

**MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE WEST ROSS DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP
HELD AT ACHNASHEEN HALL, ACHNASHEEN RAILWAY STATION
WEDNESDAY 14th DECEMBER 2016**

Present:	Randal Wilson Alasdair MacDonald Brian Fraser Ruari Matheson Bill Whyte Megan Henderson Norman Kelman Craig McIntosh Barbara MacDonald Annabel Wilson Ronnie Ross Kenny Ross George Seligman Mark Seligman David Bennett	Chairman Dundonnell Eilean Darach Fannich Gruinard Gruinard Heights of Kinlochewe Inverbroom Letterewe Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich Strathbran Strathbran Strathbran
----------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

In Attendance:	Ken Bowlt Mary Gibson Angus Davidson	Secretary/Treasurer SNH Fannich
----------------	--------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------

Apologies:	David Lilley Mark Lorimer Roddy Legge Donald Macrae	Heights of Kinlochewe Inverbroom Letterewe Strathvaich
------------	--------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Group, including those such as George and Mark Seligman, who had travelled quite some distance to the meeting, and expressed appreciation that everyone had made an effort to attend what was an important meeting in the Deer Management Group’s calendar.

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

Item	Notes	Action
1.0	<u>Review of Actions Arising from Revised Deer Management Plan</u>	
	Randal Wilson (RW) clarified that the main purpose of this quarterly meeting was to follow up the recent adoption of the Group’s Deer Management Plan (DMP) and in particular to look at what progress had been made on the actions required to implement the DMP. He confirmed that since the last meeting, the Group questionnaire had been prepared and issued to members. He confirmed that/	

Item	Notes	Action
	<p>that there had been a tremendous return rate, although some had been a little late, nevertheless Ken Bowlts's (KSB) office had managed to put together a summary of the responses on the questions within the questionnaire on the nine areas upon which the Group was focussing action. It was agreed that probably the easiest way for the meeting to review the responses to the questionnaire would be if RW ran through the summary sheet prepared by KSB's office, as follows.</p>	
1.1	<p><u>Designated Sites (Randal Wilson)</u></p>	
	<p>RW noted that we had three responses, confirming members who were aware of designated sites affecting their estate which were currently described as unfavourable as a consequence of herbivore impacts and, more importantly, that in each case the Group members were taking action, often in conjunction with SNH, with a view to working towards favourable/unfavourable recovering status.</p>	
1.2	<p><u>Woodlands (Derick MacAskill)</u></p>	
	<p>The responses from the questionnaires suggested that no-one within the Group was aware of any native woodland within their properties which had been categorised as having high or very high herbivore impact.</p>	
1.3	<p><u>Woodland Expansion (George Seligman)</u></p>	
	<p>It was noted that our maps were up to date and that one or two members of the Group may be considering planting new woodlands in the next five years, although the ones who were thinking about it were, as yet, undecided.</p>	
1.4	<p><u>Carbon Sensitive Habitats (Randal Wilson)</u></p>	
	<p>It was agreed that it was probably inappropriate to have as a Group objective the "creation" of peatlands and that we should seek to delete this from our DMP following approval at the May 2017 AGM.</p> <p>One member had indicated that they were aware of areas upon their property which would benefit from the restoration of peatland and indicated that it was their intention to carry out a restoration project in the next five years.</p> <p>However, it was recognised by the Group that funding is an issue and Mary Gibson (MG) was asked to investigate the availability of funding for such environmental work and report back to the Group.</p>	<p>MG</p>
1.5/		

Item	Notes	Action
1.5	<u>Habitat Monitoring (Norman Kelman)</u>	
	<p>RW outlined that the Association of Deer Management Groups was committed to both SWARD and Best Practice. He mentioned that they were planning to raise about £60,000 and so far had raised some £20,000 and so he encouraged all members to consider making a one-off contribution to the fund being raised by the ADMG and in doing so, confirmed that his family had made a contribution. In reviewing the responses to the questionnaire, RW confirmed that he was very encouraged to see that everyone had confirmed that habitat impact data collection had started on their properties with samples being collected on blanket bog and peatland, heather moor and montane vegetation on many estates. Queries were raised by Lochrosque, Cabuie and Nest of Fannich on the numbers shown on the questionnaire responses and KSB undertook to confirm the record and double-check to see whether the correct entries had been made. RW noted that not everyone had forwarded the habitat impact data collected to KSB and asked that if members had not done this, that they take steps to ensure that all the data was available to KSB such that it could be collated and make the Group's habitat impact data more robust.</p> <p>RW also noted the responses from the questionnaires, indicating that habitat monitoring surveys would be carried out on a regular, three-yearly basis. There were a few queries on the return for Foich, where no sample numbers were entered, and KSB undertook to liaise with Foich to update the response summary.</p> <p>There was then an open discussion on the habitat impact data being collected, with Norman Kelman (NK) indicating that he expects significant improvement in the habitat following the removal of sheep. Barbara MacDonald (BM) suggested that her experience was that it took quite a while for any improvement in the habitat to show and therefore RW suggested that patience would have to be brought to bear.</p>	<p>All</p> <p>KSB</p>
1.6	<u>Public Access (Ruari Matheson)</u>	
	<p>In running through the responses to the public access questions, RW advised that the principal income streams for the properties within the Group were sporting, holiday and residential lets, farming, renewables and forestry. The top recreational groups using the properties comprised firstly walkers, who impacted on all estates, followed by hunters/cyclists/fishermen and bird watchers.</p> <p>Roughly half of the members within the Group confirmed that walkers tended to follow clear estate paths and about the same proportion of properties had paths that gave access to the high ground. Roughly two-thirds of members actively/</p>	

Item	Notes	Action
	<p>actively maintained paths and a similar number felt that paths benefitted the properties by allowing ease of access, reducing the impacts of conflicting interests and allowing easier access for extraction of carcasses.</p> <p>The general feeling was that roughly half the members felt that recreational users had an impact on sporting use, although it was noted that some did not.</p> <p>There then followed an open discussion on public access, with reports that litter on the hill was becoming an increasing problem. Concerns were expressed that issues with trampling of vegetation would only increase with deer being constantly moved, this being particularly noted at Fannich, Heights and Gruinard.</p> <p>Mention was made that as mountain bikes were being seen more and more on the hill, there were an increasing number of issues with them and this was something to be considered as the Group moves forward.</p> <p>The Group, through the discussion, queried whether some progress could be made in the Fannich area via the Section 7 Agreement on the disturbance to deer and this is something that needs to be taken up with SNH at the appropriate time.</p> <p>RM talked about the “Heading for the Hills” website and mentioned the name Fiona Cunningham within SNH, who is the person to contact to have property details loaded up. RW encouraged everyone to do this, given that only one property within the Group, namely Fannich, currently used this website.</p> <p>The meeting acknowledged that most members were working with other bodies and using other methods such as improving paths, signage, etc, to ease any perceived access conflicts.</p> <p>When access issues flared up, it was noted that they usually manifested themselves in disrupted stalking days, additional damage to the habitat through constant movement of deer and occasional damage to young plantation when gates are left open.</p> <p>The Group acknowledged that there was difficulty in accessing funding through SRDP for path improvement and it was agreed that this was something that might be discussed further via SNH in due course.</p>	
1.7	<p><u>Deer Population and Population Model (Barbara MacDonald)</u></p>	
	<p>RW ran through the responses to the deer population and population model questions. The following being noted:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most of the properties within the Group had some Sika and Roe deer. • one-third of the properties had feral goats. • roughly/ 	

Item	Notes	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • roughly half of the properties had rabbits/hares. • two of the properties had cattle. • four of the properties had sheep. • more than half of the Group had agreed that they would be prepared to share helicopter count costs, subject to proper budgets being produced and approved by the membership. There seemed to be some ambiguity by the responses received from some of the estates and these queries were to be followed up by KSB. <p>There followed a discussion on the deer population model and it generally was agreed that it would be very important to establish livestock numbers such as sheep, cattle, horses, goats, etc, on the hill within the Group area. This is something that the Group will follow up and explore, and see whether this is an easy thing to establish.</p> <p>As regards deer count, it was acknowledged that SNH may do a deer count in 2017, it being noted that Sinclair Coghill had previously mentioned that he would query with SNH whether they were actually able to do it and advise the Group in due course. RW stressed the importance of us having an accurate spring count and therefore it was hoped that the Group would be able to organise a foot count whatever happened.</p>	
1.8	<u>Deer Welfare (Kenny Ross)</u>	
	<p>RW noted that all members currently collect data on mortality, recruitment, larder weights and that they would be prepared to share the data within the Group so that it could be reviewed on a Group basis. He acknowledged that probably about a third of the members report deer vehicle collisions on www.deercollisions.co.uk and he encouraged those who were not doing so to start.</p> <p>There was a discussion on the collation of data, particularly with regard to larder weights, and it was agreed that Bill Whyte (BW) would forward to KSB a spreadsheet showing how they recorded larder weights at Gruinard for possible circulation around the Group so that a standard basis of data collection could be put in place.</p> <p>Mention was made of the issue of dogs on the loose and the impact that this had on deer welfare, the consensus being that visitors to members' properties should be encouraged to keep their dogs on a lead and certainly under control.</p>	BW
1.9	<u>Non-Native Deer Species (David Bennett)</u>	
	<p>RW ran through the responses to the non-native species questions within the questionnaire, it being noted that Sika deer were present on all members' properties, but it was also noted that very few people actually counted them. DB/</p>	

Item	Notes	Action
	<p>DB stressed the importance of establishing the scale of the non-native species issue, but also acknowledged that the counting of Sika was not easy.</p> <p>Mention was made of the issue of counting in woodlands by dung counts, but that then brought on the query of how to separate Red and Sika numbers out.</p> <p>Brian Fraser (BF) talked about the counting of goats, with there being no response indicating that anyone counted goats. BF's view was that most of them lived along the roads and that at one time he had about 100, but numbers have now been reduced to about half that.</p> <p>BM indicated that Letterewe used to have some 200-3—goats, but their numbers had been reduced to around 40-50. BW of Gruinard advised that they had three main populations of goats, Craigrannoch, Booracheries and another with a total population estimated around 100. NK mentioned that on Sleach, there probably were around 60.</p> <p>Lastly, RW noted that neither Fallow deer nor feral pigs/wild boar were recorded as being present on any of the Group properties.</p>	
2.0	<u>Deer Count</u>	
	<p>The debate on the deer count issue was noted above, but RW stressed the importance that the Group organise a spring foot count each year to augment any other counting that may or may not be undertaken by SNH or by the Group by helicopter.</p>	
3.0	<u>Date of Next Meeting</u>	
	<p>The Group considered Thursday 23rd March or possibly 22nd or 25th May as possible dates, this to be agreed at a later date.</p>	