

Minutes of the East Sutherland Deer Management Group Spring Meeting

The Golspie Inn 2.00 p.m. Friday 5th May 2017

Present: T. Chetwynd - Chair – Loch Choire J. McMorran – V Chair - Balnacoil R. Rowantree - Secretary - Gordonbush P. Nissen – Balnacoil G. Symmers – Balnacoil R. Bain – Torish J. Billet – Kintradwell B. Colvin – Kintradwell B. Lyall – Badanloch P. Davidson – Dunrobin J. Urquhart – Dunrobin L. MacNicol - Tressady	V. Clements – DMP Author J. MacDonald – Borrobol Sir M. Wigan – Borrobol A. Grant - Kildonan M. Grant – Kildonan A. Nicholson – Klibreck A. Nicholson – Klibreck A. Robertson – Klibreck H. Deary – WMO – SNH P. Bakker – Altnaharra N. MacKay - Loch Choire A. MacKay - Dalnessie M. Rowland - Gordonbush
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1. Welcome

The chairman offered those present a warm welcome.

2. Apologies

Mr. & Mrs Ryan – Dalnessie, D. MacAskill – FCS, J. Leonard – Torish Woodland,
M. MacDonald – Culgower and West Garty

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 9th of December 2016 had been circulated via e-mail prior to the meeting. Hard copies were circulated and were agreed, apologies were received from M. MacDonald – Culgower and West Garty, these had been omitted from the previous minute, with that correction the minute was proposed by ;

A. MacKay and seconded by P. Bakker.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising that were not covered in the agenda

5. SNH Helicopter Count

The helicopter aided count of red deer on open range and forest edge was carried out on the 20th and 21st March 2017. A count report and map has been circulated to all members where the count was carried out. One or two minor corrections related to mapping were agreed, but this had no impact on the numbers/density.

It was agreed by all present that the count had been well carried out and was an accurate baseline population for modelling

The total number of deer had increased since the last Heli-count by 4.5%, from 14349 to 14958. There had been a shift in population balance, with an increase in stags and a decrease in hinds, giving a better male / female ratio than the previous count. The other notable point was the calving % which was an average of 37% across the group but well over 40% in some areas, which will have an impact on population modelling.

It was worth noting that while the population had only increased by 4.5%, that there were considerable local differences, with quite big population increases on some designated sites.

Holly Deary then clarified one or two points, the density on individual properties has been calculated on total estate area, no account has been taken of areas that are excluded to deer, i.e. Woodland schemes. This means that the deer density on open range could be significantly higher on some estates. In time, as areas of woodland become available and utilized by deer, this will change.

The Deer Management Plan, adopted by the group on 09/12/16 has a target density of 7-8/km² for the North-West group of estates and 10-12/km² for the South-East group of estates, (this density does not take account of the presence of other herbivores and should be adjusted if necessary following monitoring) This is a reduction cull of 4500 – 5000 animals across the group and should be focused on hinds.

East Sutherland, by dint of its history and location, is always closely scrutinized and with high profile designated sites in less favourable condition there will be a clear expectation from Scottish Government to deliver agreed plans. The group should seek to avoid being included in a section 7 or 8 scheme.

6. Deer Management Plan – Victor Clements (VC)

As agreed at the previous meeting, Victor had offered to reset the spreadsheets for population modelling following the SNH Heli count. This was demonstrated to members by way of slides and a group target population was shown for the three management areas.

Target pops	S	H	C	Tot	
NW	1300	1300	494	3094	
SE	2900	2900	1102	6902	
E	250	275	105	630	
Tot	4450	4475	1700.5	10625.5	10.5

It was agreed that a 35% reduction cull would be planned over a five-year time scale, with regular monitoring of Herbivore Impacts on habitat and regular (annual) population census taking place. This will demonstrate that the plan is being implemented.

Victor was asked to work up cull proposals for each estate to meet the individual and group objectives inside the five-year time frame.

The importance of having a baseline data set on habitat for all estates in the group was reiterated, this is seen as one of the elements that will be looked for by the review into deer management planning due in 2019.

Holly Deary offered to arrange a training day for Herbivore Impact Assessment in line with Best Practice and informed the group that ADMG were developing on-line training resources that could be used as a “refresher” so that the skills learned could be kept up-to-date.

7. Land Reform Act 2016 – Deer Management Review

This review is triggered by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016. By April 22nd 2019, SNH will have had to produce a review on whether the Code of Practice on Deer Management has achieved two benchmarks. Has it :

- a) been complied with
- b) been effective in promoting Sustainable Deer Management

The “Deer debate” continues in the Scottish Parliament with SNH recently producing its controversial report on Deer Management in Scotland

(<http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/corporate/DeerManReview2016.pdf>)

This report and the conclusions reached by the Environment Climate Change and Land Reform (ECCLR) Committee was debated in the Scottish Parliament on the 2nd May and the following points were made.

- SNH should be involved in the setting of culls
- Landowners should implement Best Practice in Deer counting and Herbivore Impact Assessment
- A “short-life” Independent Working Group should be established to find solutions to the “Deer problem”
- A wider legislative review of deer should be considered
- Increase in the effort on managing deer in the Lowlands

Given the spotlight on Deer Management and the impending review it is essential that the ESDMG moves forward and implements the Plan as agreed, with focus on three main areas.

- Agreeing and carrying out the cull, with focus on hind population
- Getting the HIA Baseline in place for all Estates in 2017
- Carrying out deer counts in line with Best Practice

This will demonstrate that the group is delivering the plan agreed at the time of the review. The size of the task should not be underestimated and the implications on estate resources understood.

8. ADMG

ESDMG has been in regular attendance at the meetings of ADMG, the chair asked for it to be noted that Richard Cooke and the committee of ADMG have been extremely busy in the last year promoting and protecting the interests and achievements of the DMGs by lobbying and defending deer management and through the scrutiny and analysis of data and related assumptions made by individuals and agencies.

- ADMG is running a project fund for the establishment of “SWARD” an data gathering and sharing platform for use across DMGs and a tool that would allow analysis and presentation of the data gathered during culling, counting and habitat condition assessment.

9. AOCB

- The Peatlands Action Project has been awarded an £8M award budget for the 2017/18 period (<http://www.snh.gov.uk/climate-change/taking-action/carbon-management/peatland-action/information-for-applicants/>) The IUCN Peatland Code is worth checking (<http://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/peatland-code/code-information>) Good way for ESDMG to demonstrate management of Habitat in the Public Interest.
- Wildfires – EFFIS the European Forest Fire Information Service is a useful tool when planning muirburn (<http://effis.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>) It was agreed to invite Michael Bruce Vice Chair of the Scottish Wildfire Forum to the AGM in October
- The current Muirburn Code is under review (<http://muirburncode.org.uk/>) and the updated code should be available for the start of the next burning season
- There has been an increase in the payment levels of Forestry Grant Schemes and an uplift in the grant for fencing.

10. Dates of next meetings

It was agreed by the group that two meetings / year were not sufficient given the workload necessary to meet the targets set by Government and the agencies. It was agreed to hold four meetings / year, an AGM in the Autumn, a Spring meeting to discuss counts and culls and two “practitioner” meetings.

The date for the first Practitioner meeting is **Friday 7th July 2017 at 2.00 p.m.** Golspie Inn

The AGM is to be held on **Friday 27th October 2017 at 2.00 p.m.** Golspie Inn