

# Ardnamurchan Deer Management Group Meeting

30 April 2018

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## *Minutes of Meeting*

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**In Attendance:** Graeme Taylor (GT), Scottish National Heritage; Angie Campbell (AC), Police Scotland; Max Hartley (MH), Shielbridge; Doug MacDonald, Shielbridge; William Kelly, Ardnamurchan Estates (AE); Donald Houston, Ardnamurchan Estates; Steven Grant, West Highland Hunting; Niall Rowantree, West Highland Hunting (NAR); Jim Jackson RSPB Scotland; Duncan McLean, Beinn Bhreac; Cathy Mayne (CM), Mountain Environment Services.

**Apologies:** Charlie McQueen (CMcQ), Beinn Bhreac

Meeting was chaired by Max Hartley.

**Secretary and Vice-Chair roles.** NAR unable to continue as Secretary due to work commitments. Cathy Mayne from Mountain Environment Services proposed to be taken on as Secretary to provide all secretariat functions as well as advice and support with the on-going DMG assessments by SNH (CM formerly employed by SNH). Meeting approved this and accepted that the remuneration this requires will need funding by DMG members. NAR moves to role of Vice-Chair, in support of MH in his role as Chair given his normal residence is in England.

**DMG membership fees.** These to be based on land holding and will be charged at an appropriate level to provide enough funds for secretariat. **CM to action.**

**Bank account.** The group requires a bank account, previously having used AE to provide this service. Ideally a bank with on-line banking and branches in the south-east of England as well as here. 2 signatories will be required, Max and one other, but at least 3 should be available to be used (MH, NAR, CMcQ). **CM to action.**

**Financial support from SNH for HIA training and support.** GT to check whether the £1800 for HIA training and support from SNH is still available to the group. **GT already actioned – it is available and is being routed at present via AE account, pending opening of group bank account.** Crofters west of Kilchoan have expressed in interest in receiving HIA training and there is plenty of scope to offer support to other members already undertaking HIA work. The funds will also cover collation of the data, analysis and mapping (CM to provide).

**HIA data collation.** CMcQ has collated the HIA data available and is at Beinn Bhreac 11-17 May. **CM to contact and arrange to meet.**

**Sonachan landowners.** New landowners of Sonachan have reportedly been seen on site with firearms but have shown no interest in being part of the group. It appears to be used as a weekend base for a group of businessmen from Glasgow. Police Scotland are currently looking to check firearms licences. **Action – Angie to report back later in 2018 when checks done. GT to check cull returns for all landowners, including those west of Kilchoan (done).**

## Deer Management Plan Action Points

**DMP review sub-group.** This not yet formalised but will be an on-going part of the Secretary's role, bringing all necessary revisions to each meeting, as required.

**Audit of deer managers' qualifications.** The records are with NAR but all currently in the DMG and involved in deer management hold DSC 2. NAR reported that DSC 1 and DSC 2 courses can be

provided in February 2019, for any that wish to take up the offer. On-going record keeping of this type must be mindful of the new Data Protection Act requirements. **CM to seek appropriate permissions to retain records. NAR to transfer records to CM.**

**Deer count.** AE has counted all their ground, west of Kilchoan has also been counted; therefore all ground between the lighthouse and Shielbridge has been counted. Others yet to carry out counts.

Count figures – AE 462 stags, 687 hinds; W Kilchoan 65 stags, 140 hinds, 49 calves.

Concerns about the latest SNH count figures, which given densities that are based on inaccurate figures for the land available to deer. The group requested that this be amended by SNH. **GT to action and bring new figures to next meeting.**

**Sub-group for woodland count techniques.** Woodland counts. On AE thermal imaging used to count woodland and proving very successful with higher numbers than expected; these are included in the figure given. Gorteneorn not yet counted in this way. Others with extensive woodland are encouraged to invest in this kind of equipment given the improvement in counting.

**Habitat Impact Assessment, including woodland.** HIA work of open ground habitats and woodland being carried out on AE in 2018, repeating open ground plots from 2017 and putting in new woodland plots (x30). Shielbridge to repeat open ground plots done in 2017 during the 2018 season and consider installation of woodland plots (with potential support through the HIA funding from SNH). West of Kilchoan keen for training, which should lead to the establishment of an appropriate network of plots. **CM to arrange training and support.**

SNH have contracted more detailed HIA work to inform their designated sites at Sunart SSSI/SAC (woodland, upland assemblage, heaths, saltmarsh) and Kentra (blanket bog, woodland, saltmarsh). Alastiar Headley will start work on woodland sites in early May – AE requests that he contact them prior to starting – **GT to provide contact details and also prompt liaison with Matt Wilson re WTE nest locations.** A draft form of the report will come to the DMG later in the year with 2-3 weeks time available for comments. This will be followed by a final draft. Any issues raised will then potentially require action, which could include the use of statutory instruments. The group was encouraged to pre-empt this possibility by accessing agri-environment and forestry schemes prior to the completion of the report.

#### **Sub-group for population models**

NAR has been custodian of the population model, which was used to set the cull targets for 2017/18. Cull targets were exceeded and the model now needs to be updated. This will then be used to set the targets for 2018/19 which will be broken down into 3 or 4 discrete groups, reflecting landowner objectives, underlying geology, designated sites and deer movements. **NAR to action and provide next meeting with details and new cull targets for 2018/19.**

#### **Minimising stag mortality**

Mortality not formally captured but reduced in west by adoption of a model whereby some of the crofters west of Kilchoan (those with a vested interest) now see stags as a potential resource rather than just a pest. Deer are being fed in Kilchoan village, which potentially increases conflict. **Action??**

#### **Management of high and very high impact areas of NWSS**

Map of high and very high impact areas to be produced in conjunction with new and proposed native woodlands to see how close to the 60% target the group is. **CM to action.**

#### **Peatland restoration**

Kentra has a peatland restoration feasibility study, commissioned by SNH. This outlines actions possible for Kentra, of which clearing up debris from the clay pigeon shoot was highlighted as the most pressing and useful potential action. **CM to retrieve and bring to next meeting/discuss with**

**Shielbridge.** AE to also consider what, if any, actions are appropriate. Others likewise. Ditch filling not an action that is viewed positively by AE, but other actions may be seen to contribute to the target. **Action – all to consider if there are any potential gains for peatland through proactive management (including herbivore reductions).**

### **Muirburn and fire plans**

Very little deliberate burning (limitation on timing not helpful in this part of the world, where later dates might be more appropriate) but wildfire is a challenge and is made more serious where vegetation is allowed to become more rank. All fires should be documented annually. **CM to collate and consider development of a simple fire plan. All – report all fires to Secretary, whether deliberate or not.**

### **Review of extraction techniques and access routes**

Many routes have been successfully used for decades but, in some places, contractors have very quickly caused considerable damage. This has been true for AE and Gorteneorn. Annual review of all problem areas and potential solutions, to ensure that use is maintained at a sustainable level. Trials bikes are also occasionally observed in the area, likely to be coming from residents of Kinlochleven. Where this has been seen, information should be brought to the group and documented. **Actions – all to report problem areas and observed illegal activity to Secretary and, if appropriate, Police Scotland.**

### **Sika and feral pig report**

There are sika present on the peninsula in a deer farm (approximately 20) and there are a couple in Gorteneorn. One has also been shot at Glenmore. Members are strongly encouraged to shoot and remove these in season or, when on enclosed (stock fence) agricultural land or in woodland, at any time of year (males).

Feral pigs are present at Fassifern, so not far away from the DMG area and likely to spread this way. Members to report any feral pigs seen and/or shot. Goats are present at Laga, the RSPB ground and at Glen Tarbert. The choice to keep them or not rests with individual landowners but they must be managed in the same active way as deer.

### **Compile and review guidance on Lyme Disease**

AE reports additional threats from ticks on top of Lyme disease, with one of their employees suffering from 3 different tick-borne diseases, Lyme, Rocky Mountain fever and one other. This requires a much longer course of antibiotics than the standard treatment for Lyme and all group members should bear this in mind. **CM to develop a generic information card for group members and their clients.**

### **Audit of deer-related wildlife tourism activities**

A number of tour groups are regularly coming to the peninsula, mostly via the Mull ferry to Kilchoan (and therefore to AE rather than other group members) and showing various wildlife to their clients, including deer. Parking and obstruction by these groups and their vehicles, as well as disturbance, is a potentially negative issue. There are challenges around parking and potential interactions with stalking activity. Those businesses that are using the resource should be asked to make a contribution. **Actions – all to forward information on which groups are seen to Secretary; CM to follow up with requests for liaison and contribution.**

### **Deer welfare following 2017/18 winter**

Mortality not quite as severe as anticipated in some places and more so in others, but everywhere above the norm. Mortality counts are very valuable to input into the population model to refine cull targets for coming year. **Action – all to give NAR mortality estimates for their ground.**

RTAs – none reported recently to Police. Angie to report any that do come to light.

Poaching. Lots of resources required for a prosecution but a Police visit may act as a deterrent. All to be vigilant and provide Police Scotland with any information received about potential illegal activity, including firearms. The peninsula is relatively easy to monitor, with only 2 roads in and out. Possibility of mounting roadside cameras to capture information about potential poachers, though data protection is an issue. **Angie to discuss again with the Inspector – could help reduce crime overall.**

## AOCB

Website. This needs to be hosted somewhere – possibly ADMG but also possibly independently – and needs to be such that it is easily updated and not burdensome to do. Is Hillphones still working? What other options are available for public information about stalking activity? **CM to investigate options and costs.**

Chronic wasting disease (brought up under the Lyme disease item). NAR emphasised the need to be vigilant with any clients who might have been stalking in Scandinavia or North America, where this devastating disease is present. **Action – all to check with every stalking client about all their equipment, including clothing and boots.**

GT update on potential pathway for action following survey results. SNH policy is to encourage landowners to take public money to progress future action, rather than progress down the statutory pathway. Balancing duties of SNH will include taking account of social and economic objectives of landowners. Survey will provide information on whether the site is being damaged or not, depending on how this is interpreted. Provision of targets? **GT to provide targets for all habitat types.**

## Date and venue of next meeting

Proposed Friday July 6 (NAR in NZ but SG potentially can attend for WHH) at Acharacle Community Hall. **CM to email around group for attendance and book hall.**

## Action points – pressing ones in red, bold for ALL to consider/action ASAP

Action points	By whom	By when
<b>DMG membership fees – set up system for subs</b>	CM	June 2018
<b>DMG bank account to set up</b>	CM	June 2018
<b>HIA training and support money to new bank account from AE</b>	CM	June 2018
<b>HIA training set up</b>	CM	May 2018
<b>HIA data collation – meet up to discuss and share</b>	CM, CmcQ	May 2018
Provide cull return for all owners registered with SNH	GT	Discharged
Sonachan owners - firearms	Police Scot	2018
<b>Deer Manager qualifications – update and keep records according to Data Protection Act</b>	NAR, CM	June 2018
Review of DMP – use of ADMG 2 days support	CM	August 2018
<b>Deer counts – carry out and send data to Secretary</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>June 2018</b>
<b>SNH latest deer count and density map – recalculate with correct area of ground</b>	GT	July 2018
Woodland counts – use of thermal imaging	All to consider	2019
SNH HIA work – contact with landowners by surveyors	GT	Discharged
<b>Update population model</b>	NAR	July 2018
Mapping NWSS high/vhigh impacts and new woodlands	CM	2018
<b>Peatland action – retrieve Kentra report</b>	CM	June 2018

<b>Peatland action – potential actions</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>July 2018</b>
Fire – report all fires to Secretary	All	On-going
Fire – develop simple fire plan	CM	2018
Off-road extraction routes – identification of issues to Sec	All	On-going
Off-road illegal activity report to Police Scotland	All	On-going
Sika and feral pigs – report presence to group and control	All	On-going
Chronic Wasting Disease – ensure all clients disease-free	All	On-going
Lyme disease – develop some generic guidance for all	CM	2018
Tourism businesses using Ard pen for wildlife watching – report all businesses know to operate here to Secretary	All	2018
Audit of tourism businesses and invitation to contribute	CM	2018
<b>Mortality 2017/18 counts to NAR for population model</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>May 2018</b>
Poaching – Police Scotland to again consider use of cameras to record vehicles on roads	AC	2018
Website set up – options and costs	CM	2018
<b>HIA targets for all SNH HIA habitat types</b>	<b>GT</b>	<b>July 2018</b>
<b>Next meeting – email date and book hall</b>	<b>CM</b>	<b>May 2018</b>