

**MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
HELD VIA ZOOM
WEDNESDAY 16th JUNE 2021**

Present:	Randal Wilson Donald Rice Alasdair MacDonald Gordon Crawford Angus Davidson Hendrick van Beuningen Jake Buckthorp Mark Lorimer Aiden Bell Barbara MacDonald Glyn Robson John Wood Billy Robison Mark Butcher Kenny Ross David Bennett Tom Cameron	Chairman Dundonnell Dundonnell Eilean Darach Fannich Foich Foich Inverbroom Inverewe Letterewe Lochluichart Lochluichart Lochluichart Lochluichart Lochrosque, Cabuie and West Fannich Strathbran Forestry & Land Scotland
In Attendance:	Ken Bowlt Caroline Cook Richard Cooke Megan Rowland	Secretary/Treasurer Bowlts Chartered Surveyors ADMG NatureScot
Apologies:	Stuart Allison Ruari Matheson Gary Ross David Lilley Norman Kelman Craig McIntosh Andrew Oliver Paul Swan Hamish Leslie Melville Edgar Seligman Kenny MacLean Natasha Hutchison	Eilean Darach Fannich Gruinard Heights of Kinlochewe Heights of Kinlochewe Inverbroom Letterewe Letterewe Lochluichart Strathbran Garve & District Community Council Wester Ross Biosphere

I./

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIRMANAction

The Chairman, Randal Wilson (RW), welcomed everyone to the AGM, acknowledging that this was our second AGM within a seven month period, due Covid!

He advised that since our last management meeting in March, there had not been a huge change in emphasis, and confirmed that we are still waiting on the outcome of the Scottish Parliament's debate on the Deer Working Group recommendations and so updating our Deer Management Plan would have to wait.

He highlighted that the group area had had a bad winter, particularly in the east end of the group, and the recruitment counts provided by members reflected that.

The Chairman noted that the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 26) is on the horizon in Glasgow, running from 1st to 12th November, and in part because of this, woodland expansion and peatland restoration continue to dominate the Scottish Government's thinking in the context of nature-based solutions to climate change. The Government no doubt consider the conference a shop window for them and us to potentially monetise the carbon element that these opportunities create.

RW suggested that the group need to crack on with visiting our habitat monitoring plots this year and confirmed that this was something that would be discussed further in the meeting and stressed that if anyone needed help, they should ask. He confirmed that we have until the end of July to get this job done and hopefully have some meaningful data to compare with the baseline data collected some three years ago.

RW was delighted to welcome Richard Cooke, the Chair of the Association of Deer Management Groups, to explain what our umbrella association has been up to since he last spoke to us in November. The Association's virtual AGM is next Wednesday and the Chairman suggested that if members were not all "deered out" by then, places were still available.

Lastly, RW advised that since it was our AGM, and we always have office bearers as an item on the Agenda, KSB and he would be delighted if successors could be found to take over the roles of Chair and Secretary/Treasurer of the group going forward. He explained that KSB and he were now going into their 11th year, but would be happy to make way for fresh blood and ideas. He also confirmed that they were prepared to continue for now, but that some thought has to be given to this going forward.

2./

2. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 4th NOVEMBER 2020

2.1 Adoption

The meeting adopted the Minutes as an accurate record of the previous AGM, this being proposed by Barbara MacDonald (BM) of Letterewe and seconded by Jake Buckthorp (JB) of Foich.

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 had either been dealt with or would be dealt with through items on the Agenda.

3. DRAFT FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30th SEPTEMBER 2020

The meeting shared the income & expenditure account for the year to 30th September 2020 and budgets for the years to 30th September 2021 and 2022 previously circulated, with KSB advising that the first column highlighted yellow showed the actual figures for the year to 30th September 2020. To the right of that, shaded green, was the approved budget for the same period. What the figures showed was a saving of about £1,400, this reflecting the Covid experience of virtual meetings. In other words, savings had been made as a result of having virtual meetings.

The second green column was the budget approved for the year to 30th September 2021, which was dealt with at the previous AGM.

4. BUDGET FOR THE YEAR TO 30th SEPTEMBER 2022

4.1 Budget

The third column shaded green was the draft budget for the year to 30th September 2022. KSB explained that this had been budgeted on the basis of getting back to normality with a number of face to face meetings during the year. In doing so, he acknowledged that there had been fairly positive feedback from members about the virtual meetings, particularly from those who would normally have to travel considerable distances, and therefore there was every likelihood that virtual meetings might continue into the future, in which case savings could be made.

There being no queries, the budget for the year to 30th September 2022 was approved by the meeting, proposed by Mark Lorimer (ML) of Inverbroom and seconded by BM of Letterewe.

4.2/

4.2 **Members Subscriptions**

The meeting then considered the membership subscription schedule previously circulated. KSB highlighted that this showed subscriptions raised of £5,497, this tying in with the figure shown in the approved budget to 30th September 2021. In advising of this, KSB clarified that subscriptions were lower because of savings made in the year to 30th September 2020 due Covid, as the balancing figure in the accounts was trying to retain a balance of £2,000 within the account at the end of each financial year. That explained why the subscriptions amounted to £5,497 for the year to 30th September 2021 but £7,120 for the following year as the savings hadn't been built into the budget to 30th September 2022.

The subscription schedule was adopted by the meeting, proposed by JB of Foich and seconded by BM of Letterewe.

5. **DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN**

5.1 **Review of Actions Arising from the Deer Management Plan**

RW highlighted for the meeting the Schedule of Actions from the group's Deer Management Plan which was shared on the screen. It was noted that this Schedule of Actions was updated following every meeting. It was noted that the schedule had been updated 15 times since May 2016.

5.1.1 **Designated Sites**

RW ran through the Action for designated sites in unfavourable condition, it previously having been noted at the March 2021 meeting that Dundonnell were planning to do habitat assessment plots again, as were Eilean Darach. Within the SAC area, Glyn Robson (GR) of Lochluichart advised that Cathy Mayne was going to do the habitat impact assessments for Lochluichart. GR agreed that he would share the contact details with KSB, who in turn would circulate around all members in case anyone needed assistance with having their habitat impact assessments carried out.

GR/
KSB

Angus Davidson (AD) of Fannich advised that they would be trying to do some of their plots again, bearing in mind NatureScot's approaches to the management of the Section 7 area. At this point, Megan Rowland (MR) of NatureScot confirmed that things very much appeared to be heading in the right direction within the Section 7 Agreement area and therefore in principle NatureScot would/

would be happy to see it wound up. MR was to propose a date to RW for a meeting so that a decision could be made on the way forward for the Section 7 Agreement.

MR

BM of Letterewe confirmed that NatureScot had been in touch to advise that the survey they proposed carrying out would be delayed until next year.

5.1.2 Retaining Existing Native Woodland Cover

RW reminded the group of the Action to improve the condition of native woodlands and explore funding options and the difficulty in having a nationally adopted methodology for undertaking this work.

He noted that earlier this morning he had received an email with a copy of a methodology from MR of NatureScot which would be given some consideration, although the general feeling was that it looked fairly heavy duty. It was acknowledged that this was now being considered by the Best Practice Working Group and hopefully something could be issued that would be of practical use to deer management groups.

At this point, ML of Inverbroom wondered whether anyone had been successful in bracken control, both in new woodland planting and on the open hill. RW suggested that Asulox seemed to be the only tool in the box. His experience was that it needed to be used more than once, as the first treatment might deal with 70-80% of the bracken but it probably required to be sprayed again to deal with the rest. GR of Lochluichart that it was essential to spray at precisely the right time for success. Alasdair MacDonald (AM) of Dundonnell mentioned knapsack spraying, which had been done twice on Dundonnell, the first time very successfully, the second time not so much.

5.1.3 New Woodlands

RW highlighted Dr Ben Lennon's report on the woodland creation opportunities within the group area. At that point, a plan was shared showing the woodland opportunity areas.

RW confirmed that new woodlands were in train at Lochrosque, as did BM at Letterewe.

GR/

GR of Lochluichart asked if he could get a copy of BL's report, as did Henrik van Beuningen (HvB) of Foich, and KSB confirmed that he would have BL send a copy to each of them.

KSB

ML of Inverbroom queried where the best areas were, as sometimes areas where you thought trees would grow well, they didn't, and vice versa. RW suggested that BL's report gave a good steer to people where the opportunities were likely to be.

Richard Cooke (RC) of the ADMG, advised that the Scottish Government's planting targets were high and therefore they were perhaps less likely to be too choosy as to planting sites if targets are to be met. There certainly were more productive areas in the south-west of Scotland than in the north-west, however, considerable opportunities were available.

5.1.4 Carbon Sensitive Habitats

RW reminded the group of the Action to develop a programme of possible areas for peat restoration and investigate funding options. He asked Caroline Cook (CC) of Bowlts load on the shared screen the map which she had prepared showing both restoration work that had been carried out and work that was planned. A copy of this plan is attached.

RW talked of the peatland restoration work undertaken on his own property and indicated that the biodiversity change in the areas restored was spectacular and for this reason, he would be pressing on with further proposals.

BM of Letterewe confirmed that Dr Ben Lennon had looked at Letterewe and liaised with NatureScot, who had indicated that they were going to do feasibility studies on areas that they had identified as having potential for peatland restoration schemes.

GR of Lochluichart advised that Lochluichart had completed two schemes and that there was another in the pipeline. He mentioned that Nduri at NatureScot had been very helpful, and given that she was now returning to work, perhaps BM should contact her. HvB of Foich asked KSB to let him have a copy of the plan shared during the Zoom meeting and KSB agreed that he would send this to him.

KSB

5.1.5/

5.1.5 Habitat Monitoring

RW reminded the group of the Action within the Deer Management Plan to decide on targets for sustainable levels of grazing once initial data has been analysed. This had been done and incorporated within the Plan, but he reminded the group that the three year habitat impact assessments on the original baseline sites were now due and he hoped that the majority of these could be done prior to the end of July. He asked that once everyone had carried out the habitat impact assessments, the data should be forwarded to KSB's office so that the data could be collated on behalf of the group by CC.

All

There was some discussion about how the new data would be presented, but it was agreed that we need to have the data collected in the first place.

RC of the ADMG confirmed that they were at an early stage in developing a tool to assist DMGs with managing data. This would take some time.

The group were reminded of the original surveys, with CC of Bowlts loading on the shared screen the habitat impact maps which are currently part of the group's Plan. KSB stressed the importance of ensuring that the habitat impact assessments were carried out in exactly the same spots as before and that all of the spots on the plan had coordinates. He suggested that if anyone didn't know theirs, if they send a quick email to CC, she could provide them.

Lastly, CC confirmed that she would circulate the maps to everyone so that they could update themselves and if any queries arose, they could back to her direct.

CC

5.1.6 Deer Population and Population Model

RW confirmed that everyone would be familiar with the population model, which CC loaded on the shared screen and asked KSB to take the meeting through the data.

KSB ran through the population model, starting with the recruitment count figures. He highlighted that the average recruitment if all the figures were taken into account was 15%, but that if only the figures for which full information was given were included, the average was 17%. RW stressed that it was vital that when providing figures to KSB's office, full details of the number of hinds and yearlings counted was/

was essential. Where only a percentage was given, this data clearly carried slightly less weight. He therefore asked everyone to go back through their records and see whether they could provide full details so that the areas that were highlighted in red in the recruitment count schedule could gradually be eliminated. He also confirmed that this would then give an inkling of what percentage of the hind population had been counted and all of this made the data more valuable and the model more robust.

KSB then moved to the deer population section of the model and by using the 17%, this indicated that considerably less young stock were moving into the herd this season than the previous year, where the recruitment count indicated 28%.

RW suggested that people consider the figures and that as a group, there would be further discussion to see where culling levels should be moving forward.

5.1.7 Deer Welfare

A further Action in the plan which RW highlighted was the proposal to collate information relating to deer welfare. MR of NatureScot agreed to chase up with Sinclair Coghill how the information collated by the group gives some indication with regard to deer welfare.

MR

5.1.8 Non-Native Species

RW reminded the group of the mention of wild boar made at the last meeting, but there were no further reports from the group on this. Donald Rice (DR) of Dundonnell queried whether the group were finding changes in the bird population and asked in particular whether anyone was seeing jays. GR of Lochluichart confirmed that they were seeing some, although DR confirmed not on Dundonnell. There was also a comment that magpies were moving north.

5.2 Proposed Priorities for the Coming Year

Following the extensive discussions, RW confirmed the priorities for the group for the coming year as:-

- habitat impact assessment;
- woodland expansion proposals;
- peatland restoration.

RC/

RC of the ADMG mentioned postponing the review of the Deer Management Plan and wondered whether this was necessarily a good thing. He advised that some of the deer groups were morphing their DMP into a “Land Management Plan”, with these plans embracing things like tourism, livestock management, etc. RW agreed that areas now coming within the remit of the DMGs were moving and therefore it possibly did make sense to move towards a Land Management Plan. RC suggested that the group didn’t wait too long before carrying out its review.

RW suggested that the group would give further consideration to this and discuss it at forthcoming meetings.

JB of Foich queried whether any funding was available for the tagging of deer, to enable some information to be collected on deer movement/migration. The query was put to MR of NatureScot to see whether she could clarify whether any funding was available. She advised that she was not sure, but that no work had been done since the 1990s and she will check. RC of the ADMG suggested that it wouldn’t be too difficult to do in terms of catching calves and tagging.

MR

5.3 **Budgetary Implications**

It was agreed that none of the proposals discussed necessarily had budgetary implications for the group.

5.4 **Funding**

It was agreed that there was nothing of note for the group, other than the funding available to individual members.

6. **POACHING**

RW suggested it was unlikely, given the very poor price for venison, that poaching would be a significant problem and the lack of reports from members seemed to confirm this. However, MR of NatureScot confirmed that she had received a query from Police Scotland, looking for information on any illegal game activities, including poaching, seeking registration numbers, etc, and so if anyone had any information, the suggestion was that they could pass it to MR and she, in turn, would pass it to the Police.

7. **ASSOCIATION OF DEER MANAGEMENT GROUPS (ADMG)**

RC confirmed that he had been Chairman of the ADMG for the last ten years and that he would be retiring next week. He confirmed that he enjoyed attending the West/

West Ross Deer Management Group meetings, seeing the scope of discussion and offered his congratulations to the group on the progress that they had made.

He advised that the Association's forthcoming AGM is now going to be a virtual meeting, due Covid.

He noted that the Deer Working Group report, which was issued about a year ago, had taken the Government about a year to respond to. However, it was clear that they now intended to introduce legislation to implement the report's recommendations. RC advised that it wasn't yet clear which of the recommendations the Scottish Government would be taking forward. He confirmed that the Association had responded on each and every recommendation and that it would continue to highlight the good work of the deer management groups.

RC made further reference to the Land Management Plans mentioned above, and suggested that the group consider this when the time came for review of their DMP.

RC mentioned the greenhouse gas implications for wild deer and that the Association needed a better understanding of this and that they planned to do some work on this.

RC confirmed the Association view that the group assessments are useful and a good method of benchmarking the workings of deer management groups. However, the Deer Working Group suggests that they should fall by the wayside.

With SWARD having also fallen by the wayside, the Association were now considering a replacement methodology for how deer management groups might handle their data.

He again highlighted the peat wetland and woodland issues where there was plenty of opportunity of members to participate.

As regards venison, RC noted the catastrophic price last year and hoped that maybe there would be a modest increase this year, and quite excitingly, there was the possibility of Quality Assurance venison getting a 40p premium. RC advised that the Association had been very supportive of the Scottish Quality Venison (SQV) initiative and were delighted to see that SQV had managed to obtain a grant from the Scottish Government of £40,000 to promote venison consumption.

RC raised the issue of non-lead ammunition and clearly this is an issue under discussion. He suggested that members strongly consider the practicalities of moving to non-lead ammunition.

RC/

RC confirmed that the SCOPE newsletter would be issued as usual and the Association would have a presence at the Scone Game Fair in September and also the Moy Game Fair, if it goes ahead.

RW thanked RC for his synopsis of the Association's workings and confirmed that some members had recently received a communication from Highland Venison confirming the 40p premium or Scottish Quality venison.

Kenny Ross (KR) of Lochrosque confirmed that he had trialled copper ammunition last season and that it had worked perfectly. RC said it had been reported to him that you may need to adjust the aim of the rifle and that there certainly were dangers in firing copper at solid targets in terms of ricochet. MR of NatureScot advised that she had a report on the use of non-lead ammunition and she would forward that on to the group.

MR

HvB of Foich queried what calibre was used and MR of NatureScot suggested 270, but that 243 was also being looked at to see if it could be made a non-lead round. Tom Cameron (TC) of Forest and Land Scotland advised that they take some 35,000 carcasses a year using 270, 110 grain Barnes ammunition. Larger calibre, smaller bullet, very flat trajectory and accurate. The message seemed to be don't go for heavy ammunition when using non-lead.

8. **NATURESCOT REPORT**

MR indicated that given the extensive discussions above, she had nothing further to add.

9. **ELECTION OF OFFICE BEARERS**

Both RW and KSB stepped down to allow the election of office bearers but were re-elected unopposed, with RW proposed as Chairman by BM of Letterewe and seconded by HvB of Foich and KSB proposed as Secretary/Treasurer by BM of Letterewe and seconded by ML of Inverbroom.

10. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There were no items of other business.

11. **DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

RW proposed 8th September 2021 in that it was a date that fitted his diary, but he was aware that given that the stalking season would have started, it might not suit everyone./

everyone. However, what he suggested that everyone mark it in the diary meantime, and nearer the time KSB's office would circulate details and if it turned out that too many people couldn't make the meeting, a further date would be proposed.

KSB

In drawing the meeting to a close, RW thanked all of the group members for their input and also thanked everyone for the lively discussion on the various issues and looked forward to seeing results of the habitat impact assessment imminently.

KSB/AM WRD/03
17th June 2021

WEST ROSS DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Peatland Restoration Projects

* data supplied by Angus Davidson June 2021

- Completed Projects
- Potential Projects

