

**MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
HELD AT LEDGOWAN HOTEL, ACHNASHEEN
THURSDAY 25th MAY 2017**

Present:	Randal Wilson	Chairman
	Alasdair MacDonald	Dundonnell
	Brian Fraser	Eilean Darach
	Stuart Allison	Eilean Darach
	Ruari Matheson	Fannich
	Jordan Hagon	Fannich
	Jake Buckthorp	Foich
	The Hon Mrs A J MacLay	Gruinard
	Gary Ross	Gruinard
	Barbara MacDonald	Letterewe
	Andrew Oliver	Letterewe
	Annabel Wilson	Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich
	Ronnie Ross	Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich
	Kenny Ross	Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich
	Willie Lamont	Forest Enterprise
	Mark Seligman	Strathbran
David Bennett	Strathbran	
In Attendance:	Ken Bowlt	Secretary/Treasurer
	Sinclair Coghill	SNH
	Mary Gibson	SNH
	Mark Wrightham	SNH
	Richard Cooke	Association of Deer Management Groups
	Terry Doe	Torridon & Kinlochewe Community Council
	Colin Morrison	Angus Davidson Ltd
	Natasha Hutchison	West Ross Biosphere
	Apologies:	Hendrik J E van Beuningen
David Lilley		Heights of Kinlochewe
Norman Kelman		Heights of Kinlochewe
Mark Lorimer		Inverbroom
Richard Chessells		Inverbroom
Craig McIntosh		Inverbroom
Roddy Legge		Letterewe
George Seligman		Strathbran
Kenneth MacLean		Garve & District Community Council

Item	Notes	Action
1.0	<u>WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIRMAN</u>	
	<p>In welcoming everyone to the meeting, the Chairman, Randal Wilson (RW), invited everyone around the room to introduce themselves.</p> <p>He confirmed that the Group had another busy year, with steady progress being made in discussing the actions raised our Deer Management Plan (DMP) and hopefully coming to some conclusions to be incorporated in our DMP next year.</p> <p>He praised the contributions from many members of the Group who have been tasked with helping drive discussion on the actions, making the quarterly meetings progressive, interesting and informative.</p> <p>He confirmed that the Group had met three times since the AGM in May 2016 and these quarterly management meetings have made it possible to discuss and move the business of the Group forward much more efficiently.</p> <p>RW outlined that the plan for today's meeting was to run through each of the action quickly, with a view to agreeing revisions to the DMP at subsequent Management Meetings, which revisions would then be incorporated into the DMP, subject to AGM approval, in 2018.</p> <p>He highlighted that the focus of the AGM would be on item 6.2 of the Agenda which is agreeing the action priorities for the forthcoming year with the proposal being that Carbon Sensitive Habitats, Habitat Monitoring and Deer Population and Population Model would be the Group's priorities. RW confirmed that since the last AGM, a questionnaire has been sent round members, gathering more information on individual estates and holdings, allowing a more accurate picture to be fed into our Deer Population Model and the other actions being undertaken.</p> <p>He also congratulated all those involved in the foot count which had been undertaken in the spring. Almost all of the Group area had been involved and RW thanked all who had helped out, not only on their own properties, but who also went onto neighbouring ground to assist. He confirmed that the data would allow us to get a nearly full picture and a starting point for the population model work being undertaken by Barbara McDonald (BM).</p> <p>He mentioned briefly the Fannich Hills Section 7 Agreement which is at its mid-term review stage and confirmed that although those involved in the Section 7 Agreement have reached their agreed target density within the five years, the recent Site Condition Monitoring Report was not as favourable as was hoped, but it was recognised that some management tweaks in terms of increasing culls in certain areas and changing deer feeding practices should help going forward. He confirmed that a meeting with Graham Taylor of SNH was being arranged for next month to discuss matters further.</p>	

Item	Notes	Action
	<p>In welcoming Richard Cooke (RC) of the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) to the meeting, he reminded the Group how lucky we were to have RC with us, thanked him for his attendance and agreed that he would leave RC to update the Group on progress with the ADMG later in the meeting.</p> <p>RW also advised the meeting that Colin Morrison (CM) of Angus Davidson Ltd would give a talk on habitat monitoring and how he could help gather information and set up plots on any member's land. He would also explain how the Agriculture Environment and Climate Scheme (AECS) can dovetail together with work being undertaken.</p> <p>RW also welcomed Mark Wrightham (MW), the SNH Recreation and Tourism Manager, who would give a talk on the "Heading for the Scottish Hills" website. He advised that hillwalkers were gaining in number and this is something we all had to recognise as irreversible and what is needed is to consider how best to manage the impact on deer movement and this was a subject which had to be discussed openly in order that progress could be made.</p>	
2.0	<u>MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 19TH MAY 2016</u>	
2.1	<u>Adoption</u>	
	The meeting adopted the Minutes as an accurate record of the previous meeting, this being proposed by Barbara McDonald (BM) of Letterewe and seconded by Brian Fraser (BF) of Eilean Darach.	
2.2	<u>Matters Arising</u>	
	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	<u>DRAFT FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30TH SEPTEMBER 2016</u>	
	<p>Ken Bowlt (KSB) ran through the figures previously distributed for the period to 30th September 2016, which were highlighted in yellow in the income and expenditure accounts. The figures showed subscriptions totalling £7,107 and contribution to DMP costs of £1,208, giving a total income of £8,315.</p> <p>With Group expenditure in the year to 30th September 2016 amounting to £8,101.65, there was a net income of £213.</p> <p>KSB confirmed that there was a previous year's debtor of £1,206 paid in and savings in Group expenses and the net result was that as at 30th September 2016, the bank balance amounted to £5,022.73.</p>	

Item	Notes	Action
	<p>KSB highlighted that when the actual figures were looked at for the year to 30th September 2016 and these were compared to the budget for the same period, savings had been made principally in management fees and outlays and this was the reason why there was a higher bank balance at the end of the year.</p> <p>There being no questions from the floor, the figures were adopted by the meeting, proposed by Ruari Matheson (RM) of Fannich and seconded by Mark Seligman (MS) of Strathbran.</p>	
4.0	<u>BUDGET FOR YEAR TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2017</u>	
4.1	<u>Budget</u>	
	<p>KSB ran through the figures for the remainder of the year to 30th September 2017 and explained that the budgets were very much in line with previous year's figures. However, he highlighted that given the higher than anticipated bank balance at the end of the previous year, it had not been necessary to raise as much in subscriptions as in previous years and that therefore subscriptions were going to be lower in the coming year.</p> <p>There being no questions from the floor, the budget was proposed as approved by RM and seconded by MS.</p>	
4.2	<u>Members Subscription</u>	
	<p>The meeting reviewed the proposed subscriptions previously circulated to the Group.</p> <p>The meeting agreed to the subscriptions, this being proposed by RM and seconded by MS, and KSB undertook to raise the subscription notices accordingly.</p>	KSB
5.0	<u>DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN</u>	
	<p>There was discussion on SNH's report to Government which to date was largely based on the quality of the Plan. The next time the assessments will be based largely on the progress that Groups had made in terms of their Action Plans and therefore RC was greatly encouraged to see that the Group was focussing on this.</p>	
5.1	<u>Review of Actions Arising from Deer Management Plan</u>	
	<p>RW confirmed that the main thrust of the Group's activity over the last year had been to consider how to progress the Action Plan incorporated within the Group's DMP. He reported as follows:-</p>	

Item	Notes	Action
5.1.1	<u>Questionnaire Summary</u>	
	<p>RW explained that the first quarterly meeting had spent some time considering how to gather information which could be used to progress the actions set out in the DMP. Subsequently a questionnaire was put together, covering each of the areas of the Action Plan, and was circulated to the Group and by and large, everyone responded. RW thanked everyone for the efforts made in replying. The responses from the Group were analysed by Caroline Cook (CC) of KSB's office and these were circulated to everyone. RW considered this a very successful operation, which allowed the second quarterly management meeting to consider how the Group should move forward in each of the action areas.</p>	
5.1.2	<u>Designated Sites</u>	
	<p>The responses from members showed that where members were aware of any designated sites affecting their properties which were currently described as unfavourable as a consequence of herbivore impact, steps were being taken in each and every case. As an example, he mentioned the An Teallach SSSI where goat culling and fencing to protect sensitive areas had been undertaken and BF confirmed that sheep numbers had also been reduced significantly. BM confirmed that a meeting had recently taken place in connection with the Letterewe Woodlands with Sinclair Coghill (SC) of SNH and she had described the meeting as being very useful. There was also mention of Fannich undertaking the habitat monitoring work with a Moorland Management Plan in place, in addition to the DMP.</p>	
5.1.3	<u>Woodlands</u>	
	<p>This was an action area that Willie Lamont (WL) had agreed to take on, dealing with existing woodlands. However, WL explained that the Forestry Commission's position in the Group was now up for review and he confirmed the difficulty in keeping up the input into the Group. He indicated that his assistant, Derick Macaskill, had to be taken out of the equation, as he might no longer be available, and that generally the current review ongoing within the Forestry Commission was likely to end up with less rather than more in terms of input to the Group.</p> <p>RW thanked WL for the update and expressed gratitude for the FC's input to date and was grateful for WL's commitment to do what they could to stay involved. WL also made mention of some woodlands within the area which the FC proposed to dispose of and he was queried about the likely ownership of some of these woods, but clearly was unable to say much.</p>	

Item	Notes	Action
5.1.4	<u>Woodland Expansion</u>	
	<p>In George Seligman's (GS) absence, RW confirmed that the questionnaire indicated that some members of the Group may be considering new woodlands and it was suggested that the Forestry Authority, who administered the grant funding for woodland expansion, would be happy to speak to people who were interested in establishing new woodlands.</p> <p>RC said that it was important to show that new woodlands are being considered collaboratively by the Group and built into the DMP and this is exactly what the Group is doing.</p>	
5.1.5	<u>Carbon Sensitive Habitats</u>	
	<p>Mary Gibson (MG) of SNH confirmed that the SNH website contained all the necessary info that one might need on the Peatland Action Project which had an £8 million budget for the current year. Further, she explained that there was a Project Officer based in SNH's Kinlochewe Office should anyone want to discuss peatland action proposals.</p> <p>RW queried whether there might be difficulty in SEPA granting permission for proposals within a reasonable timeframe, but Colin Morrison (CM) of Angus Davidson Ltd confirmed that his view was that SEPA were now getting on board with the initiative and that Scottish Water were now the issue.</p> <p>RC echoed the sentiment that time was of the essence. It was a great opportunity for members to undertake environmental improvement and that carbon trading was worth looking at to help bridge any cost deficit.</p> <p>When queried on scale, SC said anything from 2 ha upwards was possible and that project funding was available Scotland-wide.</p>	
5.1.6	<u>Habitat Monitoring</u>	
	<p>RW indicated that the questionnaire responses confirmed that every member of the Group has started their habitat monitoring work. It was acknowledged that collating the data and working on it was being stalled by the delays in SWARD. RC indicated that SWARD could be a couple of years in the making yet but he did suggest that the Group may wish to consider going forward on a pilot basis once this was available. RW highlighted the AECS funding for habitat funding and that CM was at the meeting to tell us a little more about it.</p>	

Item	Notes	Action
5.1.7	<u>Public Access</u>	
	<p>RW thanked Ruari Matheson for all his work on this as he had been a major contributor to the preparation of the questionnaire. RW reminded the meeting that Mark Wrightham (MW) was here to talk to us about “Heading for the Scottish Hills” and that was something he was looking forward to. He also mentioned that paths and signs formed an important part of the Group’s questionnaire responses and given the depth of responses, he had been minded to consider access as a priority area for the Group for the next year as there was much to be done.</p>	
5.1.8	<u>Deer Population and Population Model</u>	
	<p>RW thanked BM for agreeing to take the lead on this important part of the DMP. BM confirmed that the questionnaire responses had provided much useful information and as time passed, more and more information was being gathered. It was agreed that this area of work should be a priority for the coming year, with consideration given to recruitment counts.</p> <p>BM suggested that taking a long term view, we may need to consider a double count, namely a spring and a winter count, to get a better idea of deer movement during the year.</p> <p>MS queried what the optimum deer density was. The general consensus was that there was no optimum deer density and it was really a matter of deer impact.</p> <p>RC confirmed that the Habitat Impact Assessment is the critical thing, rather than deer number/density <i>per se</i>.</p> <p>When queried, SC suggested that the habitat monitoring plots should perhaps be revisited perhaps every three to five years and in extending the discussion into habitat monitoring, RC confirmed that the methodology for the monitoring was being considered by the ADMG and that best practice would be issued before long.</p>	
5.1.9	<u>Deer Welfare</u>	
	<p>RW thanked Kenny Ross (KR) for helping with this action area and confirmed that we now have a standard style of return sheet which he hoped everyone would complete diligently and return to KSB in due course.</p> <p>He confirmed that deer vehicle collisions (DVC) should be reported to the website detailed in our DMP and encouraged all members to do this.</p>	

Item	Notes	Action
	In discussing welfare, RC suggested that a recruitment count was more usually done in the spring. There may be no harm in doing such a count twice a year, but if only doing one, then best to do in May after the spring count. He suggested that a lot of mortality happened in the last month of winter before the grass comes and therefore it was best to count in that time for recruitment purposes.	
5.1.10	<u>Non-Native Species</u>	
	<p>RW acknowledged David Bennett's (DB) input on this, again confirming that the questionnaire responses provided much useful information. RW confirmed that this area of the Action Plan was largely completed and all that was needed was some considered wording to be prepared over the coming year and to be incorporated into the DMP at the next AGM.</p> <p>There followed a discussion on SNH's report to Government which to date was largely based on the quality of the Plan. The next time the assessments will be based largely on the progress that Group's had made in terms of their Action Plans and therefore RC was greatly encouraged to see that the Group was focussing on this.</p>	
5.2	<u>Proposed Priorities for the Coming Year</u>	
	<p>The priorities for the following year were agreed as:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat Monitoring; • Deer Population and Population Model; • Carbon Sensitive Habitats. 	
5.3	<u>Budgetary Implications</u>	
	RW suggested that there will be no huge costs in the current budget year envisaged in moving forward with these three priorities and that the Group would continue with the quarterly meetings to move things on.	
5.4	<u>Funding</u>	
	<p>RW highlighted that funding was available for the following:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodland expansion – through the Forest Authority; • Peatland Action Project – SNH; • Moorland management, etc – SRDP (although with tight timelines); • Collaborative Funding – ECAF (the initial scheme had been withdrawn and it was understood that the Government were now re-inventing this and that it may open later in the year). Agreed that it could help with collaborative efforts within the Group, e.g. deer count, habitat monitoring, etc. 	

Item	Notes	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative Deer Management – acknowledged that SNH has some short term funding (£175,000) because of the ECAF collapse. However, no funding application process is in place but the suggestion was that if the Group had anything that it planned to do, the best thing was simply to get an application in to SC. 	
5.5	<p><u>Talk on Habitat Monitoring</u></p>	
	<p>RW introduced CM of Angus Davidson Ltd, who gave a talk on habitat surveys. CM explained that most habitat surveys are undertaken for one of three purposes:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to find out what is there; to record change over a period of time; to monitor population density (i.e. heaths/mosses). <p>He stressed that surveys provide a snapshot of what is happening in a site or in an area at one point in time. They may follow standard methodologies (which must be repeatable) or be tailored to suit a particular site or management need.</p> <p>CM advised that monitoring is about detecting change and to be effective, surveys must be carried out over time at the same time every year. They also take account of weather issues, like late or early spring, affecting plant growth and before carrying out monitoring, you should ask the following questions:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> what do you want to achieve (evaluation of present/past management, defined species distribution, examine patterns of herbivore impacts, use info to deliver site specific management)? what info do you need to achieve it (land cover map, population size for herbivores, appropriate equipment such as GPS and site survey kit, defined grid coordinates)? how are you going to get this data (what type of survey are you going to use, how will you store and present this data, who will carry out the survey, training staff, what coordinates are you going to use)? <p>CM mentioned the Best Practice Guidance Habitat Survey which was SNH designed and is on the Best Practice Guidance website, but even simple survey techniques can show herbivore impacts over time and can be carried out by properly trained estate personnel. A more sophisticated survey, such as the Upland Habitat Surveying Land Management Impacts (1 and 2), requires trained assessors, generally at ecologist level. However, CM explained that funding of up to £4,400 is potentially available for such a survey, subject to prior discussions and approval from SNH before the survey was undertaken.</p>	

Item	Notes	Action
	<p>CM went on to explain that the Agri-Environmental Climate Scheme (AECS) was a wide ranging support mechanism that could potentially be applied across a wide variety of areas within the farmland and moorland management sectors. The primary element for upland estates such as most Group members was the Moorland Management option, where the basic payments can amount to £1.24 per ha per year for managing deer only, £3.60 per ha per year for managing livestock only and £4.84 per ha per year for managing both. He explained that there was additional support for the preparation of management plans where funding could be up to £1,200 for areas greater than 200 ha with two or more sub-plans attached and that also there were additional payments for deer number reductions of between two and five deer per 100 ha and payments could range from £0.80 to £2.00.</p> <p>Following the talk, RW queried how one would properly compare two sets of data, with say the first collected in a year when there was an early spring and then the second data collected, say, three years later, when the spring was late. CM confirmed that there was a box on the data a sheet to enter conditions and it would be here that notes would be made about the type of season so that in considering and comparing the data, proper regard could be had for variations.</p> <p>Ronnie Ross (RR) queried about plots being put down prior to the heather beetle outbreak and mentioned that it could take three or four times the length of time for recovery. CM confirmed that following a heather beetle outbreak, it could even take up to 20 years for the heather to recover.</p>	
5.6	<p>Heading for the Scottish Hills (HFSH)</p>	
	<p>MW ran through the structure of the HFSH website, giving examples of how the site looks and operates. He explained that the information was static in that it doesn't need to be constantly updated. He ran through examples of entries for various hills that people might want to approach and the sort of information that estates loaded up.</p> <p>MW suggested that members consider the guidelines when proposing to add data.</p> <p>After the talk, RW queried how many hits the website got, and whether the more estates were on it, the more hits might materialise. MW indicated that the coverage is pretty good, although there was a significant gap in our Group area. His suggestion was that page views during the stalking season were high and that the site was promoted via other sites such as Walk Highlands. At the end of the meeting, RW encouraged everyone to sign up.</p> <p>MS confirmed that he had had a look at the website and that there was a significant black hole for our area. It was generally agreed that it was a good idea to encourage the whole Group to sign up.</p>	

Item	Notes	Action
	<p>RM mentioned that he did get frustrated at the number of walkers coming into Fannich and that he was pessimistic that the public would just go where they wanted to. The suggestion was that before “Freedom to Roam” people tended to stick to the paths, but not anymore.</p> <p>RR thought that the HFSH was a very good idea, as it gave everyone a much better steer of how to contact stalkers and the like. A suggestion was that previously walkers might have relied on mountaineering books which recommended a particular pony path and you could end up with people walking all over the place, inadvertently causing a great deal of disturbance to the hill.</p> <p>There was some discussion on the Government funding for paths and an acknowledgement that very limited funds were available.</p> <p>After extensive discussion, it was suggested that KSB try to coordinate something with MW so that the Group over the coming year had our area covered on the site.</p>	KSB
6.0	<u>CULL STATISTICS</u>	
	RW highlighted the cull statistics previously forwarded to all the members and mentioned the reduced cull over the year. The suggestion was that the harsh winter of three years ago was still taking its toll.	
7.0	<u>DEER COUNT</u>	
	<p>In acknowledging that the spring 2017 foot count was not complete, RW suggested that nevertheless, it probably showed a decrease in numbers.</p> <p>However, a counter-view was expressed by SC who highlighted that the count data showed recruitment of around 1,500 animals whereas the cull amounted to only 700. Therefore, his suggestion was that unless the cull was increased, numbers would not stay down for long.</p> <p>SC also confirmed that the helicopter count was planned for 2018 and that the priority would be for a deer count and not a goat count. He indicated that they needed coordinators to assist and it was agreed that this could be sorted out at the next meeting.</p> <p>KSB confirmed that he would arrange for CC to send ownership shape files to SC so that he could have his plans marked up accordingly.</p>	KSB
8.0	<u>ASSOCIATION OF DEER MANAGEMENT GROUPS</u>	
	RC indicated that it had been another busy year.	

Item	Notes	Action
	<p>The Land Reform Act had come in, giving SNH new powers, introducing new penalties and sporting rates. The introduction of sporting rates was also looking as if it might turn out to be quite a challenge for the valuation authorities, with up to some 55,000 landholdings coming under consideration.</p> <p>Over the last year, there had also been the parliamentary review of deer management and a report had been prepared with recommendations for the Government that:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNH should have new powers to set cull levels; • there should be statutory responsibility to manage deer; • there should be power to set up deer panels; <p>However, the indication was that there was unlikely to be any new money for SNH and therefore it could be fairly difficult for them to deliver their aspirations/recommendations.</p> <p>RC confirmed that the whole process of the parliamentary review of deer management had been fairly gruelling. Despite the SNH report, the hope was that the committee may have acknowledged the importance of impacts rather than numbers and RC hoped a little bit of understanding may be emerging.</p> <p>He indicated that the deer managers need to be able to defend how/what they do as we are likely to have three-yearly reviews and there is a lot to do.</p> <p>At the end of RC's brief talk, RW thanked him and said that the Group were hugely grateful for his input and for the trouble he had taken to attend the meeting.</p>	
9.0	<u>SNH</u>	
	<p>Given that the meeting had discussed a wide range of topics, SC confirmed that he had probably covered everything already.</p> <p>The position for SNH was that they were still waiting for the Minister to decide what she expects of SNH following the review of Deer Management and the Committee's Report and it was acknowledged that there was unlikely to be more funding. He suggested that perhaps a working group within SNH might be set up to take things forward and that hopefully it would comprise a range of bodies and that a consensus might emerge as to what should be aimed for and could reasonably be achieved.</p> <p>MG introduced Natasha Hutchison (NH) and explained that she was here to listen to the Group. Further, RW advised that he would be happy to see NH attend the quarterly management meetings of the Group if she wanted to find out more about the workings.</p>	

Item	Notes	Action
10.0	<u>CONSTITUTION</u>	
	The meeting considered the draft Constitution previously circulated and agreed that it should be adopted. This was proposed by KR and seconded by RM.	KSB
11.0	<u>ELECTION OF OFFICE BEARERS</u>	
	Both RW and KSB agreed to step down to allow the election of officers, but were re-elected unopposed, in both cases proposed by RM and seconded by BM.	
12.0	<u>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</u>	
12.1	<u>Letterewe Study – Invertebrate, Ecology and Deer Management at Letterewe</u>	
	BM mentioned the new book published on the studies being undertaken at Letterewe and advised that Letterewe was prepared to make available a copy to any member that wished one. In receiving his copy, RW thanked BM for the generous offer.	
12.2	<u>Weather</u>	
	Alasdair MacDonald (AM) of Dundonnell mentioned the weather which the BBC prepared for walkers and wondered whether they might extend this such that it was also targeted for stalkers as well. Essentially AM was querying whether the BBC could be approached and it was generally considered that this might be difficult.	
13.0	<u>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</u>	
	RW confirmed that a date for the next quarterly management meeting would be set for some time in August, but this could be arranged through KSB's office.	KSB
14.0	<u>THANKS</u>	
	In drawing the meeting to a close, RW thanked all of the Group members involved in the quarterly management meetings for all their help, and also thanked the speakers, CM of Angus Davidson Ltd and Mark Wrightham of SNH for preparing and giving their talks and in particular thanked MS for coming all the way up to London to attend the meeting.	