

MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD AT LEDGOWAN HOTEL, ACHNASHEEN THURSDAY 19th MAY 2016

Present: Randal Wilson Chairman

Alistair MacDonald Dundonnell
Brian Fraser Eilean Darach
Stuart Allison Eilean Darach

Ruari Matheson Fannich
Jordan Hagon Fannich
Jake Buckthorp Foich
Bill Whyte Gruinard

Norman Kelman Heights of Kinlochewe

Richard Chessells Inverbroom
Craig King Inverbroom
Craig McIntosh Inverbroom
Barbara MacDonald Letterewe
Roddy Legge Letterewe

Ronnie Ross Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich Kenny Ross Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich

Willie Lamont Forest Enterprise

George Seligman Strathbran
David Bennett Strathbran
Donald Macrae Strathvaich

In Attendance: Ken Bowlt Secretary/Treasurer

Caroline Cook Bowlts Chartered Surveyors

Sinclair Coghill SNH Mary Gibson SNH

Richard Cooke Association of Deer Management Groups
Terry Doe Torridon & Kinlochewe Community Council

Martin Scott RPS Planning & Development Steven Lockwood RPS Planning & Development

Apologies: Hendrik J E van Beuningen Foich

The Hon Mrs Jane MacLay Gruinard
Mark Lorimer Inverbroom

David Lilley Heights of Kinlochewe

Megan Henderson Gruinard

Kenneth MacLean Garve & District Community Council

PC Alasdair Ross Dingwall Constabulary

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Item	Notes	Action
1.0	Welcome and Introduction from the Chairman	
	In welcoming everyone to the meeting, the Chairman, Randal Wilson (RW), invited everyone around the room to introduce themselves.	
	He was pleased to report that further progress had been made over the last 12 months, the dominating feature being further extensive revisions to the Group's Deer Management Plan (DMP), with a meeting being held in January which the Chairman, Ken Bowlt (KSB), our Secretary/Treasurer, and Mrs Caroline Cook (CC) met up with Sinclair Coghill (SC) of SNH to go through the revisions to the DMP and effectively carry out a further assessment.	
	RW reported that following that meeting, the Group gained approval from SNH for the 50% grant contribution from SNH to the cost of the DMP revisions. He reported that we were still awaiting a date for our formal reassessment with SC which, when taken together with the reassessment of all the other DMPs would form part of a submission to the Scottish Government Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment (RACCE) Committee, which would give an indication as to how far Deer Management Groups have progressed since 2014.	
	RW explained that the main part of the Agenda will be taken up by some of the actions that flow from the revised DMP and which would be required to be carried out over the next five years. His thought was that it was very important to get more Group members involved in the development of the action plan for progress to be made.	
	RW outlined that another part of today's programme was to acknowledge that the workload of the Deer Management Group had increased dramatically in recent years and he confirmed his view that the fees paid to the secretary/treasurer had been unrealistically low over the past five years and in no way reflected the amount of time that KSB and his team have put into the administration of the Deer Management Group and indeed into the development of the DMP. He confirmed that the amount of time put into our latest update was far in excess of what KSB had actually invoiced. RW also advised the meeting that he was aware what other secretary/treasurers were being paid by other Deer Management Groups and therefore considered it appropriate for the Group to consider an increase in the fee paid to the secretary/treasurer to reflect a more realistic level of input. RW advised that the whole deer management sector had moved on massively since 2011 and he felt that we now needed to address this item.	
	RW welcomed Richard Cooke (RC), our Association Chairman, to the meeting and thanked him for making the effort to join us. RW confirmed that RC would be able to give the Group a quick update of all that the Association has been involved in on behalf of the Groups.	
	RW/	



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	RW also welcomed Martin Scott (MS), Principal Ornithologist, and Steven Lockwood (SL), Principal Ecologist, from RPS Planning & Development, who he had met previously. He explained that they were here to illustrate how they can help us get access to ECAS funding (funding for collaboration and group activities) and also access to SRDP funding for individual estates and environmental requirements.	
2.0	Minutes of Meeting held on 29th May 2015	
2.1	Adoption	
	The meeting adopted the Minutes as an accurate record of the previous meeting, this being proposed by George Seligman (GS) of Strathbran and seconded by Barbara MacDonald (BM) of Letterewe.	
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.	
3.0	Draft Financial Position as at 30 th September 2015	
	KSB ran through the figures previously distributed for the period to 30^{th} September 2015, which were highlighted in yellow in the income & expenditure accounts circulated. The figures showed subscriptions totalling £4,889.75 and contribution to DMP costs of £3,257, giving a total income for the Group of £8,146.75. With costs amounting to £5,239.13, it was noted that there was a bank balance as at 30^{th} September 2015 of £3,783.38 with an outstanding debtor of £1,026 as at the year end. For information, the outstanding debtor was Forest Enterprise.	
	KSB highlighted that some £2,655.75 was paid to the ADMG with the balance comprising meeting expenses, secretary/treasurer costs and outlays.	
	He also highlighted that the major variance from budget for the year to 30 th September 2015 was that the DMP costs were not actually incurred during that year, nor was the grant received, this resulting in a considerable saving in terms of cash flow, given the slippage of this cost and grant income into the year to 30 th September 2016.	
	There being no questions from the floor, the figures were adopted by the meeting, proposed by GS of Strathbran and seconded by Bill Whyte (BW) of Gruinard.	



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4.0	Budget for Year to 30 th September 2016	
4.1	Budget	
	KSB ran through the figures for the remainder of the year to 30 th September 2016. He confirmed that the budgets were very much in line with the previous year's figures but that the current year's budget included a revised figure for the DMP cost which had slipped into the current year, as had the SNH grant which was also shown as being increased from earlier expectations, although still equated to 50% of planned costs. He also highlighted that the current year's budget included a further contribution from the members to the DMP costs of some £1,220.	
	Regarding the fees for the secretary/treasurer role, KSB advised that whilst he undertook some of the work himself, he also had his staff undertaking work, and in terms of the administration of the Group, he had spent around £3,000 at cost paying his staff to undertake work. He therefore proposed that the budget for the current year be revised to show the management fees as increasing to £3,000 plus outlays and VAT and correspondingly the subscriptions being revised to cover the increase. He undertook to circulate a revised budget with the Minutes, adjusted to include this fee revision.	KSB
	There being no questions from the floor, the budgets were proposed as approved by GS and seconded by Ruari Matheson (RM) of Fannich.	
4.2	Members Subscription	
	The meeting reviewed the proposed subscriptions and DMP contributions previously circulated to the entire Group. Further, KSB confirmed that he would update the proposed subscription and DMP contributions schedule to reflect the adjustments made to the current year's budget and would circulate this together with the Minutes.	KSB
	The meeting agreed that the schedule should be revised accordingly, this being proposed by GS and seconded by RM.	
5.0	Deer Management Plan - Revisions	
	The Chairman explained his view that this item on the Agenda was the crux of today's discussion. He explained that we know our DMP is awaiting reassessment and that this will be part of SNH's submission to the RACCE committee this autumn when the whole deer management sector will be under the spotlight once again. There is an acknowledgement that one area that we may/	



Item	Notes	Action
	may have scored lightly on to date has been actions and consequently the idea is to get more of the membership to deliver on actions and commitments given within the DMP.	
	RW, in highlighting the work undertaken in revising the DMP, asked the meeting to adopt the revised Plan, which it duly did, this being proposed by RM and seconded by Kenny Ross (KR) of Lochrosque. RW also advised Group members that the revised Plan would be available on the Group's website:-	
	http://wrossdmg.deer-management.co.uk/deer-management-plan/	
5. I	Review of Actions Arising from Revised Deer Management Plan	
	RW asked the meeting to consider the schedule of actions from the DMP previously circulated with the meeting papers. He explained that this schedule highlighted the actions that were required in order to implement the DMP. Given the workload, RW advised that he had given thought as to who might be the most appropriate Group member to lead in each of the eight different areas where action was required and had identified a Group member for each area. He then ran through the schedule previously circulated of actions that flowed from the DMP as follows:- Designated Sites – RW advised that as part of its revised DMP, the Group had samplified to proviously the status of all designated sites within the	
	had committed to reviewing the status of all designated sites within the Group and to facilitate any actions that may be required. Therefore, the Group needed to develop an action plan for any sites in unfavourable condition, explore how funding options might work, and further identify how any sites might be monitored. This would be involve liaising fairly closely with SNH and given his experience in this field, RW was pleased to advise the meeting that BW had agreed to take the lead on this area of our action plan.	BW
	There followed some discussion on matters, with Norman Kelman (NK) of Heights of Kinlochewe querying how the monitoring was undertaken within the designated areas. BW explained that the monitoring was similar to normal habitat impact assessment monitoring, but different in that different habitats were targeted. Mary Gibson (MG) of SNH explained how SNH's six year rolling programme of monitoring was undertaken.	
	 Woodlands – RW advised that as part of the revision to the DMP, the Group had committed to reviewing the condition of native woodland within the Group and to facilitate any actions that may be required to retain and improve the condition of the native woodland, exploring options for SRDP funding. 	
	RW/	

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	RW was pleased to advise the Group that Willie Lamont (WL) of Forest Enterprise agreed to take the lead on this, and given his extensive experience within the Forestry Commission, he was well suited. The action required on this front was the development of a plan to improve the condition of native woodlands and explore funding options for any work required. BM queried whether SNH's methodology in assessing the condition of existing native woodland cover would be the same as the Forestry Commission's. It was agreed that it probably wouldn't be, but it was something that would be explored and the most appropriate methodology would be proposed.	WL
	RW highlighted that as part of the revised DMP, Group members would be encouraged to explore the possibility of woodland expansion in the context of Deer Management Group needs. Further, in the event of woodland expansion being undertaken within the Group, consideration would need to be given to deer population levels via the deer population model and regard will have to be had for any changes in range, forage and shelter. RW advised that GS had kindly agreed to take a lead on this one and to develop how woodland expansion be reported to the Group and fed into the population model. In advising the Group of this, RW highlighted how some of the tasks involved in the action plan had to relate to one another and GS' role involved liaising with other Group members and with whoever was taking the lead in developing the deer population model and that a collaborative approach would need to be taken by each of the Group members who were leading on the different areas within the action plan.	GS
	 Carbon Sensitive Habitats – RW set out how the Group had set out to consider opportunities and priorities for the creation and restoration of peatlands, identifying funding sources where possible. In addition, the Group had undertaken to encourage members to minimise surface damage to peatland. The actions required in this area are the development of a programme of possible areas for peat restoration and investigating funding options to assist with such work. RW confirmed that he had agreed to take the lead on this issue for the Group. 	RW
	There was some discussion on carbon sensitive habitats, with GS mentioning work undertaken in northern England with which he had an involvement. He advised that initial costs were high but that it was interesting how quickly the habitat restabilised following the initial work. RC talked about work being undertaken in the Cairngorm National Park and again how quickly habitats could be stabilised. He also mentioned that there was the possibility for funding within SRDP for such work.	
	Habitat/	



Item	Notes	Action
	 Habitat Monitoring – RW asked the meeting to note that targets for improvement towards "good management" of each habitat are to be agreed by the Group and that once the means of collating, analysing and presenting the habitat impact data is available, the Group will identify a sustainable level of grazing and trampling for each of the three habitats to be monitored. This is to be mapped and if necessary, actions agreed. 	
	As far as actions were concerned, he confirmed that the Group would investigate interim measures for collating and analysing data in the absence of SWARD and that we would decide on targets for sustainable levels of grazing once the initial data has been analysed. RW thanked NK for taking this set of actions forward. There was some discussion habitat monitoring, with RW explaining that there was an issue for the funding for completion of SWARD and hence the need for us to investigate interim measures for collating and analysing data in its absence. RC confirmed from the ADMG's point of view that there was a realistic prospect that SWARD will be completed at some point in the future, although there was no certainty. SNH have no funding, and so private funding options are being discussed.	
	 Public Access – RW highlighted that within the revised DMP, there was a commitment to encourage members to upload information to the SNH Outdoor Access Code website. The action required was the collation of estate information to pass onto SNH for uploading on their website. He advised the Group that RM had kindly agreed to take the lead in this area. RC mentioned the "Heading for the Scottish Hills" system which already does exist. SC also confirmed that Fiona Cunningham was the contact with SNH for RM to touch base with and move matters forward. 	RM
	• Deer Population and Population Model – RW highlighted that the Group had undertaken within its DMP to develop/fine tune a simple population model based on local conditions to provide guidance on Group and estate cull target setting over the long term. He expected there to be guidance from SNH on the process of developing a population model and that there would require to be further discussion and count information needs to be collected in order to produce a realistic population model that is based on current data and local conditions. The objective was that once the model was developed, there will be discussion within the Group to come up with suitable cull targets for the next five years.	
	As part of the action plan on the population model, someone had to feed the local information into the population model and this might also involve investigating a helicopter count and possible funding sources. RW confirmed that BM had kindly agreed to take on this role. BM, in confirming this, emphasised/	ВМ

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	emphasised that she would need help from SNH and all other Group members. She would need everyone to play their part in providing information on their deer population and an indication of their aspirations.	
	There was the an extensive discussion on deer counts, with NK confirming that earlier discussions between the stalkers had led to a consensus on a summer count being undertaken as this would include recruitment. However, RM of Fannich suggested that the problem in doing the count in July is that it would be difficult to compare the count to previous years when counts were carried out at different times of the year. Brian Fraser (BF) of Eilean Darach explained that he simply couldn't manage a July count due to staff commitment to fishing. BW also queried how we would tie in the count with SNH's counts if we did a summer count. SC confirmed that SNH's policy is for white counts rather than summer counts. RM pointed out that he didn't agree with June counts when the hinds were calving and as little disturbance as possible was required. BW queried whether it might be possible to get some help from the military, who from time to time required to undertake training with the helicopter pilots, although it was thought that this might not be a runner. RW implored the meeting to come to an agreement on the best way to undertake a count, with RC suggesting that the norm is for a spring foot count.	
	In summary, RW suggested that the best compromise would be a spring Group count and following this, WL advised that he would offer half a dozen men to help with any count. BW mentioned that it would be useful if everyone took notes on their observations on the hill in September/October and RW suggested that it would be important that everyone did that and fed the information back to BM, who would collate all the information as part of her role in dealing with the population model. RC stressed that information on recruitment and mortality would be important for the model.	
	 Deer Welfare – RW explained that the Group had taken on the commitment to encourage members to provide appropriate data on mortality, recruitment and larder weights and for the data to be reviewed on a Group basis and where appropriate fed into the deer management planning process. He explained that KR had kindly agreed to take on the job of collecting and collating the information required. 	KR
	 Non-native Deer Species – RW advised that the Group had undertaken to develop a policy, through open discussion within the Group, for the management of goats within the DMG area. Similarly, the Group has undertaken to develop a policy for Sika deer to prevent their spread. David Bennett (DB) of Strathbran had kindly agreed to take on this role. There was/ 	DB



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	was some discussion on where the goats within the Group area came from and whether they were feral or not and the general consensus seemed to be that they were feral. WL advised that the Forestry Commission have a draft policy and that he would be very happy to let DB have sight of it. RW suggested that both DB and WL liaise on this.	DB/WL
	BW said one of the dangers in terms of managing the habitat is that any over-grazing tended to be blamed on deer, but it was very important that consideration was also given to the impact of goats, sheep, etc. There was extended discussion on goats, with Ronnie Ross (RR) of Lochrosque mentioning having seen a group of 30 adults and 20 kids around the Shiel area. BF mentioned that he was going to do a count of deer in June but would also include goats if this was helpful to the Group and agreed to pass the data on to the Group. RC stressed the importance of the deer population model and the need to include all herbivores impacting on the habitat, i.e. sheep, goats, etc. He also stressed the importance, when considering counting, of ensuring that everyone did it on the same date. He suggested that it would be no use for some people to do a spring count with others doing a summer count.	BF
	There followed some discussion on the difficulty of counting deer within woodlands, the use of transects, dung counts, etc.	
5.2	Priorities for the Forthcoming Year	
	RW suggested that priorities could only be established once the leaders of each of the action areas had developed their work and there had been further discussion. Clearly it had to be accepted by the Group that not everything could be done at the same time and it would be necessary to establish priorities, but this is something which would evolve as the year progressed.	
5.3	Budgetary Implications	
	RW suggested that once the action plan evolved and priorities were being formulated, it had to be accepted that some of the actions might have budgetary implications and these would have to be part of the thinking of the Group as to what our priorities were.	
5.4	Funding (SRDP/Collaborative Funding)	
	Again, RW suggested that no decisions could be made on this issue today, but rather as the work programme evolved, funding would be investigated for each cost aspect and then the Group could consider everything in the round before making/	



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	making final decisions on priorities. He accepted that some priorities might, to a certain extent, be determined by what funding was available, but he asked the Group to be patient on this to allow work on the action plan to progress.	
6.0	Cull Statistics	
	The meeting considered the cull statistics previously forwarded. RW highlighted that the 2015/16 culls indicated that most deer forests had cut back on both the stag and in particular on the hind culls, due to perceived population reductions by natural mortality.	
	However, he suggested to the Group that until we had some reasonable count data, it was very difficult to know whether the correct decisions were being made in terms of each estate setting its cull targets and therefore the sooner we all agreed on what count should be undertaken, the better.	
	There was comment about the absence of figures for part of Corriemoillie, Lochluichart and Tournaig and indeed for culls undertaken on licence and authorisation within the Group area. However, KSB advised that information had now been received from SNH following the distribution of the cull data and that the cull schedules would be updated and further distributed to the Group. KSB also indicated that this information would, of course, be required for feeding into the deer population model being developed by BM.	KSB
7.0	Deer Count	
	Whilst accepting that the Group had probably exhausted the subject of deer counting earlier, RW reiterated that given that the norm is a spring foot count, he would be looking for a foot count to be organised by the Group.	
	RC outlined his experience with deer counts in that they were like military operations and that you really needed someone to help plan and coordinate in order for the deer count to work properly. It was agreed that there required to be some discussion with SNH on who organised the last count within the West Ross Deer Group area to see whether information on the planning for the deer count could be obtained. The suggestion was that this was something that could be developed by BM as part of her new role.	
	The Chairman emphasised that progress needs to be made on a coordinated Group-wide count.	вм



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8.0	Poaching	
	Alistair MacDonald (AM) of Dundonnell mentioned that he reported an incident to the Police, who never even came out. RC suggested that if AM gave him the details, this was something that he might be able to progress at Association level.	AM
	KR advised that he had rang the Police three times in connection with an incident and obtained absolutely no reaction. RR also mentioned an incident involving three men, but again no progress appeared to have been made in terms of prosecution.	
	After listening to the various reports, RC suggested that details be passed on to him of any incidents and providing he had sufficient information, he would pass it on to the Lead Wildlife Officer of the Police.	RC
9.0	Association of Deer Management Groups	
	Given the extensive time spent discussing issues arising from the action plan, RC gave a very brief account of the work of the Association.	
	He mentioned that on the political front, we have now got two ministers to deal with rather than one. He recognised that the parliamentarians' political mood is to regularlise deer management and he was sure that everyone was aware of the Rural Affairs Committee's role in undertaking three-yearly reviews to see how the voluntary principal was managing in terms of deer management.	
	From the Association's point of view, he suggested that we were all in a much better place, with our DMPs in position, not only focussed on deer management, but also on the public interest.	
	However, he agreed it was not a good time to be a land manager, given the current political climate, but nevertheless he emphasised that we have a good story to tell and a positive approach was required.	
	RW highlighted the issue of sporting rates, where there are a significant number of sporting entities which would require to be assessed for sporting rate purposes and it had to be acknowledged that this was probably a fairly huge job for the assessors. The Association would be pressing for any new process to take account of the active role in deer management planning being undertaken and pressing to see if exemptions might be possible. It also has to be remembered that SNH have been given statutory powers under the new Land Reform Bill to intervene in deer management matters where no action is being taken. The vast majority of the 44 deer management groups have completed a DMP and it is proposed that all will go through the reassessment process by the end/	

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Item	Notes	Action
	end of June. At the time of the meeting, there were some 23 DMPs live on the internet and the Chairman hoped that after our meeting, our one would be able to go live.	
	The Chairman thanked RC for the brief summary and emphasised the excellent work that the Association was undertaking on behalf of all the Deer Management Groups in the context of a very difficult political climate.	
10.0	SNH/Deer Commission for Scotland	
	SC advised that the formal assessment of the Group's DMP would probably be undertaken in the next couple of weeks. He indicated that he had wanted to delay the formal assessment as he recognised that the DMP was perhaps a little light on actions and he had been keen to wait until today's meeting to see how the Group planned to deal with its action plan. However, he was encouraged by the vigorous discussion and had been given a very clear impression by the Group that the action plan would develop.	
	Mary Gibson (MG) of SNH also stressed the importance of SNH and the Group liaising and keeping each other up to date with ongoing matters.	
11.0	Election of Office Bearers	
	Both RW and KSB agreed to step down to allow the election of officers, but were re-elected unopposed, in both cases proposed by BW of Gruinard and seconded by BM of Letterewe.	
12.0	Any Other Business	
12.1	Non-Members	
	There was some discussion on properties within the Group area which were not members, such as the National Trust, Aultbea Estate, etc. KSB advised that a list had been prepared previously and agreed that this would be circulated once again to all members.	KSB
12.2	Consultation	
	RC queried what consultation was being undertaken in terms of the new DMP and KSB advised that it had been circulated to each of the Community Councillors within the Group area, explaining that the DMP was considered by the Group to be a "travelling document" which would be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis and that any comments were welcomed. He explained that it was not part of the Group's plan to have open meetings to consult on the DMP but that this was something that the Group would explore.	



Item	Notes	Action
12.3	RPS Planning & Development	
	RW thanked Martin Short (MS) and Stephen Lockwood (SL) of RPS Planning & Development for attending the meeting. They were keen to get an insight into the workings of the estates, the wider Group and SNH.	
	MS and SL gave a presentation explaining how the Government funding for the work of the Deer Management Group and its members might work, both for collaborative and individual estate initiatives.	
	What became clear is that whilst funding is available, the rules and regulations tend to be complex, and this is something which needs to be investigated carefully by the Group and its members. There was discussion involving RC, SC and other Group members and the important point to be the taken from the discussion was that there is likely to be funding available and it needs to be investigated. MS and SL made it clear that RPS Planning & Development were available to assist the Group in terms of undertaking surveys that might be required and were happy to discuss this further with the Group as a whole or with individual members at any time in the future.	
12.4	<u>Thanks</u>	
	In drawing the meeting to a close, RW thanked CC for all her work in assisting with the revision of the DMP.	
	He also thanked MS and SL from RPS, GS for coming all the way up from London and RC for taking the time out to attend the Group's meeting.	
	He also thanked all of the members who attended.	
13.0	Date of Next Meeting	
	It was agreed that the Group would probably have a full meeting in November, but RW suggested that he would try and have a meeting with each of the members who had agreed to take on a role in terms of developing the action plan and this would probably take place in August, on a date to be agreed. His plan was that he would meet together with each of the people leading on the various aspects of the action plan quarterly to review progress and ensure full liaison with the Group.	RW

KSB/AM 0025 9th June 2016