WEST ROSS DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP
NOVEMBER 2024

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WEST ROSS DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP
NOVEMBER 2024

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 West Ross Deer Management Group (WRDMG) is situated in the north-west Highlands. It extends to approximately 104,500 ha (258,225 acres). Altitude within the WRDMG ranges from sea level on the west coast to 1,060m at the summit of An Teallach. There are 18 Munros within the Deer Management Group (DMG), as well as many steep sided glens and lochs.

1.1.2 The climate is typical of the mountainous regions of north-west Scotland. Compared with the central Highlands and the east of the country, the climate here is windy, wet and mild. At Kinlochewe, the average annual rainfall is approximately 2,211mm. The mountainous terrain causes a great deal of local variability in rainfall which generally increases towards the inland regions and with altitude. At low altitude in the Letterewe area, daily temperature ranges expected in January and July are 0° to 6° centigrade and 10° to 16° centigrade respectively. Snow accumulates on high ground during winter and may persist well into spring in corries and on north and east facing slopes.

1.1.3 The WRDMG area supports the characteristic range of plant communities found in north-west Scotland, dominated by relatively slow growing and unproductive wet heath and blanket bog. The diversity of habitat in the area supports several plant species considered to be scarce in the national context but there are no extreme rarities, classified as Red Data Book species.

1.2 **Group Members**

A summary of estates that have provided a copy of their Deer Management Plan (DMP) or have filled in the questionnaire can be seen at Appendix II. Map 1 shows the West Ross Deer Management Group membership.

	PROPERTY	Hectares
1	CABUIE, BRUACHAIG and FADA	15,324
2	DUNDONNELL	13,453
3	EILEAN DARACH, LITTLE GRUINARD AND LARACHANTIVORE	10,964
4	FANNICH	3,761
5	FOICH	3,945
6	GRUINARD ACHNEGIE & FAIN	10,142
7	HEIGHTS OF KINLOCHEWE	3,430
8	INVERBROOM	7,973
9	INVEREWE	840

	PROPERTY	Hectares
10	LETTEREWE	16,556
11	LOCHLUICHART	9,615
12	LOCHROSQUE and KINLOCHEWE	1,812
13	LONGART (FCS)	1,596
14	STRATHBRAN	4,059
15	STRATHVAICH & STRATHRANNOCH	1,014
	Total Area	**104,482**

1.3 Timescale

This is an update to the first collaborative DMP to be prepared by the WRDMG. This Plan has been updated to cover the five year period from 2024-2029, however it is seen as being an ongoing process and actions may be refined an amended as a result of the data collected throughout the period.

2. PLAN OBJECTIVES

2.1 Guiding Principles

As members of this DMG, we:-

- acknowledge what we have in common – namely a shared commitment to a sustainable and economically viable Scottish countryside;
- make a commitment to work together to achieve that;
- accept that we have a diversity of management objectives and that we respect each other's objectives;
- undertake/

- undertake to communicate openly with all relevant parties;
- commit to negotiate and where necessary compromise in order to accommodate the reasonable land management requirements of our neighbours;
- undertake that where there are areas of disagreement, we will work together as a Group to resolve these;
- endorse and comply with the Code of Practice on Deer Management;
- all deer management will be carried out in accordance with Best Practice Guidance on Management of Wild Deer in Scotland – http://bestpracticeguides.org.uk
- will join the Common Ground Forum project and sign up to Our Common Ground Accord (link)

2.2 **The Group's Objectives:-**

- Maintain a sustainable population of deer that maximises socioeconomic benefits and minimises environmental impacts.
- To describe the deer management required to ensure that ownership objectives (be they sporting, agricultural, fishing, conservation, etc) are achievable whilst maintaining designated features in favourable condition or working towards favourable/unfavourable recovering condition.
- Undertake actions to mitigate climate change and seek to promote biodiversity gain where appropriate and where support is available.
- Continue to maintain good peatland condition and seek to restore peatland where appropriate.
- Control the spread of sika and any other non-native deer species, invasive or otherwise, within the DMG area.
- Minimise the incidents of deer poaching.
- Promote responsible access within the bounds of the Access Code.
- Liaise with NatureScot with a view to protecting all designated features.
- Seek to identify native woodland condition and potential expansion of woodlands within the Group area.
- Encourage members to keep up with skills and training applicable to deer management.
- Promote awareness re: appropriate bio security measures when visitors from areas where CWD are involved with deer management activities.
- Provide opportunities for local community engagement and education

2.3/

2.3 Plan Targets (2024 - 2029)

Whilst fostering best practice in all aspects of deer management, the focus of this Plan will be in the following areas:-

- to agree on and be working towards maintaining a relatively stable deer population in line with Government recommendations (currently 10 deer per km²). Future deer targets with be informed by information available at the time;
- to prepare a summary of actions based on actions within the Deer Management Plan to be considered by the Group at their AGM and thereafter included in the Plan;
- designated sites currently described as "unfavourable" as a consequence of herbivore impacts will have deer management in place to work towards favourable/unfavourable recovering status;
- manage deer impacts to ensure habitats are considered to be in good condition as evidenced by regular habitat monitoring;
- engage with local communities to identify opportunities for further education and positive engagement;
- encourage members to upload information to NatureScot Heading for the Scottish Hills website;
- make Minutes of Group meetings and this Plan publicly available via Group website – http://wrossdmg.deer-management.co.uk;
- provide contact information and liaise with emergency services as required.

2.4 Achievements to Date

The group have had a Deer Management Plan in place since 2016 and from that prepared a Deer Management Action Plan which is updated after each meeting. The current version is attached at Appendix III.

The group continue to meet three times each year and through Covid had to adapt to using a Teams/Zoom format. Lessons learned from this have been brought forward into our current meetings whereby we can offer hybrid meetings to allow members of the group who are not in the area at the time to join remotely. More recently we have been including one site visit into our meeting programme.

NatureScot provided a full day's training session in April 2013 in connection with habitat monitoring and group members carry out Habitat Impact Assessment Surveys every three years

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A Woodland Creation Potential study was carried out by Bowlts Chartered Surveyors to identify areas within the group area that are suitable for new woodland. A copy of this is attached at Appendix IV.

The Fannich Hills area was part of a Section 7 Agreement, but due to the commitment of group members, this has now been lifted and management of the area has been returned to the group.

Over recent years, we invited various guests along to our meetings to give presentations to the group and these are:-

- Martin Scott – Principal Ornithologist, and Steven Lockwood, Principal Ecologist, both of RPS Planning & Development, joined us in May 2016 to discuss ECAS/SRDP funding.
- Colin Morrison of Angus Davidson Ltd joined us in May 2017 to talk about habitat monitoring.
- Mark Wrightham, NatureScot's Recreation and Tourism Manager, also joined us in May 2017 to talk about the Heading for the Scottish Hills website. The intention was to have entries for all of the major hills within our Group area on this site within the next 12 months.
- Dr Pete Mayhew, Director of Conservation and Visitor Experience at the Cairngorm National Park Authority, joined us in May 2018 to talk about natural capital.

2.5 **Monitoring (To provide a baseline and inform on trends)**

In order to define and improve current base data and to undertake various assessments and thereafter to monitor, the following data should be collected:-

2.5.1 Deer Population

- Annual winter foot counts.
- Annual recruitment rate counts from a sample of hind groups (late April/early May).
- Annual cull figures.

2.5.2/

2.5.2 Deer Welfare

- Recruitment rate (from above).
- Annual report by estates of deer condition.

2.5.3 Habitat

- Habitat monitoring following Wild Deer Best Practice methodology, preferably every three years (2024 and 2027).
- Prioritise habitat monitoring on designated sites currently classed as unfavourable due to deer impacts.
- Develop a Group habitat monitoring plan to monitor impacts on other sites.
- Once sufficient habitat monitoring data feeds through, impact targets for the various habitat types to be identified on a Group basis.

2.5.4 Socio-economic

- Employment information.
- Mature stags/hinds culled by guests/clients – cull records.
- Tourism - B&B/lodge nights let.
- Agricultural/Crofting/Forestry – impacts on each sector summarised, e.g. FCS Nearest Neighbour Damage results on restocks.
- Deer Vehicle Collisions.
- Local community interests/engagement.

2.5.5 The DMP is considered by the Group as a live document which is reviewed and constantly updated. The Group, having updated the Plan, now intends to encourage a dialogue within the Group and wider stakeholders with a view to preparing an action plan to develop mechanisms to manage deer.

3./

3. DATA AUDIT

3.1 Site Designations

The WRDMG area includes a number of conservation designations. Further information on these can be found on the NatureScot website. Map 2 shows the outline of these sites overlaid onto the ownership boundaries. Map 3 highlights the last assessed condition of the SSSIs.

3.1.1 Sites of Special Scientific Interest

SSSI	Hectares	Feature Category	Feature	Visit Date	Last Assessed Condition	Feature Pressures
Wester Ross Lochs	1,503.34	Birds - aggregation of breeding birds	Black Throated Divers - breeding	31/08/2002	Favourable maintained	No negative pressures
Ardlair	9,312.05	Broad-leaved, mixed and yew woodland	Upland oak woodland	01/06/2022	Unfavourable No change	Over grazing
		Mosaic	Upland assemblage	28/06/2006	Favourable Maintained	Invasive species and over grazing
		Broad-leaved, mixed and yew woodland	Upland birch woodland	01/06/2022	Unfavourable No change	Over grazing, plant pests and diseases
Meall an t-Sithe and Creag Rainich	245.97	Structural and metamorphic geology	Moine	19/06/2002	Favourable Maintained	No negative pressures
An Teallach		Earth sciences	Moine	24/09/2013	Favourable Maintained	No negative pressures
An Teallach/						
An Teallach	5,141.55	Quaternary geology and geomorphology	Quaternary of Scotland	25/05/1999	Favourable Maintained	Over grazing and recreation/disturbance
		Vascular plants	Vascular plant assemblage	09/08/2009	Unfavourable Declining	Natural event, over grazing and recreation/disturbance
		Mosaic	Upland assemblage	28/07/2012	Unfavourable No change	Over grazing and trampling

SSSI	Hectares	Feature Category	Feature	Visit Date	Last Assessed Condition	Feature Pressures
Creag Chorcurach	163.02	Structural and metamorphic geology	Moine	21/02/2007	Favourable Maintained	No negative pressures
Dundonnell Woods	337.00	Broad-leaved, mixed and yew woodland	Upland mixed ash woodland	21/11/2013	Unfavourable Recovering	Over grazing and under grazing
Fannich Hills	10,906.85	Mosaic	Upland assemblage	27/06/2014	Unfavourable	Burning, over grazing and trampling
		Quaternary geology and geomorphology	Quaternary of Scotland	11/09/2009	Favourable Maintained	Recreation/disturbance
		Structural and metamorphic geology	Moine	08/06/2010	Favourable Maintained	No negative pressures
		Other invertebrates	Flies	31/07/2017	Favourable Declining	Over grazing and trampling, recreation/ disturbance and game/ fisheries management
		Other invertebrates	Beetles	30/07/2015	Favourable Maintained	No negative pressures
Achanalt Marshes	208.25	Birds - assemblages of breeding birds	Breeding bird assemblage	30/07/2001	Favourable Maintained	No negative pressures
		Fen, marsh and swamp (Wetland)	Flood-plain fen	09/10/2002	Favourable Maintained	No negative pressures
		Standing open water and canals	Mesotrophic loch	11/09/2017	Favourable Declining	Invasive species
Corrieshalloch Gorge	6.93	Broad-leaved, mixed and yew woodland	Upland birch woodland	07/05/2002	Favourable Maintained	Invasive species
		Geomorphology	Fluvial Geomorphology of Scotland	24/03/2015	Favourable Recovered	No negative pressures
		Quaternary geology and geomorphology	Quaternary of Scotland	07/03/2007	Favourable Maintained	No negative pressures
		Other invertebrates	Cranefly (Lipsothrix ecucullata)	01/07/2015	Favourable Maintained	Forestry operations
Fionn Loch Islands	23.35	Broad-leaved, mixed and yew woodland	Upland birch woodland	30/06/2004	Favourable Maintained	No negative pressures
Caileach Head	10.02	Structural and metamorphic geology	Torridonian	08/06/2007	Favourable Maintained	No negative pressures

3.1.2/

3.1.2 Special Areas of Conservation

SAC	Hectares	Feature Category	Feature	Visit Date	Last Assessed Condition	Feature Pressures
Fannich Hills	9,638.00	Standing open water and canals	Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels	17/07/2010	Favourable Maintained	No negative pressures
		Dwarf shrub heath (Upland)	Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath	27/06/2014	Unfavourable No change	Over grazing. Burning.
		Bogs (Upland)	Blanket bog	30/08/2005	Unfavourable No change	Over grazing
		Montane/				
		Montane habitats	Montane acid grasslands	27/06/2014	Favourable Recovered	Over grazing. Burning.
		Montane habitats	Alpine and subalpine heaths	05/09/2005	Favourable Maintained	Over grazing
		Dwarf shrub heath (Upland)	Dry heaths	05/09/2005	Unfavourable No change	Burning and over grazing
		Inland rock	Plants in crevices on acid rocks	14/09/2005	Unfavourable No change	Over grazing
		Inland rock	Acidic scree	14/09/2005	Unfavourable No change	Trampling
Little Gruinard River	1,179.77	Fish	Atlantic salmon (Salmo salar)	18/08/11	Favourable Recovered.	Invasive species and other activities
Loch Maree Complex	15,735.02	Acidic scree	Upland habitat	29/08/14	Favourable Maintained	Trampling
		Alder woodland on floodplains	Woodland	03/07/2004	Unfavourable No change	Over grazing
		Alpine and subalpine heaths	Upland habitat	22/11/2006	Favourable Maintained	Natural event and trampling
		Blanket bog	Upland habitat	13/09/2014	Favourable Maintained	Trampling.
		Bog woodland	Woodland	20/08/2008	Favourable Maintained	Invasive species
		Caledonian forest	Woodland	27/09/2010	Unfavourable No change	Invasive species, over grazing and pro-active on site management
		Clear/				

SAC	Hectares	Feature Category	Feature	Visit Date	Last Assessed Condition	Feature Pressures
		Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels	Freshwater habitats	15/07/2010	Favourable Maintained	No negative pressures
		Depressions on peat substrates	Upland habitat	30/08/14	Favourable Maintained	Over grazing.
		Dry heaths	Upland habitat	16/06/2017	Unfavourable Recovering	Invasive species and over grazing
		Montane acid grasslands	Upland habitat	22/11/2006	Favourable Maintained	Trampling
		Otter (Lutra lutra)	Mammals (except marine)	30/07/2012	Favourable Maintained	Other
		Plants/				
		Plants in crevices on acid rocks	Upland habitat	30/08/2014	Unfavourable declining.	Invasive species – bracken. Over grazing.
		Plants in crevices on base-rich rocks	Upland habitat	30/08/2014	Favourable Maintained	Invasive species – bracken.
		Tall herb communities	Upland habitat	26/08/2014	Favourable Maintained	
		Western acidic oak woodland	Woodland	24/04/2008	Unfavourable No change	Over grazing
		Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath	Upland habitat	16/06/2017	Unfavourable No change	Over grazing

3.1.3 Special Protection Areas

SPA	Hectares	Feature Category	Feature	Visit Date	Last Assessed Condition	Feature Pressures
Achanalt Marshes	208.25	Birds - aggregations of breeding birds	Wood sandpiper (Tringa glareola), breeding	12/07/2013	Favourable Maintained	No negative pressures
Wester Ross Lochs	1,980.98	Birds - aggregations of breeding birds	Black-throated diver (Gavia arctica), breeding	31/08/2002	Favourable Maintained	No negative pressures

3.1.4/

3.1.4 National Scenic Area

Site	Hectares
Wester Ross	143,880.00

3.1.5 Existing Agreements

- Ardlair Wide Countryside Agreement (5.49) exp 30/10/2024.
- An Teallach Wide Countryside Agreement (5.49) exp 30/11/2044.
- Corrieshalloch Wide Countryside Agreement (5.49) exp 14/03/2093.
- Loch Maree Complex Wide Countryside Agreement (5.49) exp 31/10/2024.

3.1.6 Delivery of Designated Features into Favourable Condition

The Group commits to reviewing the status of all designated sites within the Group area and to facilitate any actions that may be required. As part of this process, the Group has asked all members to advise if they are aware of any designated sites affecting their land currently described as unfavourable as a consequence of herbivore impact. It is acknowledged by members that four properties currently have designated sites described as unfavourable as a consequence of herbivore impacts and, in each case, have also confirmed that steps are being taken in terms of deer management with a view to working towards favourable/ unfavourable recovery status.

The Group intends to review matters on an ongoing basis and thereafter to facilitate any actions that may be required.

3.2/

3.2 Geology

3.2.1 The WRDMG area is particularly rugged with a geology dominated by Lewisian gneiss and Torridonian sandstone to the west. To the east of the Moine Thrust the area is characterised by boggy plateau and the less rugged, more open hill characteristic of the Moine series. The area generally is predominantly open moorland, dominated by wet heath vegetation. However, an extensive area of basic Hornblende schist runs across the Beinn Lair range from Beinn Airigh Charr to Loch Garbhaig, giving rise to an area that is richer in plant species than the rest of the region. Alluvial deposits can be found around the larger rivers and lochs.

3.2.2 To the west of the Moine Thrust, the soils belong predominantly to the Lochinver Association derived from Lewisian gneiss, whilst to the east they are of the Arkaig association, derived from Moine schists. In both cases, most soils have a peaty surface horizon. Peaty gleys and peat are extensive, whilst peaty podzols occur on more freely draining sites. Brown forest soils and humus-iron podzols are the richest soils in the area that are of limited distribution along the shore of Loch Maree. Sub-alpine podzols and alpine soils occur on the high ground. Across much of the area dominated by Lewisian gneiss, the soils are shallow with extensive areas of exposed rock.

3.3 Native Flora and Fauna

3.3.1 A mosaic of wet and dry heath is the principal land cover. Of the nine national vegetation classification (NVC) moorland communities that are of international importance in Scotland, three are found in the WRDMG area. These are as follows:-

M17 - Blanket mire;
M17 - Wet heath;
H10 - Heath.

3.3.2 In addition, steep, well drained slopes support grassland (U5) and on higher ground where snow lies longest, there is grass heath (U7). Summits are largely covered by moss heath (U10). Lichens and moss are frequent components of all these mid to high elevation vegetation types.

3.3.3/

3.3.3 Several other plant communities occur on rock ledges, screes, summits and flushes. These include dwarf herb community (CH12), tall herd community (U16 and U17) and rush heath (U9) as well as grassland (U13) and mire (M11). On sites formerly used for agricultural or crofting, grassland (U4) occurs. This community, commonly referred to as "greens" is important because it provides the best quality grazing, although it generally covers less than 1% of the total area.

3.3.4 The plant community with the greatest conservation value is undoubtedly the Atlantic Oak Woodland. This occurs on the north shore of Loch Maree together with larger areas of Downy birch and occasional stands of Scots pine. It is rich in epiphytic mosses, liverworts, lichens and ferns. There is very little under storey or shrub layer and no regeneration outside fenced enclosures. In areas dominated by Birch, many trees are approaching maturity and there has been some windthrow. Other tree species, such as Rowan, Holly and Ash are also represented. Aspen and Juniper species of conservation importance that are particularly susceptible to browsing, occur in low numbers along the shore of Loch Maree.

3.4 **Woodlands**

3.4.1 Existing Woodlands

In 2013, Scotland's woodland and forest cover was 1.4 million ha (18% of the land area). The Scottish Government would like to increase woodland cover in line with other European countries and has set a woodland expansion target of 25% woodland cover by the second half of the 21st Century.

According to the Forestry Commission Scotland datasets, National Forest Inventory 2021 and Native Woodland Survey (2021), 6,588 ha (6%) are under woodland in the West Ross Deer Management Group area. Most of the woodland is on the lower ground to the margins of the group area, along the main roads. Map 4 shows the distribution of the existing woodlands.

PROPERTY	Total Area	Woodland	Woodland %	Native Woodland/Nearly Native (Ha)	Native Woodland/Nearly Native (%)
Cabuie, Bruachaig and Fada	15234	520	3%	181	35%
Dundonnell	13453	390	3%	209	53%
Eilean Darach, Little Gruinard and Larachantivore	10964	191	2%	98	51%
Fannich	3761	132	4%	12	9%
Foich	3945	185	5%	49	27%
Gruinard, Achnegie and Fain	10142	416	4%	142	34%
	3,430	319	9%	145	46%
Inverbroom	7973	283	4%	72	25%
Inverewe	840	103	12%	39	37%
Letterewe	16556	385	2%	243	63%
Lochluichart	9615	1109	12%	556	50%
Lochrosque and Kinlochewe	1812	461	25%	51	11%
Longart (FLS)	1596	1090	68%	233	21%
Strathbran	4059	873	22%	118	13%
Strathvaich and Strathrannoch	1014	129	13%	129	99%
Total	104482	6588	6%	2276	35%

3.4.2 Native Woodlands

The Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS) was published in 2021. This maps non-designated native woodland cover, reports condition and highlights herbivore impacts which threaten medium to long term condition of these important woodlands.

From/

From the NWSS 2,276 ha of the West Ross Deer Management Group area (35% of the total woodland) is considered to be "Native" or "Nearly Native".

Map 5 shows the distribution of native woodland in the West Ross Deer Management Group area.

The herbivore impact of each of these native woodlands is monitored by FCS and categorised into Very High, High, Medium and Low.

Within the Group area, 63% of native woodlands are considered to have low or medium herbivore impact and 39% high or very high. Map 6 shows the distribution of the herbivore impact on native woodlands.

	Hectares	% of native woodland
Low Total	250	11%
Medium Total	1150	52%
High Total	195	9%
Very High Total	681	30%
Total	2276	100%

3.4.2.1 Retaining Existing Native Woodland Cover

The Group commits to reviewing the condition of native woodland within the Group area and to facilitate any action that may be required to retain and improve the condition of the native woodland, exploring options for SRDP funding.

As/

As part of this process, the Group has asked all members to advise if they are aware of any native woodland within their land which has been categorised as having high or very high herbivore impact. It is acknowledged by the Group that only one property has existing woodland cover categorised as having a high or very high herbivore impact and in that case, the member has fenced off over 90 ha in some 21 enclosures between 1995 and 2014 at their own cost.

The Group will continue to monitor and review the position with regard to existing native woodland cover.

3.4.3 New Woodlands

Over the last 30 years there has been considerable tree planting activity with the group area. Of the 6,588 ha of woodland, 4,799 ha of woodland have been planted in this period. 73% of the total woodland has been created on the last 30 years.

Woodlands which have been planted in recent years are identified from the FCS grant datasets WGS3 (1994-2003), SFGS (2003-2006), SRDP Woodland Creation Options (2007-2013) and SFGS Woodland Creation Options (2015-2024). Map 7 shows the extent of these.

Members have also confirmed that the Group's Woodland Map no 7 within this Plan is fully up to date as at October 2024.

Forestry Grant Scheme	Year	Hectares
Woodland Grant Scheme 3 (WGS3)	1994 - 2003	3,299
Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme (SFGS)	2003-2006	613
SRDP Woodland Creation Option	2007 - 2014	599
SFGS Woodland Creation options	2015 - 2024	268
Total		4,779

The/

The Highland Council Forest and Woodland Strategy aims to direct forestry and woodlands to the most appropriate places within the Highlands. Map 8 shows the suitability of the Group area for woodlands.

Highland Council Forestry Strategy	% of Group Area
Policy A: Suitable for all types of woodland scheme which respect local circumstances and meet current FCS design criteria and guidelines	14.3%
Policy B: Preference for a mixed woodland mosaic with retention of a substantial open space element within the relevant landscape character zone(s)	14.0%
Policy C: Planting primarily for nature conservation and/or amenity	30.1%
Policy D: Limited potential for sensitive woodland development with preference for retention of large scale open space	24.2%
Unsuitable for trees	18.4%

The Group will update the Plan on an ongoing basis to record any woodland expansion by Group members. Group members will continue to be encouraged to explore the possibility of woodland expansion in the context of Deer Management Group needs.

In the event of woodland expansion being undertaken by Group members, consideration will be given to deer population levels via the deer population model. Regard will be had for any changes in range, forage and shelter.

Any proposals for woodland expansion will be actioned by individual members and this will be monitored by the Group and the DMP amended accordingly.

A study was carried out by Bowlts Chartered Surveyors on behalf of the group to identify potential areas for woodland creation. The results of this can be seen at Appendix I, Map7A.

3.5/

3.5 Carbon Sensitive Habitats

3.5.1 Carbon rich soils and peatland areas provide multiple benefits, e.g. good water quality, biodiversity and climate change mitigation as soil carbon stores and through carbon sequestration. Growing concerns with regard to climate change have come to recognise the value of peat as a massive carbon store. Carbon can be locked in upland peat for thousands of years.

Disturbance of peatlands leads to surface breakdown and release of CO^2 into the atmosphere.

Along with soils on which they stand, trees and woodlands are also a valuable carbon store. They also have the virtue of absorbing CO^2 from the atmosphere as they grow.

3.5.2 NatureScot has prepared and consulted on a dataset of carbon rich soil, deep peat and priority peatland habitats in Scotland derived from existing soil and vegetation data. Map 9 shows this data for the group area published in 2016.

3.5.3 53% of the group area is classified as having *all or most of* the vegetation cover indicating priority peatland (classes 1 and 2). The table below shows the percentage of each category over the group area.

Summary Description of the 'Carbon and Peatland' Classes		Hectares	% of Group Area
Class 1	Nationally important carbon-rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat. Areas likely to be of high conservation value	16,526	16%
Class 2	Nationally important carbon-rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat. Areas of potentially high conservation value and restoration potential	38,413	37%
Class 3	Dominant vegetation cover is not priority peatland habitat but is associated with wet and acidic type. Occasional peatland habitats can be found. Most soils are carbon-rich soils, with some areas of deep peat	5,183	5%

Summary Description of the 'Carbon and Peatland' Classes		Hectares	% of Group Area
Class 4	Area unlikely to be associated with peatland habitats or wet and acidic type. Area unlikely to include carbon-rich soils	2,691	3%
Class 5	Soil information takes precedence over vegetation data. No peatland habitat recorded. May also include areas of bare soil. Soils are carbon-rich and deep peat.	10,952	10%
Class 0	Mineral soil - Peatland habitats are not typically found on such soils	27,500	26%
Class -2	Non-soil (e.g. loch, built up area, rock and scree)	3,217	3%

3.5.4 Map 10 shows the areas of existing woodlands and priority peatlands. This equates to 57% of the Group area.

3.5.5 The Group will consider opportunities and priorities for the creation and restoration of peatlands, identifying funding sources where possible. In addition, the Group will encourage members to minimise surface damage to peatland.
After enquiry with members, it has been established that a number of members are considering creation/restoration of peatland on their property. The Group has encouraged all members to familiarise themselves with SNH's Peatland Action Project which offers funding assistance. Existing and proposed peatland restoration projects can be seen at Appendix I, Map 10A.

3.5.6 Once the means of collating, analysing and presenting the habitat impact assessment data is available, a data sub-set will be created for carbon sensitive habitats.

3.6 River Basin Management Planning

River Basin Management Planning, led by SEPA, aims to protect and improve Scotland's water environment in a way that balances cost and benefits to the environment, society and the economy. The River Basin Management Plan for Scotland sets out measures to address a range of impacts affecting water quality, physical condition, water flows and levels, accessibility for fish migration by the impact of invasive non-native species on the aquatic and animal communities. The Group will contribute as appropriate to River Basin Management planning when Group input is sought.

3.7 Habitat Types and Monitoring

3.7.1 Map 11 shows the main habitats by broad type. Heather moor, Blanket bog and peatland, and montane vegetation are the predominant types covering 90% of the group area. The table below shows the area and percentage of each of the broad habitat types. Data comes from the Land Classification Scotland, published in 1988 (LCS88).

Property	Area (ha)	Blanket bog & peatlands		Heather moor		Montane vegetation		Water		Total	
		HA	%	HA	%	HA	%	HA	%	HA	%
Cabuie, Bruachaig and Fada	15,324	7,021	46	6,228	41	1,774	12	26	0	15,048	98
Dundonnell	13,453	1,000	7	10,118	75	1,428	11	153	1	12,698	94
Eilean Darach, Little Gruinard and Larachantivore	10,964	449	4	7,626	70	2,019	18	437	4	10,531	96
Fannich	3,761	989	26	1,656	44	861	23	1	0	3,507	93
Foich	3,945	634	16	2,413	61	663	17	31	1	3,740	95
Gruinard, Achnegie and Fain	10,142	998	10	7,011	69	1,324	13	354	3	9,677	95
Heights of Kinlochewe	3,430	44	1	3,065	89	0	0	274	8	3,384	99
Inverbroom	7,973	1,657	21	4,866	61	846	11	208	3	7,577	95
Inverewe	840	49	6	632	75	0	0	24	3	704	84
Letterewe	16,556	494	3	10,230	62	3,449	21	1,521	9	15,693	95
Lochluichart	9,615	2,851	30	4,972	52	1,090	11	69	1	8,982	93
Lochrosque and Kinlochewe	1,812	28	2	421	23	0	0	1	0	450	25
Longart (FCS)	1,596	118	7	565	35	0	0	9	1	692	43
Strathbran	4,059	504	12	2,302	57	5	0	16	0	2,827	70
Strathvaich and Strathrannoch	1,014	478	47	527	52	0	0	0	0	1,006	99
Total	104,482	17,304	17	62,619	60	13,459	13	3,123	3	96,517	92

Plan 11A shows a new, more accurate, habitat data set called the Scottish Habitat sand Land Cover Map 2020 created by AI to classify satellite data to EUNIS level 2. The table below shows how these habitat classifications are distributed across the group.

	Temperate shrub heathland		Raised and blanket bogs		Cliffs and rock pavements		Dry grasslands		Seasonally wet and wet grasslands		Mesic grasslands	
Property	Ha	% of total area	Ha	% of total area	Ha	% of total area	Ha	% of total area	Ha	% of total area	Ha	% of total area
Cabuie, Bruachaig and Fada	4712.7	31%	5587.1	36%	101.4	1%	2597.9	17%	788.5	5%	0.9	0.0%
Dundonnell	6481.2	48%	3058.1	23%	1421.7	11%	238.3	2%	177.8	1%	163.8	1.2%
Eilean Darach, Little Gruinard and Larachantivore	4463.4	41%	2085.4	19%	2249.8	21%	101.3	1%	18.7	0%	11.8	0.1%
Fannich	302.3	8%	1246.9	33%	99.9	3%	1170.9	31%	142.2	4%	0.7	0.0%
Foich	1705.4	43%	1110.1	28%	259.0	7%	27.1	1%	71.1	2%		0.0%
Gruinard, Achnegie and Fain	5104.0	50%	2015.0	20%	692.7	7%	313.6	3%	128.9	1%	25.5	0.3%
Heights of Kinlochewe	1,493.4	44%	974.0	28%	130.8	4%	101.8	3%	40.8	1%	0.2	0.0%
Inverbroom	2682.3	34%	3125.0	39%	119.2	1%	512.9	6%	271.1	3%	109.4	1.4%
Inverewe	417.4	50%	217.5	26%	6.7	1%	0.6	0%	2.6	0%	8.2	1.0%
Letterewe	6769.1	41%	3073.5	19%	1474.8	9%	333.0	2%	90.8	1%	17.4	0.1%
Lochluichart	2187.6	23%	5389.9	56%	269.9	3%	472.4	5%	71.2	1%	51.8	0.5%
Lochrosque and Kinlochewe	492.9	27%	331.9	18%	8.1	0%	240.2	13%	105.4	6%	120.8	6.7%
Longart (FLS)	146.1	9%	269.3	17%		0%	164.7	10%	91.8	6%	7.7	0.5%
Strathbran	1107.5	27%	1474.1	36%	1.8	0%	420.2	10%	154.3	4%	13.4	0.3%
Strathvaich and Strathrannoch	142.1	14%	759.9	75%		0%	10.7	1%	62.6	6%	2.2	0.2%
Total	38207.5	37%	30717.8	29%	6835.9	7%	6705.5	6%	2217.7	2%	533.85	0.5%

3.7.2 Habitat monitoring has been carried out by a number of estates on the two main habitat types (blanket bog and dwarf shrub heath) to identify grazing and trampling impacts by deer. The monitoring has been carried out in line with the best practice guidelines. It is anticipated that a further two rounds of habitat monitoring will be carried out during the lifetime of this plan.

3.7.3 Each member estate has identified a suitable number of habitat monitoring plot sites and agreed them with the Group. Overall, a minimum of 156 sites are monitored such that the two habitat types will be adequately represented in the sample sites.

Habitat Impact Assessment (HIA) has been carried out on all active estates in the West Ross Deer Management Group area since 2016. Some estates had carried out previous assessments, however in order for us to have a baseline assessment, only the most recent results have been included as part of this Plan.

Assessments have been carried out either by estate staff using the best practice methodology or by professional ecologists, some of whom have used the best practice methodology whilst others have used more detailed methodology. However, whichever methodology was used, all surveys recorded the number of quadrats which had been browsed and an average browsing for each quadrat recorded on the low to high scale.

All surveys included plots in both blanket bog and dwarf shrub heath habitats.

3.7.4 NatureScot provided a full day's training session in April 2013 for each person carrying out survey work to include:-

- guide to equipment required (early warning will be given of this to allow estates to get any equipment required);
- navigating to plot locations;
- confirming habitat types once at plot location;
- what to measure when you get there;
- analysing data.

A further training day will be provided as a refresher as and when required.

3.7.5/

3.7.5 The Group continues to encourage the membership and reinforce the need for Habitat Impact Assessments to be carried out.

3.7.6 The standard impact classes for habitat monitoring, as outlined in the Best Practice Guidelines, will be adopted by the Group. These are:-

Dwarf Shrub Heath

Browsing on long shoots of ling heather, if ling not present, then blueberry:-

- Light – less than 33% of long shoots in the sample browsed – (L);
- Moderate – 33%-66% long shoots browsed – (M);
- Heavy – greater than 66% long shoots browsed – (H).

Trampling-

If plots are >50m away from a supplementary feeding site, assess the amount of heather stem breakage as a result of trampling and assign as classes for the whole plot:-

- Light/moderate – inconspicuous – (L/M);
- Heavy – conspicuous – (H).

Blanket Bog

Browsing on long shoots of heather, if heather not present, then cowberry:-

- Light – less than 33% of long shoots in the sample browsed;
- Moderate – 33%-66% long shoots browsed;
- Heavy – greater than 66% long shoots browsed.

Trampling:-

- Determine whether bare soil with a deer hoof print is present or not.

3.7.7 **Browsing**

Blanket Bog

The tables below shows the results for browsing on Blanket Bog with the number of plots recorded in each impact category for Habitat Impact Assessment surveys carried out in 2016-2018 and 2020-2021. The results of this are also shown in Maps19 and 19A attached at Appendix 1.

2016-2018

Category	Number of Plots	%	
L	107	49.5%	91.2%
LM	48	22.2%	
M	42	19.4%	
MH	10	4.6%	7.9%
H	7	3.2%	
NA	2	0.9%	0.9%
Total	216	100.0%	

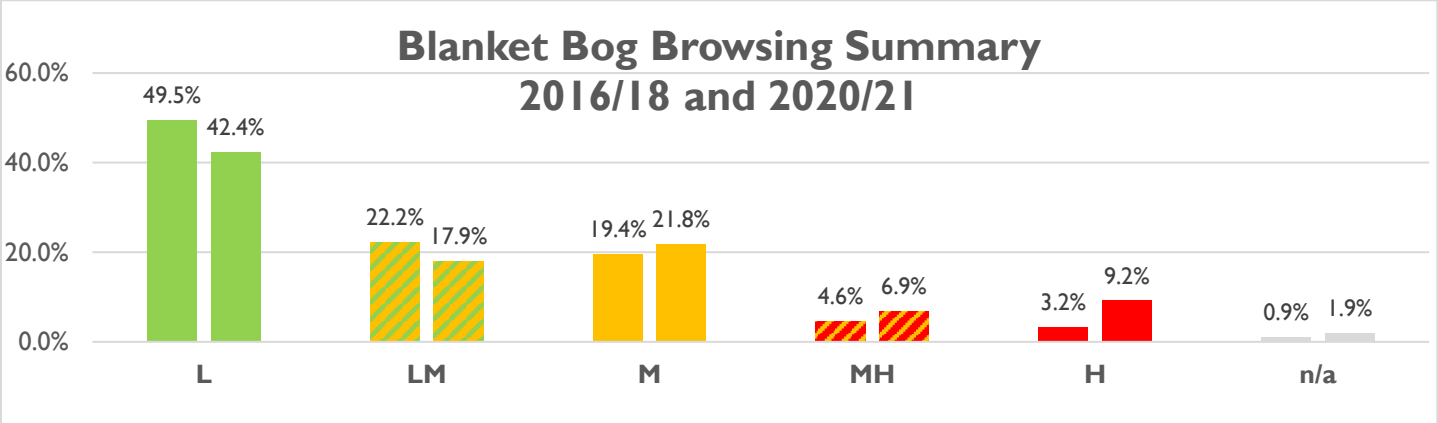
2020-2021

Category	Number of Plots	%	
L	111	42.4%	82.1%
LM	47	17.9%	
M	57	21.8%	
MH	18	6.9%	16.0%
H	24	9.2%	
n/a	5	1.9%	1.9%
Total	262	100.0%	

The results of the baseline survey (2016-2018) indicate that 197 Blanket Bog plots (91%) exhibit a light to moderate level of browsing, with only 9% moderate to heavy. In the 2020-2021 more plots were surveyed and although there are an increased number of Blanket Bog plots in the L-M category (215) which accounts for 82% of total plots.

The/

The graph below shows the number plots in each category between the 2 surveys. The first column shows the 2016-2018 survey and the second the 2020-2021 survey.



Dwarf Shrub Heath

The table below shows the results for Dwarf Shrub Heath with the number of plots recorded in each impact category for Habitat Impact Assessment surveys carried out in 2016-2018 and 2020-2021. The results of this are also shown in Maps 20 and 20A attached at Appendix 1.

2016-2018

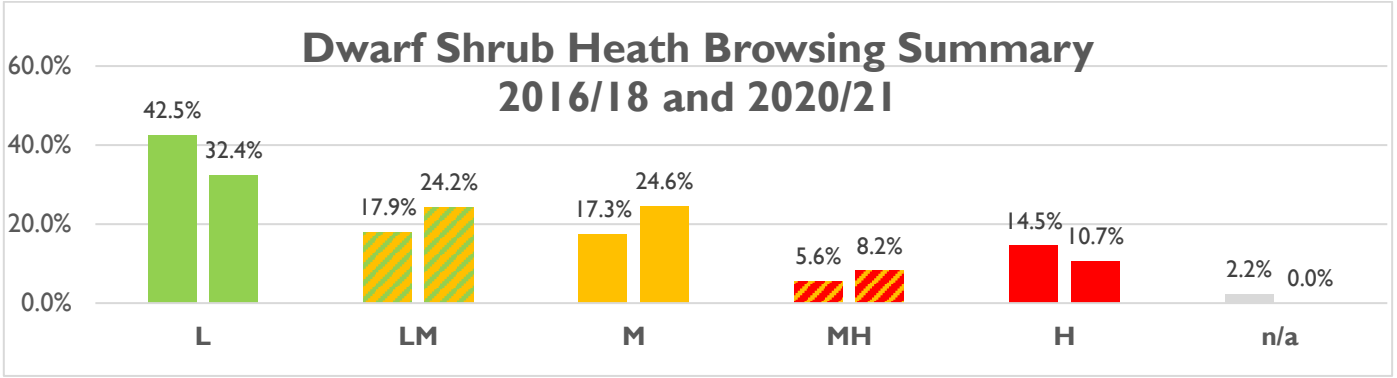
Category	Number of Plots	%	
L	76	42.5%	77.7%
LM	32	17.9%	
M	31	17.3%	
MH	10	5.6%	20.1%
H	26	14.5%	
NP	4	2.2%	2.2%
Total	179	100.0%	

2020-2021

Category	Number of Plots	%	
L	79	32.4%	81.1%
LM	59	24.2%	
M	60	24.6%	
MH	20	8.2%	18.9%
H	26	10.7%	
NP	0	0.0%	0.0%
Total	244	100.0%	

The results of the baseline survey (2016-2018) indicate that 139 Dwarf Shrub Heath plots (78%) exhibit a L – M level of browsing, with only 20% Medium to High and High. Dwarf Shrub Heath was not present in 2% of plots. In the 2020-2021 more plots were surveyed and there is an increased number of Dwarf Shrub Heath plots in the L-M category (198) which accounts for 81% of total plots.

The graph below shows the number plots in each category between the 2 surveys. The first column shows the 2016-2018 survey and the second the 2020-2021 survey.



3.7.8 Trampling

Blanket Bog

The table below shows the results for trampling on Blanket Bog with the number of plots recorded in each impact category for Habitat Impact Assessment surveys carried out in 2016-2018 and 2020-2021. The results of this are also shown in Maps 21 and 21A attached at Appendix 1.

2016-2018

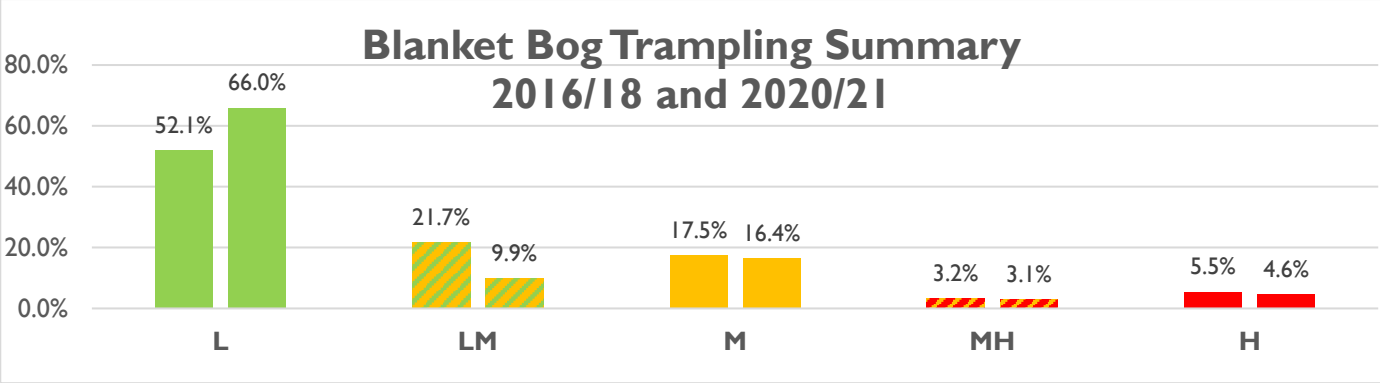
Category	Number of Plots	%	
L	113	52.1%	91.2%
LM	47	21.7%	
M	38	17.5%	
MH	7	3.2%	8.8%
H	12	5.5%	
Total	217	100.0%	

2020-2021

Category	Number of Plots	%	
L	173	66.0%	92.4%
LM	26	9.9%	
M	43	16.4%	
MH	8	3.1%	7.6%
H	12	4.6%	
Total	262	100.0%	

The results of the baseline survey indicate that 198 Blanket Bog plots (91%) exhibit a light to moderate level of trampling, with only 9% moderate to heavy. In the 2020-2021 more plots were surveyed and there are an increased number of Blanket Bog plots in the L-M category (242) which accounts for 92% of total plots.

The graph below shows the number plots in each category between the 2 surveys. The first column shows the 2016-2018 survey and the second the 2020-2021 survey.



Dwarf Shrub Heath

The table below shows the results for trampling on Dwarf Shrub Heath with the number of plots recorded in each impact category for Habitat Impact Assessment surveys carried out in 2016-2018 and 2020-2021. The results of this are also shown in Maps 22 and 22A attached at Appendix 1.

2016-2018

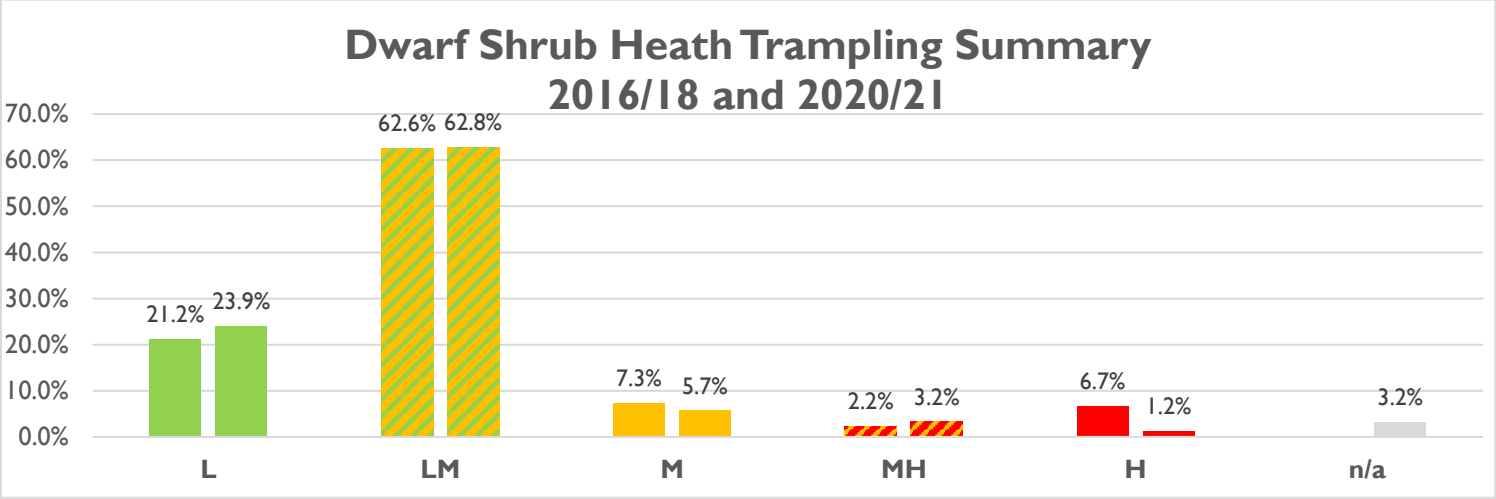
Category	Number of Plots	%	
L	38	21.2%	91.1%
LM	112	62.6%	
M	13	7.3%	
MH	4	2.2%	8.9%
H	12	6.7%	
Total	179	100.0%	

2020-2021

Category	Number of Plots	%	
L	59	23.9%	92.3%
LM	155	62.8%	
M	14	5.7%	
MH	8	3.2%	4.5%
H	3	1.2%	
n/a	8	3.2%	3.2%
Total	247	100.0%	

The results of the baseline survey indicate that 150 Dwarf Shrub Heath plots (91% exhibit a light to moderate level of trampling, with 9% moderate to high. In the 2020-2021 more plots were surveyed and there are an increased number of Dwarf Shrub Heath plots in the L-M category (228) which accounts for 92% of total plots.

The graph below shows the number plots in each category between the 2 surveys. The first column shows the 2016-2018 survey and the second the 2020-2021 survey.



3.7.9 Habitat targets of 85% being in light to moderate categories have been agreed over all of the survey locations to take into account the natural variation in these due to landform/feeding areas. It is understood that some areas will have a higher impact than others, which is why targets will be set and monitored on a Group-wide basis rather than for individual estates.

3.7.10 Most members have carried out habitat monitoring surveys at three-year intervals and monitoring data will be fed back to the DMG for consideration at the AGM. It is acknowledged that the Forestry Commission use different methods to monitor their habitats.

3.7.11

3.7.11 The Group commits to discussing impact data, cull targets, deer population and the DMP will be revised as appropriate.

3.8 Historic and Cultural Features

The West Ross Deer Management Group area is very sparsely populated and as a result does not have a large number of historical features of national or regional importance. There are 12 listed buildings, three Scheduled Ancient Monuments and one Garden and Designed Landscape designation within the area. Map 12 shows the distribution of listed buildings, Schedule Ancient Monuments and Garden and Designed Landscapes along with the Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record.

Listed Building	Category
Abhainn Cuileig, Footbridge	B
Achnasheen, Ledgowan Bridge	B
Corrieshalloch Gorge, Suspension Footbridge	B
Dundonnell House	B
Dundonnell House, Garden Ballroom	B
Dundonnell House, Garden Cottage	C
Dundonnell House, Gardens	B
Letterewe House	C
Letterewe House, Furnace	C
Letterewe House, Steading	C
Letterewe House, Watch House	B
Lochrosque Lodge, Old Lodge	C

Scheduled Monument	Status
Fasagh Ironworks, Loch Maree	Scheduled
Dun an Ruigh Ruadh, Broch, Loch Broom	Scheduled
Dun Lagaidh, Fort and Broch, Loch Broom	Scheduled

Gardens and Designed Landscapes	Designated
Dundonnell	1987

Group members will be encouraged to ensure that historic sites are preserved and damages avoided. Site records for all historic sites can be accessed at https://canmore.org.uk. Highland Council Historic Environment Record can be accessed via http://her.highland.gov.uk.

3.9 Fencing in the Landscape

3.9.1 Deer fencing, when properly planned for, constructed and maintained, can be an effective way of controlling deer to allow different land-uses to co-exist in close proximity, and to protect public safety. Deer fencing can impact on wider habitat management as well as the landscape and public access.

3.9.2 The Wild Deer Best Practice Guidance for Scotland contains a section on fencing to provide deer managers with key points to consider before, during and after the erection of deer fencing.

3.10 Public Access

3.10.1 The WRDMG area is popular with walkers. With 18 Munros concentrated around Fisherfield, The Fannichs and An Teallach, there are often walkers to be seen "bagging" the highest peaks.

3.10.2/

3.10.2 Map 13 shows key walked routes and Munros. The Group welcomes responsible outdoor access and promotes the Outdoor Access Code produced by NatureScot).

3.10.3 The Group will encourage members to upload information to the NatureScot Outdoor Access Code website (www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/hftsh). The Group will monitor this site to identify Group members using this service.

3.10.4 All Group members responded to a detailed questionnaire on public access on the use made of estate paths, the availability of paths to give access to high ground and the general consensus was that paths are a benefit to members. Group members also indicated that path reinstatement, signage, footbridges, steps and bridges may help by encouraging walkers to use the paths and cause as little disturbance to wildlife as possible. It is generally acknowledged that irresponsible access still causes problems for the men on the ground through herd disturbance, lost stalking days, erosion, gates being left open, etc. Therefore, the Group will continue to press for responsible access.

4. WEST ROSS DEER POPULATION

4.1 Deer Count Figures

4.1.1 The principal deer species in the area is Red deer. Roe deer occupy woodland margins but are mainly confined to lower elevations. Sika deer are known to be resident between Lochluichart and Achnasheen and occasional visitors elsewhere.

4.1.2 Deer counts have not been undertaken every year by all of the estates, but many have identified this as a priority. An NatureScot Deer census was undertaken for the WRDMG in March 2009 by the Deer Commission for Scotland.

A/

A further helicopter count was undertaken by NatureScot in spring 2018. The tables below show the figures for both counts by estate.

	2009						2018				
PROPERTY	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Uncl	Total	Density	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total	Density
Cabuile, Bruachaig and Fada	603	0	0	2246	2,849	**19.0**	342	763	240	1,345	**9.0**
Dundonnell	234	0	0	596	830	**6.2**	201	285	85	571	**4.2**
Eilean Darach, Little Gruinard and Larachantivore	267	547	156	211	1181	**10.8**	186	299	100	585	**5.3**
Fannich	150	0	0	488	638	**17.0**	66	167	38	271	**7.2**
Foich	212	0	0	517	729	**18.5**	178	285	91	554	**14.0**
Gruinard, Achnegie and Fain	283	82	25	1087	1477	**14.6**	276	759	271	1306	**12.9**
Heights of Kinlochewe	157	0	0	129	286	**8.0**	263	165	68	496	**14.0**
Inverbroom	146	0	0	525	671	**8.4**	76	338	89	503	**6.3**
Inverewe	43	0	0	40	83	**9.9**	65	9	6	80	**9.5**
Letterewe	425	309	80	861	1675	**10.1**	748	1002	314	2064	**12.5**
Lochluichart	410	0	0	731	1141	**11.9**	288	387	115	790	**8.2**
Lochrosque and Kinlochewe	25	0	0	88	113	**6.2**	18	7	2	27	**1.5**
Longart (FLS)	7	0	0	0	7	**0.4**					**0.0**
Strathbran	80	0	0	227	307	**7.6**	83	99	19	201	**12.6**
Strathvaich and Strathrannoch	127	0	0	37	164	**16.2**	80	10	5	95	**2.3**
Non Members	155	24	4	194	377		76	123	47	246	
Total	3324	962	265	7977	12528	12.0	2946	4698	1490	9134	8.7

4.1.3 Maps 14, 15 and 16 show the 2009 deer count and Map 17 deer densities for each estate per km². Maps 14A, 15A and 16A show the 2018 deer count and Map 17A deer densities for each estate per km².

4.1.4 It is important to recognise that these figures are a snapshot of what was happening at the time of the count. There will be significant movement of animals between estates on a regular basis. Ongoing count figures will provide a better indication of deer numbers over time. To assist this, the Group is in the process of preparing and consulting on a simple Population Model (4.2 below).

4.1.5 The Group understands the importance of coordinated and Group-wide deer count data and appreciates the importance in terms of modelling and managing the deer population. The Group has agreed the importance of annual foot counts and has allocated "count coordinators" to arrange a comprehensive 2019 foot count. This information will be reviewed at the Group meetings and fed into the Population Model.

4.2 **Population Model**

4.2.1 The group has developed a population model using the NatureScot guidance. Discussion and count information has been collected in order to produce a realistic population model that is based on current data and local conditions and can help the group with the long term cull targets.

4.2.2 The NatureScot population density model has been used to project forward from the 2018 count.

4.2.3 The following assumptions are made when using this model:-

- 2% stag mortality each year;
- 2% hind mortality each year;
- 6% calf mortality each year;
- 1 to 1 hind/stag calf ratio;
- No/

- No immigration/emigration;
- There is no allowance for local conditions within this model and this needs to be discussed further.

4.3 Population Model Going Forward

A population model has been prepared using the 2018 NatureScot spring count projected forward to 2027.

This is based on maintaining the density across the whole area of 8.8 deer per km² with a slow reduction in the stag:hind ratio. As the count numbers for the Group in the spring of 2018 were 17% lower than they were in 2009, it is felt that maintaining the 2018 spring population would be a good place to start for the forward model. The management area for the population model includes areas that are fenced off as we do not have full data of all fenced off areas across the whole Group and so it has been decided to use the whole area as the management area, giving a target density of 8.8 deer per km².

Following the spring count of 2018, there was a particularly harsh spell of weather and mortality was considered to be particularly high. This has been estimated at 16% for stags and hinds and 36% for calves. The calving rate for 2018 has also been based on a sample summer count done by a number of the estates.

From the population model, this gives an annual culling level for the next five years of 232 stags, 267 hinds and 102 calves. This has then been split between each of the estates based on their five-year average.

West Ross Deer Management Group

Population Model 2019 - 2027

Target Density	8.8
Management Area (Ha)	104500

Target Spring Population	**9144**

	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Stag:Hind Ratio	Total	Density
Spring Population 2018	2946	4698	1490	1.59	9134	8.74

Population Model	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Stag: Hind Ratio	Total	Density
2018 Spring Population	2946	4698	1490	1.59	9134	8.69
2018 Summer Population	3691	5443	1524		10658	
2018/19 Cull ACTUAL	***385***	***250***	***81***		***716***	
2018 Mortality	221	109	91		422	
2019 Spring Population	3085	5084	1352	1.65	9520	9.05
2019 Summer Population	3760	5760	1670		11191	
2019/20 Cull ACTUAL	***312***	***241***	***68***		***621***	
2019 Mortality	226	115	100		441	
2020 Spring Population	3223	5404	1513	1.68	10140	9.64
2020 Summer Population	3979	6160	1725		11864	
2020/21 Cull ACTUAL	***305***	***644***	***256***		***1205***	
2020 Mortality	239	123	103		465	
2021 Spring Population	3435	5393	936	1.57	9764	9.29

2021Summer Population	3903	5861	1641		11405	
2021/22 Cull ACTUAL	***413***	***530***	***179***		***1122***	
2021 Mortality	234	117	98		450	
2022 Spring Population	3256	5214	1251	1.60	9721	9.24
2022 Summer Population	3882	5839	1635		11356	
2022/23 Cull ACTUAL	***476***	***703***	***227***		***1406***	
2022 Mortality	233	117	98		448	
2023 Spring Population	3173	5019	1305	1.58	9497	9.03
2023 Summer Population	3825	5672	1588		11085	
2023/24 Cull ACTUAL	***473***	***844***	***322***		***1639***	
2023 Mortality	190	100	78		369	
2024 Spring Population	3162	4728	1324	1.50	9213	8.76
2024 Summer Population	3824	5389	1509		10722	
2024/25 Cull	***417***	***876***	***209***		***1502***	
2024 Mortality	190	95	79		364	
2025 Spring Population	3217	4419	1237	1.37	8873	8.44
2025 Summer Population	3835	5038	1411		10284	
2025/26 Cull	***417***	***876***	***209***		***1502***	
2025 Mortality	193	88	74		356	
2026 Spring Population	3225	4074	1141	1.26	8440	8.03
2026 Summer Population	3795	4644	1300		9740	
2026/27 Cull	***417***	***876***	***209***		***1502***	
2026 Mortality	194	81	68		343	
2027 Spring Population	3185	3687	1032	1.16	7904	7.52
2027 Summer Population	3701	4204	1177		9082	

West Ross Deer Management Group

Cull Targets 2025-2030

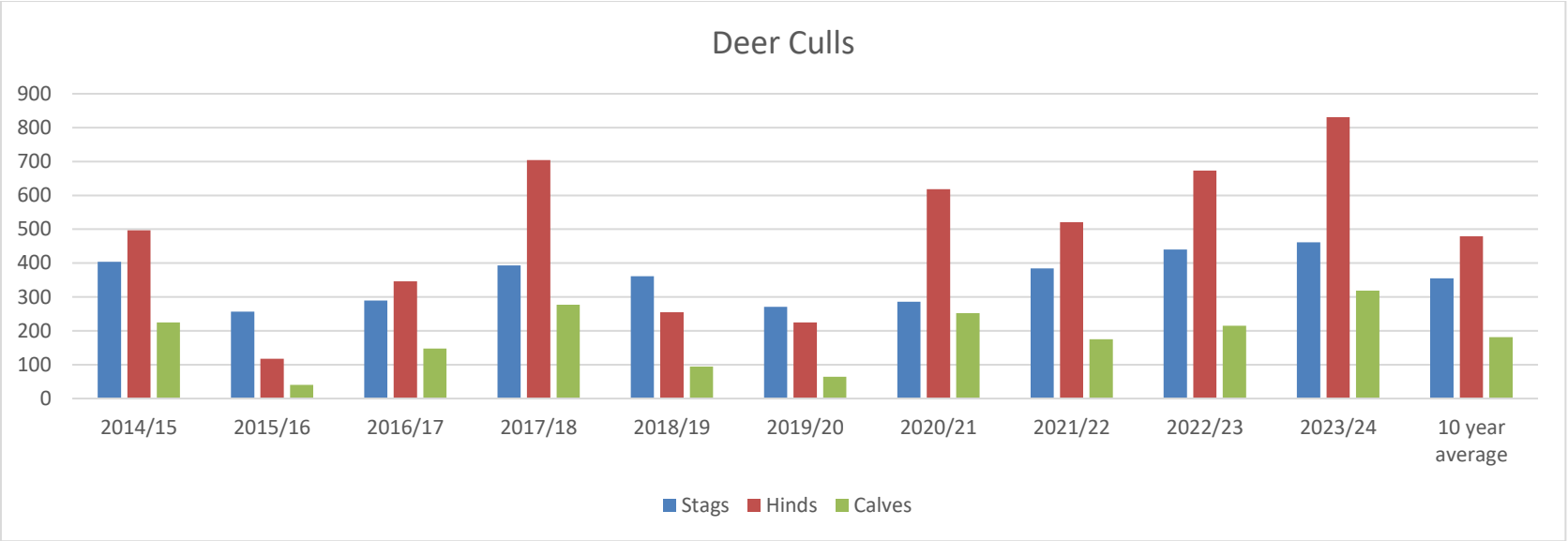
	Stags		Hinds		Calves	
Estate	5 year average	**Stags Target**	5 year average	**Hinds Target**	5 year average	**CalvesTarget**
Dundonnell	35	**37**	51	**75**	20	**18**
Cabuie, Bruachaig and Fada	44	**46**	140	**207**	34	**30**
Corriemoillie (non members)	12	**12**	8	**11**	4	**4**
Eilean Darach, Little Gruinard and Larachantivore	35	**37**	51	**76**	32	**28**
Fannich	26	**27**	29	**43**	10	**9**
Foich and Strone	31	**33**	53	**78**	19	**17**
Gruinard	26	**28**	35	**52**	4	**4**
Heights of Kinlochewe	25	**27**	17	**25**	6	**5**
Inverbroom	14	**15**	27	**41**	13	**11**
Inverewe	2	**2**	3	**4**	1	**1**
Kinlochewe	11	**12**	18	**26**	6	**5**
Letterewe	42	**45**	72	**107**	19	**17**
Lochluichart	48	**50**	59	**88**	28	**24**
Lochrosque and Kinlochewe	1	**1**	0	**0**	0	**0**
Strathbran	20	**21**	11	**16**	5	**4**
Strathvaich	3	**3**	2	**4**	1	**1**
Tournaig (non members)		**0**		**0**		**0**
Forest Enterprise	20	**22**	16	**24**	35	**31**
Totals	395	**417**	592	**876**	237	**209**

The model will be kept under review and any adjustments will be made each year based on estimated mortality rates and calving rates from foot counts. The population model will also be reviewed in light of the data collected for habitat monitoring and the target population adjusted accordingly to ensure that the habitat impact assessment targets have been met.

4.4 Deer Culls

4.4.1 Red deer cull figures recorded in season over the last 10 years for the group area are as follows, full figures are available in Appendix V.

	Stags	Hinds	Calves
2014/15	404	497	225
2015/16	257	117	40
2016/17	289	346	148
2017/18	393	704	277
2018/19	361	255	94
2019/20	271	225	64
2020/21	286	618	252
2021/22	384	521	175
2022/23	440	673	215
2023/24	461	831	319
10 year average	355	479	181



4.4.2 It should be noted that there have been some boundary changes within the group since these figures were submitted and so future cull figures may not be directly comparable with previous data.

4.4.3 It is acknowledged that crofters and occupiers of agricultural land may have rights to take deer to protect crops and in-bye improved pasture. It will be necessary, for the sake of completeness, to establish how many deer have been taken.

4.4.4 As more data is collected and analysed, the intention is to collate overall cull numbers and also to focus on the use and application of the data.

4.5/

4.5 Deer Vehicle Collisions (DVCs)

4.5.1 It is estimated that there are more than 10,000 deer-related motor vehicle accidents every year in Scotland, on average causing about 70 serious human injuries. The economic value of these accidents is £5 million.

4.5.2 Scottish Natural Heritage manage the Deer Vehicle Collision Project which looks to assess the scale and distribution of DVCs across the country and have provided data for the WRDMG area.

	Road						
YEAR	Unknown	A832	A832 /A890	A835	A890	A896	Total
2005		5	1	64	1		71
2006		6	1	26			33
2007		2		19			21
2008	2	1		16			19
2009				23			23
2010		1		29			30
2011		2		4			6
2012				1	1		2
2013		3		7		1	11
2014		1		2			3
2015	1	2		7			10
2016	2			5	1		8
2017	2	2		5			9
2018	2	1					3
Total	9	26	2	208	3	1	249

4.5.3 Information for the Group area provided by NatureScot is listed in the table above.

4.5.4/

4.5.4 Members will be encouraged to report DVCs on the http://www.deercollisions.co.uk website, as well as reporting to the DMG.

4.5.5 Map 18 shows the distribution of DVCs.

4.5.6 Members directly impacted by DVCs are encouraged to liaise with the local authority and the Group to identify actions to reduce or mitigate DVCs.

4.6 Deer Welfare

4.6.1 The Group will continue to encourage members to provide appropriate data on mortality, recruitment and larder weights and to review the data on a Group basis and where appropriate, feed into the deer management planning process.

4.6.2 The Group encourages all members to have regard for the welfare of their deer population in terms of the provision of food and shelter and as a Group, to incorporate deer welfare as an issue within the planning process and to respond to any mortality event.

4.7 Non-Native Species

4.7.1 The Group will encourage members to report Muntjac sightings to NatureScot.

4.7.2 The Group acknowledges that historically no attempt has been made to count the feral goat population within the Group area. It has been established that feral goats are present on five estates and the population within the Group area at May 2017 is estimated at around 200-210 animals. The Group recognises that feral goats do have an impact on the habitat and that regular counts should be undertaken and their numbers and impact should be controlled.

4.7.3 It has been established that there are no known sightings of feral pigs/wild boar or fallow deer on any of the Group properties.

4.7.4/

4.7.4 However, it is agreed that Sika deer are widespread within the Group area. Only three members count/monitor the Sika population. It is acknowledged that within the Group, some members seek to cull Sika deer whilst others see them as a sporting asset and therefore the policy for the control of Sika deer will vary from estate to estate.

The Group understands that it would be useful to collect count data for Sika deer, but recognises the practical difficulties in counting them.

4.7.5 The Group reminds members that introducing any species of deer outwith their natural habitat range may be illegal.

5. DEER MANAGEMENT AND THE ECONOMY

5.1 Economic Benefit of Deer Management

The management of wild deer contributes significantly to the economy of rural Scotland. It provides all year round jobs in fragile and remote areas through sporting shooting and managing deer herds. The sporting shoots bring visitors to the area who require accommodation and other service facilities. The venison produced is exported.

5.1.1 The PACEC study, published in February 2016, estimated the value of value of deer sporting activity to the Scottish economy to be £140.8 million per annum, supporting the equivalent of 2,520 full-time jobs.

If and when the PACEC survey information at a local level becomes available, this will be distributed within the Group and included within the DMP.

5.1.2 Most of the estates in the group list stalking as part of their key activities. On some, the stalking is let and whilst others provide it for family and friends only.

5.1.3/

5.1.3 A 10-year average cull of 355 stags, giving a sporting stag value for the Group area of approximately £175,000 per annum.

5.1.4 Based on the cull figures, it is estimated that the value of venison produced within the area amounts to £34,510 (based on £1/per kg and average carcass size of 40 kg, with 85% being sold). Venison, not used for private consumption, is sold mostly through local game dealers and onto restaurants and retailers.

5.1.5 Members will be encouraged to add value to products from deer management via Scottish Quality Wild Venison, etc, and this will be reviewed by the Group periodically.

5.1.6 Wild deer are also an important species for wildlife tourism in Scotland, Red deer stags in particular are considered to be "iconic" of the Scottish Highlands. The Group will consider and discuss any collaborative opportunities that arise to provide wildlife tourism in the area.

5.1.7 Members will be encouraged to use the PACEC information to help identify further opportunities to increase and improve revenue for the sector.

5.2 **Employment**

5.2.1 There are currently over 18 full and part time jobs provided within the area, that are either fully or partially involved in deer management. This does not include estate staff dealing with management, accommodation and other ancillary services. There is also a positive impact of stalking visitors to the area on local services and facilities.

5.2.2 The Group will continue to encourage members to ensure that skill levels applicable to the Deer Management Group are maintained and will endeavour to keep an up-to-date record for the Deer Management Group. Information on skills and competence will be fed to NatureScot.

5.2.3/

5.2.3 The Group has appointed one of the Group stalkers to help identify suitable training and to liaise with all members of staff within the Group with a view to identifying training needs (CPD) and availability.

5.2.4 The Group accepts the minimum level of competence should be DMQ1 for those managing deer actively.

5.3 Larder Services, Infrastructure and Marketing

5.3.1 Most properties within the group have their own larder facilities and some larder sharing already goes on. Three properties are members of the SQWV scheme. There may be an opportunity for additional larder/infrastructure sharing. This will be encouraged and discussed further within the group.

5.3.2 Whilst there is no compulsion to join, the DMG will encourage its member estates to consider joining the SQWV Assurance Scheme. This Scheme is the result of an 18-month development project commissioned by Forest Enterprise in association with the Association of Deer Management Groups, the Scottish Association of Game Dealers and Processors and the Scottish Gamekeepers Association. It represents the first occasion on which the public and private sectors of the Scottish wild venison sector have worked together on an initiative which encompasses the entire industry.

The SQWV Scheme's aims are to:-

- respond proactively to consumers about the way wild venison is produced;
- improve food safety and meet the requirements of the Food Safety Act 1990;
- address environmental and animal welfare responsibilities.

Furthermore, the scheme is a reaction to the significant negative effect which Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) has had on the industry.

5.3.3/

5.3.3 Members will be encouraged to add value to products from deer management via Scottish Quality Wild Venison, etc, and this will be reviewed by the Group periodically.

5.4 Economic Costs of Deer Management

5.4.1 Alongside the economic benefits of deer management, there will be ongoing costs. The total expenditure on deer management in Scotland in 2013/14 according to the PACEC Study respondents was £43.1 million; £7.7 million capital expenditure, £15.2 million on staff and £20.2 million other operational expenditure.

5.4.2 There is no accurate data for the economic cost of providing deer management within the group. Estate costs including staff, property maintenance and infrastructure costs are likely to be spread across a number of enterprises. Some properties may run as a profitable business, whereas others accept the cost of deer management as part of the necessary ongoing costs of maintaining their estates and the associated habitats. This will vary so much between properties and that there is no model to fit all.

5.4.3 There are costs associated with deer damage within commercial forestry and agricultural crops, however, the Group does not have information on these. Any relevant statistics which come to light during the period of the Plan will be considered and discussed.

5.4.4 If and when the PACEC survey information becomes available at a local level, this will be distributed within the Group and included within the DMP.

5.4.5 Further information on each estate is found in Appendix II.

6./

6. PUBLIC HEALTH & WELLBEING

6.1 Bio-Security Measures

6.1.1 Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a highly infectious disease which has devastating effects on many populations of wild and farmed deer. At present it is restricted to the USA and Canada.

6.1.2 A leaflet produced by BASC has been circulated to all group members to raise awareness and limit the spread of CWD. Copies of the leaflet should be given to guests, in particular those form North America. See Appendix VI.

6.2 Lyme's Disease

6.2.1 Lyme's disease, or Lyme Borreliosis, is a bacterial infection spread to humans by infected ticks. Ticks that carry the bacteria responsible for Lyme's disease are found throughout the UK and in other parts of Europe and North America.

6.2.2 Lyme's disease can often be treated effectively if it's detected early on, but if it's not treated or treatment is delayed, there's a risk of developing severe and long-lasting symptoms.

6.2.3 A leaflet has been circulated to all group members (Appendix VII). Individual landowners should ensure that their staff and guests are aware of the symptoms of Lyme's disease and what to do if they think they have been infected.

6.3 Other Notifiable Diseases

The Group continues to encourage all members and their staff to be familiar with all relevant notifiable diseases and to ensure that each member has a system for recording.

6.4/

6.4 **Food Safety**

The Group continues to encourage all Group members to join the Scottish Quality Wild Venison organisation and to ensure that all persons actively involved in deer management have a DMQ 1 qualification. The training and qualification status will be reviewed periodically.

7. MONITOR AND REVIEW PROGRESS OF DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN

7.1 The annual DMG Meetings will provide an opportunity to discuss and review the DMP. Results from deer counts and deer cull data can be compared in order to highlight any potential problem areas.

7.2 The stalkers also get together on a regular basis to discuss any issues that arise within the Group area.

7.3 In addition to record keeping, regular discussion between neighbouring estates and estate stalkers will help determine the trends with deer. Unacceptable impacts may trigger an increased cull for the following year, targeting the areas where the impacts are greatest. Culls will be addressed, if necessary, through increased effort and a formal review of the DMP will be undertaken at year five.

7.4 **Record Keeping**

7.4.1 Records will be kept and shared with the Group for the following:-

- culled deer;
- deer counts;
- cull targets;
- aspirational deer densities;
- habitat monitoring.

7.4.2/

7.4.2 These records will be maintained by estate stalkers/managers and cull data will be supplied to NatureScot annually as requested.

8. COMMUNICATION POLICY/ACTIONS

8.1 The Group has its DMP on its website –http://wrossdmg.deer-management.co.uk - together with Minutes of the Group AGM. As the DMP is revised, the revised DMP will be uploaded. Minutes of the Group's meetings and AGM are distributed to all attendees.

8.2 Stakeholders such as local Community Council leaders, NatureScot, the Police, etc, will to be invited to AGM.

8.3 The Group will consult on the Deer Management Plan as required.

8.4 Details of estate contacts will be provided to the fire service to provide assistance with hill or woodland fires.

8.5 The Group continues to support and promote wider opportunities for further education on deer.

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

i) A Highland Deer Herd and its Habitat - Milner, Alexander, Griffin
ii) NatureScot - Sitelink for Designated sites
iii) East Sutherland Deer Management Plan - Professor Rory Putman
iv) Aberuchill Deer Management Plan – Bowlts
v) Fannich Hills SSSI/SAC Upland Habitat Management Plan – Professor Rory Putman
vi) NatureScot Best Practice Guidelines – Habitat Impact Assessment
vii) FCS online data download
viii) Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record
ix) Historic Scotland online data download

APPENDIX I

MAPS

APPENDIX II

ESTATE DETAILS

APPENDIX III

CURRENT VERSION
DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN
ACTION PLAN

APPENDIX IV

WOODLAND CREATION POTENTIAL STUDY

APPENDIX V

DEER CULL FIGURES

APPENDIX VI

CWD LEAFLET

APPENDIX VII

LYME'S DISEASE LEAFLET