the current deer population numbers and make up. Therefore, her view was that we needed to do a count by helicopter.	

	<p>SC confirmed that SNH currently planned to do a count in the 2017/18 year although they won't know until April 2017 whether they will have the funding for this.</p> <p>RM stressed that data was needed separately on stag, hind and calf numbers. He expressed concern about any count that results in "unclassified" deer.</p> <p>GS suggested that the Group did require a "proper count" and that that could probably only be done by helicopter.</p> <p>The meeting accepted that it was very difficult to get a "perfect" count but RW suggested that the Group does need to get into regular spring foot counts to back up any helicopter counts, with the foot counts hopefully being done each year.</p> <p>There was some discussion on the likely cost of a helicopter count and this was estimated at £35,000-£40,000 for the whole Group, there being the hope that there might be the possibility of collaborative funding available.</p>	
7.0	<u>Deer Welfare</u>	
	<p>It was agreed that a questionnaire needs to be put together on mortality, recruitment, etc. Some members at the meeting thought that seeking larder weights may be going too far. GS talked about kidney fat levels as another piece of data that might be useful. Following extensive discussion on the level of data, with BM mentioning that Reay Forest has a fantastic larder system, DM issued an invitation to the Group to visit an FC larder to see how they dealt with recording information on carcasses. He also confirmed that he would send to KSB a copy of their return sheets for the members' information. DM kindly agreed to put together a draft questionnaire for circulation to the Group.</p>	DM
8.0	<u>Collation of Information</u>	
	<p>It was agreed that in terms of collecting information from the membership, it was probably better that KSB coordinate all the questionnaires so that one large questionnaire went out to the membership covering all of the information required, rather than a series coming out from different Group members. KSB agreed to collate the draft questionnaire. GS kindly offered to review this prior to issue to the membership.</p>	KSB/GS
9.0	<u>Date of Next Meeting</u>	
	<p>It was agreed that Mandy McWilliam from Ken's office would liaise with everyone, the intention being to have a meeting on Tuesday 29th or possibly Wednesday 30th November.</p>	