

**MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE WEST ROSS DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP
HELD AT ACHNASHEEN HALL, ACHNASHEEN RAILWAY STATION
THURSDAY 23rd MARCH 2017**

Present:	Randal Wilson	Chairman
	Brian Fraser	Eilean Darach
	Stuart Allison	Eilean Darach
	Ian Allison	Eilean Darach
	Ruari Matheson	Fannich
	Jordan Hagan	Fannich
	Jake Buckthorp	Foich
	Norman Kelman	Heights of Kinlochewe
	Mark Lorimer	Inverbroom
	Craig McIntosh	Inverbroom
	Barbara MacDonald	Letterewe
	Andrew Oliver	Letterewe
	Ronnie Ross	Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich
	Kenny Ross	Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich

In Attendance:	Ken Bowlt	Secretary/Treasurer
	Sinclair Coghill	SNH
	Mary Gibson	SNH

Apologies:	Angus Davidson	Fannich
	Hendrik Van Beuningen	Foich
	The Hon Jane MacLay	Gruinard
	Bill Whyte	Gruinard
	Gary Ross	Gruinard
	Megan Henderson	Gruinard
	David Lilley	Heights of Kinlochewe
	Roddy Legge	Letterewe
	George Seligman	Strathbran
	Mark Seligman	Strathbran
	David Bennett	Strathbran
	Patrick Creasey	Strathvaich
	Donald Macrae	Strathvaich
	Willie Lamont	Forest Enterprise
	Derick Macaskill	Forest Enterprise

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, and in particular thanked Mark Lorimer (ML) who had travelled all the way up from London. He confirmed that this was another important meeting in our Group's calendar.

The/

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 two previous quarterly meetings and the adoption of the Group's Deer Management Plan (DMP) in May 2016. Following the last quarterly meeting, which reviewed the summary of returns to the Group's questionnaire, various actions had been agreed and given that all of the matters arising from the minutes of that meeting would be dealt with in the course of this meeting, he decided to go through the action areas, again referring to the updated questionnaire summary sheet prepared by Ken Bowlts office (KSB) as follows:-	
1.1	<u>Designated Sites (Randal Wilson)</u>	
	RW highlighted that we only had three members who were aware of designated sites affecting their estate which were currently described as unfavourable as a consequence of herbivore impacts and in each case, steps are being taken to remedy the situation. Mary Gibson (MG) confirmed that a meeting required to be organised with Barbara MacDonald (BM) in connection with the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding for Letterewe and dates needed to be agreed.	
1.2	<u>Woodlands (Derick MacAskill)</u>	
	In Derick's absence, RW highlighted that we only had one member who was aware of any native woodland within their estate which had been categorised as having a high or very high herbivore impact and this was Letterewe. However, he was also pleased to highlight that there was a signed Memorandum of Understanding with SNH in respect of the native woodland area along the shore of Loch Maree and therefore a plan was already in place to improve the condition of this native woodland. Sinclair Coghill (SC) mentioned the new enhanced grant rates for new native woodlands and it was agreed that these should perhaps be explored. KSB suggested that everyone had a good look at Map 5 from the DMP to double check that there were no native woodlands within their properties which were in unfavourable condition and RW encouraged everyone to do this so that the Group could demonstrate that it was meeting its commitment in respect of this action area.	Group
1.3	<u>Woodland Expansion (George Seligman)</u>	
	The meeting noted that only two members were considering woodland expansion.	All

Item	Notes	Action
1.4	<u>Carbon Sensitive Habitats (Randal Wilson)</u>	
	<p>The responses in the questionnaire summary were noted and RW invited MG to talk about the new Peatland Restoration Grant Scheme.</p> <p>MG advised that as from 1st April, the Government had made £8 million available for peatland restoration projects. MG indicated that the application forms were relatively easy to complete.</p> <p>MG also mentioned that Andrew McBride was the man within SNH who was tasked with leading the project and so if anyone had any queries, she was sure that he would be able to assist. It was understood that the project and budget would be available for the next 12 months.</p> <p>There was a discussion and agreement that there had been a fair bit of TV coverage on peatland restoration projects and RW encouraged all members to explore possibilities of the new scheme.</p>	All
1.5	<u>Habitat Monitoring (Norman Kelman)</u>	
	<p>RW confirmed that the SWARD software was not yet fully ready and indeed that it may be next year before it was available. Meantime, he suggested that everyone made an effort to get their data to KSB. KSB confirmed that so far he had received data from Eilean Darach, Heights of Kinlochewe, Inverbroom, Lochrosque/Kinlochewe and Letterewe. RW encouraged all members to relay their data onto KSB who would collate this on behalf of the Group.</p> <p>SC confirmed that the ECAF Scheme had been binned and as a result of that, the Scottish Government had given SNH £175,000 for assistance with deer management. There was some discussion and it was thought that this probably could cover habitat monitoring and processing of data and therefore SC suggested that the Group consider lodging an application for funding to SNH.</p>	All All
1.6	<u>Public Access (Ruari Matheson)</u>	
	<p>The Group discussed the use of the “Heading for the Scottish Hills” website and mention was made of Fiona Cunningham within SNH who deals with it, the suggestion being that she should perhaps be invited to the AGM to explain to everyone how it works to see if we can get more members involved.</p> <p>BM queried the amount of use the public made of the “Heading for the Scottish Hills” website and SC agreed to take this up with SNH to establish the position.</p> <p>RW, in considering the questionnaire summary, put a query to ML as to whether he felt there was benefit from the work that his estate had undertaken on/</p>	SC

Item	Notes	Action
	<p>on paths. ML suggested it was a bit too early to tell. He confirmed that Inverbroom had improved about 10 km of paths with SRDP funding, although he did mention that there was an issue with payment of funds, with the authority changing specifications and the number of signs which required to be erected half way through contracts, which was not an ideal way of doing business.</p> <p>Ruari Matheson (RM) showed the Group a map which highlighted areas of disturbance on Fannich Estate and indicated that Lochluichart might also be preparing such a map. What the map did highlight was that public access and the disturbance which this caused to deer resulted in a great deal more trampling of the ground and it was agreed that this looked to be a good way to illustrate the point.</p> <p>Ronnie Ross (RR) raised the issue of misinformation being distributed on “best routes” via websites, booklets, etc, provided by a variety of sources. As a result, members of the public were arriving “well informed” of where they wanted to go.</p> <p>RW mentioned the Facebook page which the Angus Glens have up and running where members load pictures on a regular basis of birds seen.</p>	
1.7	<p><u>Deer Population and Population Model (Barbara MacDonald)</u></p>	
	<p>RW highlighted the DMP target of developing/fine tuning a simple population model based on local conditions to provide guidance on Group and estate cull target setting over the long term. As part of that, he stressed the need to do deer counts and Kenny Ross (KR) was asked to confirm the conditions prevailing when the recent spring foot count was undertaken.</p> <p>KR explained that when the snow came, it set the perfect scene for the spring count, and so the count was largely undertaken on 28th February 2017 and the general feeling of those estates able to participate at that time was that a good count was achieved.</p> <p>RW noted some omissions:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dundonnell – RW explained that he had volunteered help to Alasdair MacDonald (AM) get the count organised; • Gruinard – Norman Kelman (NK) suggested that Gary Ross (GR), the new stalker, would be keen to get a count done; • Lochluichart – RM indicated that he might be able to get their count data from them as it was understood they had undertaken a count. <p>RW left it to Ronnie Ross (RR), KR <i>et al</i> to liaise and see whether the count could be completed.</p> <p>A/</p>	RR/KR

Item	Notes	Action
	<p>A query was raised with regard to contact details and KSB agreed to circulate a fresh list of contact details to all members.</p> <p>BM explained that Letterewe will probably do their summer helicopter count again.</p> <p>SC suggested that more information was needed on deer movement and where the deer live at different times of the year.</p> <p>BM suggested that there was a definite change at Letterewe over the years in where deer are found at different times of year.</p> <p>RM suggested that there was a definite difference in both hind and stag behaviour over the years and his theory was that this was largely because of the disturbance.</p>	KSB
1.8	<u>Deer Welfare (Kenny Ross)</u>	
	<p>RW re-stated the Group's intention to continue to encourage members to provide appropriate data on mortality, recruitment and larder weights such that the Group could review the data and feed it into the DMP process.</p> <p>The Gruinard return sheet had previously been circulated and there was some discussion about whether columns should be added to record the time when beasts were shot and perhaps a grid reference, but it was agreed, in the first instance, we would stick with the existing formula and KSB was to circulate.</p> <p>Whilst considering deer welfare, KR made the comment that the deer are currently in very good condition and generally better than they have been for many years at this time of year.</p>	KSB
1.9	<u>Non-Native Deer Species (David Bennett)</u>	
	<p>RW queried whether we should be counting other species. NK didn't think it was necessary to count, for example, goats, as we already had a good idea how many were on the ground.</p> <p>RW suggested that KSB should circulate a return form for the various species, including Sika and other deer, goats and livestock, as such information would be required once the deer population model started to be used.</p>	KSB
2.0	<u>Constitution</u>	
	<p>RW confirmed that the Constitution based on a style provided by the Association of Deer Management Groups had previously been circulated to all members and that the intention was to have this adopted at the forthcoming AGM. He asked that if there were any comments, they should be fed through prior to the AGM.</p>	

Item	Notes	Action
3.0	<u>Any Other Business</u>	
3.1	<u>Progress</u>	
	<p>RM asked SC for his opinion as to the progress being made by the Group. SC suggested that the Group were making good progress, but that they should keep pushing on. He also mentioned that SNH's report on Deer Management had gone to the Scottish Government in December 2016 and had sat with the Government Committee since then. Everyone was waiting with baited breath but once Rosanna Cunningham had heard from the Committee, she would let everyone know the Government's intentions.</p> <p>RW's view is that the deer management industry is making progress, with DMPs in place for most groups, and that generally he hoped the Government would be happy with this progress.</p>	
3.2	<u>Facebook Page</u>	
	Jordan Hagan (JH) mentioned that he had set up a Facebook page for the Group and invited everyone to go and have a look at it. There was some discussion on this and it was agreed that great care should be taken as to what was loaded on the Facebook page.	
4.0	<u>Date of AGM – 25th May 2017</u>	
	<p>RW confirmed that Kate Forbes MSP had been invited, but unfortunately could not come. He hoped that it might be possible to arrange a meeting with her at some point in the future.</p> <p>RM suggested that Fiona Cunningham of SNH be invited to address the AGM on the "Heading for the Scottish Hills" website and MG agreed to sound her out.</p>	MG

In closing the meeting, the Chairman thanked everyone for attending.