

**MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
HELD AT ACHNASHEEN HALL  
WEDNESDAY 30<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2022**

Present:	Alasdair MacDonald	Dundonnell
	Donald Fraser	Fannich
	Angus Davidson	Fannich
	Jane MacLay	Gruinard
	Gary Ross	Gruinard
	Norman Kelman	Heights of Kinlochewe
	Mark Lorimer	Inverbroom
	Craig McIntosh	Inverbroom
	Aidan Bell	Inverewe
	Barbara MacDonald	Letterewe
	Andrew Oliver	Letterewe
	Glyn Robson	Lochluichart
	John Wood	Lochluichart
	Gary Ross	Lochluichart
	Kenny Ross	Lochrosque
In Attendance:	Linzi Seivwright	Chair
	Caroline Cook	Bowlts Chartered Surveyors
	Ben McKeown	NatureScot
Apologies:	Donald Rice	Dundonnell
	Gordon Crawford	Eilean Darach
	Albert van Dedem	Fannich
	Maurits van Dedem	Fannich
	Ruari Matheson	Fannich
	Hendrik van Beuningen	Foich
	Jake Buckthorp	Foich
	David Lilley	Heights of Kinlochewe
	Patrick Creasey	Strathvaich

**1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR**

Action

The chairperson, Linzi Seivwright (LS), welcomed everyone to the meeting. She explained that she had had a handover from Randal Wilson. She felt that the group have made good progress over the last 10 years, thanks to Randal and the team, but moving forward there were a new set of challenges to deal with. There is a lot happening politically. She suggested that there is a lot happening politically, but she looked forward to working with the Group and supporting them in any way she can.

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## 2. **MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 27<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2022**

### 2.1 **Adoption**

The meeting adopted the Minutes as an accurate record of the previous meeting, which was the AGM. This was proposed by Glyn Robson (GR) of Lochluichart and seconded by Jane MacLay (JM) of Gruinard.

### 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. **PRIORITY ACTIONS ARISING FROM DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN**

LS drew attention to the schedule of actions on the group's DMP which was shared on the screen. She confirmed that this schedule was updated following every group meeting going back as far as May 2016, keeping it as a live and working document.

### 3.1 **Designated Sites**

The Section 7 Agreement had been put in place between SNH/NatureScot to cover the areas within the Fannich Hills SAC and clearly the steps put in place had had a positive result. Ben McKeown (BM) of NatureScot confirmed that NatureScot were happy for the management of the Section 7 area to revert back to the West Ross DMG. He added that for the Section 7 area, it was now business as usual, but that NatureScot would reevaluate the situation and carry out a further Habitat Impact Assessment (HIA) in the next five years.

Mark Lorimer (ML) of Inverboom asked, given that the Section 7 had been an success, how we compared with other groups. BM of NatureScot responded that West Ross is a good group and it would be interesting to see the results of the group wide HIA.

LS commented that it was a good sign that the Section 7 had been handed back and confirmed with BM that the next assessment would include a full site condition and full HIA.

In relation to other sites, BM of NatureScot confirmed that for An Teallach, site monitoring would be due before 2026 and for Ardlair and Letterewe SSSI, he confirmed that NatureScot had commissioned a HIA in the woodlands which he has just received and this would be made available in due course.

### 3.2/

### 3.2 **Existing Woodlands**

LS confirmed that creating new woodlands was higher up the political agenda and she confirmed that the woodland methodology was currently being signed off by the best practice group and should be available shortly for circulation. BM added that NatureScot would be looking at training for this in the spring and LS added that ADMG may be able to arrange training for the group, but this would be after March so can be discussed at the next meeting.

### 3.3 **New Woodlands**

Glyn Robson (GR) of Lochluichart commented that they were looking at additional woodlands and would forward any maps to Caroline Cook (CC) when they became available. ML commented that Inverbroom may be looking at woodland, but had nothing to report just yet.

GR

It was noted that Foich had advised at the previous meeting that new woodland was planned in 2023, but there was no-one from Foich at the meeting to confirm if that was still the case.

### 3.4 **Carbon Sensitive Habitats**

LS commented that there was lots of potential and funding for peatland restoration schemes and asked if anyone was carrying out any additional schemes to those which had previously been raised previously. Angus Davidson (AD) commented that Foich had asked them to look at the possibility of a peatland scheme, but it was still in the early stages. ML added that Inverbroom may do some at some point, but had no firm plan as yet. Kenny Ross (KR) commented that there was lots done at Lochrosque and there may be more in the pipeline.

LS mentioned that ADMG were looking at running workshops and confirmed that she would circulate any information that she has.

LS

### 3.5 **Habitat Impact Assessments**

LS commented that the group had a good HIA coverage, with most estates carrying out HIAs in 2021. It was agreed that CC would pull together the HIA information for the spring meeting for the group to review.

CC

LS mentioned that she had reviewed the habitat mapping in the group area and it was 40% heather so it needed to be kept in good condition. BM asked if the HIA was on open range only and this was confirmed to be the case. He commented/

commented that the wide HIA coverage was extensive. LS commented that it may be beneficial to include information on livestock grazing within the Plan as this also affected the habitat.

There was then a general discussion about differentiating between damage done by livestock, deer and walkers. At this point, LS talked about the Strategic Deer Board, whose task is to implement the DMG recommendations. She believed that if the groups don't cooperate on a voluntary basis, then this is likely to become legislative. She confirmed that the management of upland areas was complex to achieve a healthy deer population, good livestock and a healthy environment. For this to happen, there needed to be more joined up thinking. She added that the Government have ambitious targets and need owners to achieve them. LS agreed to circulate the list of who is on the Strategic Deer Board to the group.

LS

LS is also looking to provide feedback via ADMG and so if members have issues to raise, they should send them to her for inclusion in that feedback. She added that the incentive side of the Government targets still have to be worked through. AD commented that agri schemes for 2024 may be delayed until the end of 2025 and it still had to be agreed how this integrates with carbon codes, etc.

ADMG have been asked to put a paper back regarding challenges and taking up schemes that exist. LS is therefore looking for feedback from the group as to how to make it easier to take up existing funding schemes and she can feed this through to ADMG. She noted the Government have ambitious targets but they need landowners to buy in.

### 3.6 **Public Access**

Kenny Ross (KR) of Lochrosque commented that for the path at Cabuie, they need to put in a kissing gate for wheelchair access as the track is used by SSE, Cabuie Estate and Strathbran Estate and so there are loads of padlocks on the gate.

It was noted that Heading for the Scottish Hills website usage seems to have dropped away, and that walkers, if they do phone, don't phone to ask permission to walk, they phone to tell you that they are walking. Barbara McDonald (BMcD) of Letterewe had commented that they had a lot less messages now than they had previously and this seemed to be accepted generally across the group.

There/

There was then a discussion about the Access Code and BM of NatureScot commented that if they don't access responsibly, then officially they don't have a right to access the countryside. LS commented that the Walk Highland website was very popular and walkers go there to find route, but there is no deer information on that website and that it may be worth looking into linking the Walk Highlands website with the Heading to the Hills website.

Craig McIntosh (CM) of Inverbroom commented that there were certainly more hillwalkers post Covid pushing deer around and more hillwalkers during the week.

BMcD of Letterewe commented that inflatable canoes and fold up bikes were also popular at Letterewe. They would park their cars and use their inflatable canoes to cross the loch and then mountain bike. It was agreed that mountain biking was also becoming a problem in other areas. Angus Davidson (AD) of Fannich suggested that there is an opportunity for a study with people counters, perhaps at the main car parking points, and it was noted that the Highland Council rangers might have an idea of how many cars there were parking now compared to previously and this could be fed back to the Strategic Deer Board. LS recommended that they put a representation to the Land Reform Group.

LS

### 3.7 Deer Population and Population Model

There was a general round the table discussion about whether the draft figures submitted were still likely to be the case. Letterewe commented that they hadn't seen very many hinds so they are unlikely to get anywhere near the 90 that they were due to cull, and would probably only take half of that. Otherwise, all figures were roughly as submitted previously. BM was asked to confirm whether it was likely that NatureScot would be able to carry out a helicopter count next winter, as it was unlikely that it would be done this coming spring.

BM

There was then a general discussion about using drones and thermal imaging for counting. It was agreed that this was difficult to carry out and that the technology wasn't quite there yet. BMcD from Letterewe confirmed that they would be carrying out their helicopter count as usual this summer and it was agreed that the group would look at the cost of a helicopter count for everyone this summer.

LS asked BM to confirm whether, if the group carried out their own count, NatureScot would be able to contribute financially. BM confirmed that this would need to be looked into.

BM

It/

It was agreed that LS would put together a price for a helicopter count and a decision would be made on this at the spring meeting.

LS

### 3.7 Deer Welfare

It was agreed that deer welfare was difficult to measure and that stalkers on the ground were best placed to know about the welfare of their deer. It was also agreed that though the Government want them to cull more deer, but they can't get rid of them out of the larder. LS reported that the Scottish Venison Association was having a meeting to raise this with the Government.

## 4. DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN REFRESH UPDATE

LS confirmed that CC would prepare an update to the Habitat Impact Assessment section before the next meeting with a view to updating the DMP following on from the next helicopter count.

CC

It was agreed that LS/CC would bring proposals to the next meeting with regard to costs and timescales for this.

LS/CC

## 5. ADMG UPDATE

LS confirmed that the ADMG report had been circulated to the group and that there was a Zoom meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> December at 5.00 pm and if anyone needed the details, they should contact her directly. She also advised that the ADMG AGM was on 22<sup>nd</sup> March next year in Inverness.

## 6. NATURESCOT UPDATE

BM reported that there were no further updates since the last meeting.

## 7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

KR reported that they were still having copper bullet issues, they can't get them and they are no use, so they have gone back to lead bullets. There was a general discussion about whether the supermarkets/game dealers are still taking deer with lead shot. It was also noted that Sweden had gone back to lead due to welfare issues.

## 8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that a date would be circulated to members in due course.