

# Inveraray & Tyndrum Deer Management Group

## Summary Minutes of the Meeting on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018, at 10am at Argyll Estates Offices, Cherry Park, Inveraray

**Present:** Hugh Nicol – Argyll Estates (Chair), David Lowes – Glenfalloch (Vice-chair), Helen MacIntyre (Secretary), Jimmy Irvine – SNH, Victor Clements – Consultant/ADMG Rep, Nikki Dayton – Quadrat Scotland, Dougie Campbell – Strath Caulaidh, representatives from Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, Strone, Forest Enterprise, Glenfalloch, Ardkinglas, Blarghour, Achadunan, Stuckendroin, Cononish, Inveruglas, Auchreoch, Strathfillan, Scottish Woodlands

**Apologies:** Tilhill, Achlian, Ardchonnell, SNH Ben Lui, Brackley

### Chairman's Welcome

Hugh Nicol welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming. He read a prepared statement as follows:

“While we as a group are working within the remit of the ITDMG and generally liaising closely and effectively with each other, and with external bodies, we recognise that it is for each landowner or land manager to make their own decisions on how they think their own land is best managed. The DMG is not here to tell anyone how it must be done. We don't have the power to make anyone do anything. We are all simply volunteers acting for the best interests as we see it for the area and all members can, and most do, contribute to this.”

### 1. Apologies – as above

2. **Matters arising from minutes of meeting 20<sup>th</sup> April** – Letters have not yet been written to members who do not take part in the annual foot count. **Action: HM to write these before the Spring.** Minutes were approved by all.

### 3. Culls

#### a) Results of stag cull 2018

Members commented it had been a hard season to start, but was good once the rut got started and the stags were in very good condition. It was noticed there were not as many mature woodland stags this year.

#### b) Proposed hind/calf cull 2018-19 –

Most members have agreed to increase their culls so that the total proposed group hind cull has reached the target of 500. No members have responded negatively to using the population model to help with group cull setting. SNH said their focus is on reducing deer numbers around Coille Coire Chuilc SSSI, and they have been speaking to appropriate landowners. Members will be able to use Habitat Impact Assessment data in the future to focus where culls are necessary.

### 4. Deer Management Plan

- a) SNH assessment will be in Mar/Apr 2019. Members are aware that Jimmy scores the meetings and produces a report.
- b) Victor Clements discussed the Health Check he carried out on ITDMG in Aug 2018 for ADMG. 44 of 45 DMGs had health checks. The report has been circulated. Some points to note include: training levels are better than most DMGs, there are mainly low impacts on native woodlands; there is increased pressure on gaining SQWV membership; DVC information is lacking; ITDMG should prioritise and focus on issues most important to the group.
- c) Chair said we are encouraging members to share data, but if some is missing then it's a problem for the group (e.g. foot counts). SNH are committed to a 5 year cycle for helicopter counts, funding dependent.

## 5. Secretary's and Treasurer's Reports

- a) There are several outstanding subscriptions, reminders have been emailed.
- b) The Health Check summary suggested that the group should prepare an annual budget, so the accounts this year are presented differently.
- c) It was requested that copies of all papers for meetings be pre-printed and available at the meeting. It was agreed that there would be an inflationary increase in subscriptions to cover this cost.

## 6. Chairman's Report

The Chair described how the executive committee is working well to make decisions in between group meetings and move things on. He went to a Monadhliath DMG meeting this year and it was useful to see what they are doing, including peatland restoration. He will carry on as Chair for now, unless someone else wants to be chair and then he is happy to step aside. It was recognised that he is doing an excellent job.

## 7. ADMG Report

Tom Turnbull gave his report as ADMG rep.

### Review

- We currently await the report from the Deer Working Group which should come out in the Spring in conjunction with the SNH report on the DMG assessment process. Sadly the Deer Working Group Chairman Simon Pepper passed away suddenly during September. Deer Working Group: Dr Andrew Barbour, Dr Jayne Glass and Robin Callander as special advisor. Richard Cooke has been appointed as special advisor.
- A Lowland Deer Panel report is imminent, this will have implications for lowland deer management.
- We currently await the Spring DMG assessments which will be on the same basis as those in 2014 and 2016.
- Most DMGs will have undertaken the health checks offered by ADMG and should be well aware of any areas in which they are lacking and need to improve.
- SNH have prioritised 35 of the 101 Benchmark and Public Interest criteria, for each of these SNH has set a target for the overall percentage of DMGs assessed as green.
- The 35 criteria could be distilled down into the following headings:
  1. Bringing designated sites into favourable condition.
  2. Address Native Woodland Condition.
  3. Woodland Expansion.
  4. Carbon and Peatland.
  5. Habitat Impact Assessment
- DMGs should consider all of the above and look at how they can update or improve their deer management plan and DMG operations in order that they are shown to be improving when assessed in 2019.
- Groups should look at their 2016 assessments and particularly at those areas in which they have amber or red results and consider how these can be changed to green by Spring 2019. It's also extremely important to look at the working plan within your DMP in order to update and improve it. SNH will be looking for evidence of ongoing work and each benchmark and public interest criteria will need to be shown to be tackled within the DMG.

### Review of Compliance with the code of Practice on deer management

- As part of the 2019 Deer Sector Review, SNH is required to report to the Government on delivery of the Deer Code. A questionnaire was asked to be filled in by those interested. The closing date for this was 25 October.

### Public consultation on a Forestry Strategy for Scotland 2019 - 29

- This closes on 29 November and if you are interested in the future of Scotland's woodlands then you should respond.

### ADMG survey of Sporting rents

- ADMG is currently still open to responses to their survey of stalking rents and is available for comment.

## Meetings

- There will be a regional meeting of ADMG in Inverness on Wednesday 21 November.

## Venison Marketing

- A strategy has been announced by Scottish Government and The Scottish Venison Partnership for maximising venison sales, both wild and farmed. Nine key areas are to be looked at include: developing new supply chains, skills-building, tailored support for deer farming, developing a scheme for co-op owned chills and larders, consumer promotion, education, building Scotland as a centre for world-class expertise, and further research and development including market insight.

## Carcass Preparation

- It is advised by SQWV that any gut contaminated deer are not entered into the food chain. Any deer that are contaminated by poor shot placement are left on the hill.
- A new guide on contamination in venison has also been made available by The Scottish Venison Partnership and SQWV. This has been circulated by ADMG under the e-scope newsletter.

## Sporting Rates

- For anyone undergoing an appeal to their sporting rates, Scottish Land and Estates have published guidance for those 281 appeal cases for highland deer forests awaiting a hearing on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2018.
- Initial negotiations with the assessor should have been completed by 20<sup>th</sup> October. 30<sup>th</sup> October was the deadline for valuation appeal grounds. By 13<sup>th</sup> November an appellant must have submitted comparable evidence that they wish to use.

## Ongoing work

- There will soon be a youtube online tutorial for HIA based on the best practice guides and there is also currently a tutorial on carcass handling provided by the Scottish Venison Partnership that provides up to date best practice guidance. There is also a youtube video on field dressing of roe deer.
- ADMG is participating in a steering group for Wild Deer Best Practice which are likely to be presented online this time rather than in the old folders.
- ADMG is collaborating with ADMG on new geographical areas for DMGs with potentially 6 new groups.

## 8. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Report

Jimmy Irvine gave the report for SNH.

- a) West Loch Lomond estates are now set up as a DMG. There is also work in Cowal and elsewhere in Argyll to set up DMGs. ITDMG is an upland deer group but everything else in Argyll is classed as lowland. The Lowland Deer Panel will hopefully have recommendations for how best to run DMGs in lowland areas.
- b) The SWARD software has now been scrapped as it has been decided it is not fit for purpose, and SNH will be developing better software.
- c) SNH are reviewing the Section 7s currently in place, merging two into one. There is now a Section 10 in the Carse of Stirling. The Chair asked if SNH would need to intervene in ITDMG. JI said given ongoing discussions it's not likely.
- d) Transport Scotland are keen to work with landowners for roadside deer management, e.g. Loch Lomond A82. HM has produced a map of DVCs in the ITDMG area for 2014-17 which shows more DVCs along A85 between Dalmailly and Tyndrum, and around the Arrochar to Tarbet area. JI suggested we try to identify which species they involve since red deer collisions tend to be more dangerous. FC does a lot of night shooting along A85 to reduce DVCs.
- e) Management of designated sites within ITDMG is progressing.

## 9. Carcass handling – Alasdair Cameron FES

- a) AC circulated copies of a presentation, which is available online, along with three videos on best practice.

- b) Some people are still putting contaminated carcasses into dealers. We really need to advise people on increasing their standards.
- c) Highland Game do not want extensive trimming anymore. High pressure water should not be used as it can push contamination in further. Use a tissue/paper towel and a general low pressure hose.
- d) AC has offered to hold a site visit to look at the FES Glenbranter larder if there is interest from ITDMG members. **Action: HM to email group for interest in early Dec.**

#### **10. Group Habitat Impact Assessment results – Nikki Dayton, Quadrat Scotland**

- a) ND presented the results of the first year of fieldwork for the group HIA project. She emphasised that this data is more useful for seeing changes over time than just assessing current condition. It can then be used to inform stocking densities and cull targets.
- b) 198 dwarf shrub heath plots and 104 blanket bog plots were set up across the group members involved. The heath plots are very useful for showing grazing and trampling impacts, and ideally a moderate level of impact is desirable. For blanket bog plots, heather is already stressed by waterlogging so the impact on heather should ideally be low.
- c) The results show that ITDMG has quite high impacts compared to other local areas such as Blackmount and Glenfalloch. To prevent further heather loss immediate action is needed. At sheep stocking densities below 5 ewes/ha, where other palatable food is available, sheep tend not to eat heather but deer are less selective. However, this depends on what grass is available.
- d) Landowners will be able to look in more detail at their plot locations and determine which herbivores are having most impact.
- e) ND did not see much evidence of heather beetle, but one estate said that they have had lots this year.
- f) There will be a training day on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2019 for all members involved in this group HIA project. Morning and afternoon training sessions will take place on this date at opposite sides of the DMG. The locations and times will be confirmed nearer to the training date. This training is essential for all participating landholdings. It is vital that all attend this since our funding from LLTNP is conditional on adequate training being done so that members can carry on doing HIA competently.

#### **11. Any Other Business**

- a) Next deer count was set for week beginning 11<sup>th</sup> March. Help was offered to count on other properties the day after the count if needed.
- b) There was a discussion on the recent publicity surrounding hunting wild goats and sheep on Islay and the sharing of images on social media. Alasdair Cameron (FE) has information on legal management of trespassing sheep which can be requested if and when required.
- c) One estate will be felling a small unfenced area of spruce woodland and replanting with fenced native trees.
- d) One member will contribute to the National Park Authority Outdoor Recreation Plan on behalf of both ITDMG and Balquhiddy DMG.
- e) The A82 upgrade north of Tarbet will widen the road to include grass margins and a separated cycle path. The timescales have not been set yet, but landowners will be contacted.
- f) LLTNP could help arrange a visit to Glenfalloch or Auchlyne to look at peatland restoration.

#### **12. Date of Next Meeting – 10am on Thurs 25<sup>th</sup> April 2019 at Glenfalloch Lodge.**

#### **13. Group Peatland Feasibility Study – Dougie Campbell, Strath Caulaidh**

DC gave an overview of Strath Caulaidh's experience in peatland regeneration and talked about their plans for our group peatland feasibility study. The fieldwork will be carried out during November to February and a final report produced in February. All landowners will be contacted to arrange access and co-ordinate suitable dates for work on their land.