

Inveraray & Tyndrum Deer Management Group

Summary Minutes of the Meeting on Friday 28th October 2016, at 2pm at Argyll Estates, Cherry Park, Inveraray

Present: Tom Turnbull – Strone (Chair), Helen MacIntyre (Secretary), Jimmy Irvine – SNH, representatives from: Glenfalloch, FCS, Tilhill, Ardkinglas, Garabal, Stuckendroin, Argyll Estates, Luss Estates, Dunderave, Achadunan, Scottish Woodlands, Balliemeanoch, Ardchnonell and Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park.

Apologies: David Lowes – Glenfalloch (Vice-chair), Achadunan, Blarghour, SNH Ben Lui, Auch Reoch, Inveruglas, Cononish, MOD, Strathfillan, Glencroe Farm, NFUS.

1. Chairman's Welcome – Tom Turnbull (TT) welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming.

2. Culls and Counts

Stag cull figures for 2016 were slightly down on the group target, with some returns still to come in. Some members found that the warmer weather made it harder to cull stags. Heading for the Scottish Hills (HFTSH) website seems to be working well, with more walkers ringing estates to check about routes. TT encouraged group members to put their details on the website. The proposed hind cull target for 2016-17 is much higher than last year. Woodland cull targets are high but animals will only be culled if they are threatening plantations.

3. Deer Management Plan (DMP)

ITDMG was reassessed in June. We did well, and now have no red boxes, a few amber and mostly green. One area for improvement is habitat impact assessment (HIA). A few members are doing HIA already and several more have shown interest in funding to start HIA. SNH would like deer managers to record in a robust manner, so that changes in ownership mean continuity and new managers will know what the habitat was like previously. TT pointed out that in the future we may need to defend that we are managing our land properly, and having HIA information can help with this.

A draft population model with cull targets has been circulated to the group. Once agreed on, it will be added to our DMP. We are looking at how many deer we need to cull annually to keep the population static. Initial calculations, with certain assumptions, indicate the group would need to shoot 300 hinds a year on the hill to keep a static population. This can be refined as needed. There will be always be competing objectives of lower density of deer for forestry and higher density for sporting culls. Although there is some overlap between woodland and hill populations, many hinds are hefted to the hill and don't go into the woodland. The Spring count gives a good estimate of the number of hill hinds, the ones that don't move into woodland much. The model may need to be adjusted after the helicopter count next year. Some group members showed support for the model and some said they think it is more complicated than can be shown in a population model.

4. Secretary and Treasurer Reports

Accounts - The current bank balance was reported. There are some outstanding subscriptions, the group will start paying for website hosting from December, and there will be money due for secretarial work for March to September. It was suggested that the group could hold meetings in other locations to encourage other group members to attend, and that it would cost less than £200 to hold one in a hotel. Argyll Estates kindly confirmed that they are very happy to let the Group use their meeting room in Cherry Park if they want to meet in Inveraray.

Website – The group website (<http://inverarayandyndrumdmg.deer-management.co.uk>) has had encouraging visitor numbers, with around 400 visits for most months since March this year, but 2200 visits in August. Perhaps people were accessing our Deer Management Plan.

Questionnaire – Group members were reminded to return their completed annual questionnaires, which will allow us to update sections of the DMP with information missing. All questions are voluntary, so only answer those you are happy to answer.

5. ADMG Report – given by Tom Turnbull as ADMG rep

ADMG Assessment Process - All Deer Management Groups have been through the 2016 assessment process to allow our progress to be measured against the benchmark. The key evidence of progress put forward by ADMG at these meetings are as follows:

- A. From a standing start, 33 of the 42 DMGs now have an active website and others are under construction.
- B. All Groups have been renewing and revising their deer management plans. 32 groups have plans posted online.
- C. The level of improvement has been significant. The proportion of criteria assessed as Red in 2014 has reduced from 31% to 8% and the proportion assessed as Green has increased from 23% to 63%. The proportion of Amber criteria has decreased from 46% to 28%.

There is acknowledgement from ADMG that there is still some way to go, particularly when it comes to monitoring and managing the impacts of deer on habitat. The results of the report from SNH will be announced shortly.

Authorisations - The SNH Review Panel Report on authorisations to cull deer out of season or at night has been published and can be found on the SNH website. The main findings were as follows:

- a) The Panel Concluded that the processes in place for authorisations are largely fit for purpose but have made some recommendations.
- b) There is clearly a need for the continued use of authorisations in order to protect habitat.
- c) Authorisations and their use should become an accepted part of Deer Management Planning and integrated appropriately.
- d) Cull information should be available and transparent.

E.Coli 0157 - You will all be aware of the E.coli outbreak that occurred last Autumn. Scottish Quality Wild Venison have been working with Food Standards Scotland to try and reduce the risk of E.coli entering the food chain. As a result of these discussions it is likely that there will be a number of amendments and recommendations in the SQWV. For those providing venison for the food chain it is vital that best practice guidance is followed at all times. Current recommendations suggest that where present, E.coli is carried in the faeces of deer, with one of the areas of highest risk being the last 12 inches of the gut/rectum. One measure that everyone can implement now is to ensure that when gralloching a carcass and removing the pluck, there is no spillage whatsoever, especially from this area. This step in itself will make a significant contribution to minimising risk and ensuring that this bacteria does not enter the human food chain. It is advised that all DMG members strive to achieve SQWV status as a minimum requirement at this point. ITDMG are planning to have an E.coli training day, using FCS larder at Glenbranter.

Chronic Wasting Disease - Five cases of CWD have now been reported in Norway. three in reindeer and two moose. To prevent transfer to the UK The British Deer Society is recommending the following:

- If you have travelled to the countryside of USA, Canada or Scandinavia, meticulous disinfecting and cleaning of clothing, equipment and footwear to remove all debris should reduce, (although not eliminate), the risk of introducing disease into this country.
- If you have been hunting in any of the above countries it is more likely that your clothing footwear or equipment may have been contaminated and should not be removed from the country. Trophies should also not be removed from the country.
- Don't assume that guests will be aware of the risk of CWD transmission. Send the BDS leaflet provided on their website to all guests so they are aware the risks and of their responsibilities. Advise them in the documentation that their kit will be checked for cleanliness. Undertake a kit check upon arrival, if suspicious of contamination, bag up all suspicious articles for return to their home and provide alternatives for the duration of the visit.

The British Deer Society are providing regular updates on their website.

Heading for the Scottish Hills - ADMG would recommend that all landholdings where deer stalking is undertaken provide the relevant information to The Heading For The Scottish Hills web service.

6. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Report – given by Jimmy Irvine, SNH

A helicopter deer count of the whole of the open hill area of ITDMG is planned for any time between 9th Jan and 31st March 2017, weather and helicopter availability dependent. Most individual estates will be allowed one person to ride along, with smaller holdings choosing a representative for several holdings. There will be 3 SNH staff in the helicopter – a navigator, a cameraman, and a recorder of deer numbers. ITDMG will get copies of all images and data after the count, which we can share with individual holdings.

HFTSH seems to be working very well, and is proving useful for people accessing the countryside.

Ben Lui NNR has now been denotified as a National Nature Reserve, but it still retains its other designations, such as SAC etc.

Review of Authorisations – An external deer panel looked at how SNH manages authorisations. The report covers recommendations for improvements that could be made, and how deer groups can improve communication too. The review can be found online at www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A2081643.pdf.

Government Deer Review – A final SNH report is going to the government in the next two weeks. It covers all deer management across Scotland. JI believes ITDMG have stepped up and done what has been asked.

7. Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park Report

Nicola Colquhoun talked about LLTNP's plans regarding HIA funding. NC had asked deer group members about interest in HIA funding and several members responded. The Park believes it is important for individual estates to get involved so they have more information to enable better deer management. They are looking at different funding schemes, and discussing options with SNH and ADMG. One suggestion is that members set up their HIAs, collect the data and then the Park can help with data analysis. It is possible that students and/or park volunteers could help with this.

8. Any Other Business

It was discussed whether a foot count should be done as well as the helicopter count. JI said it is worth planning for it, as it would be a good opportunity to compare foot and helicopter counts. Most agreed, and w/c Mon 6th March was set for the foot count. Tom Turnbull notified the group that he is looking to step down as Chair by the Spring. Hugh Nicol kindly volunteered to take over as Chair from the Spring meeting.

9. Date of Next Meeting

This will be held a month later than usual to allow all cull and count figures to be collected and circulated before the meeting. The date was set for Fri April 7th at 2pm at Argyll Estates.