

# Inveraray & Tyndrum Deer Management Group

## Summary Minutes of the Meeting on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2019, at 10am at Glenfalloch Lodge, Ardlui

**Present:** Hugh Nicol – Argyll Estates (Chair), David Lowes – Glenfalloch (Vice-chair), Helen MacIntyre (Secretary), Jimmy Irvine – SNH, Hazel White – SNH Peatland Action, Andrew McBride – SNH Peatland Action, Tom Turnbull – ADMG Rep, representatives from Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, Glenfalloch, Argyll Estates, Ardkinglas, Blarghour, Stuckendroin, Forestry Land Scotland, Cononish, Inveruglas, Auchreoch, Strathfillan, Tilhill, Gresham House

**Apologies:** Nikki Dayton – Quadrat Scotland, Achadunan, Achlian, Ardchonnell, SNH Ben Lui, Brackley

**Chairman's Welcome** - Hugh Nicol welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming.

**1. Apologies** – as above

**2. Matters arising from minutes of meeting 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018** – We wrote to five members who do not usually take part in the count. Three responded and planned to count but only one counted due to a misunderstanding.

FLS held a carcass handling training event in December at Glenbranter larder, which went well and generated lots of discussion. Minutes were approved by all.

**3. Secretary & Treasurer Reports – Helen MacIntyre**

HM explained that deer groups are being asked to provide more evidence of how they are managing their deer, which means she has to request more information from members. Thank you to the members who always respond, but it was pointed out that there are several members who always need chasing and this wastes a lot of time which costs members money.

Questionnaires – Only about half of these have been returned so far. **Action:** Members to return questionnaire.

Accounts – Thank you to Ardkinglas for continuing to act as group treasurer and managing the accounts for us. No changes in the accounts since the November meeting, except that some of the peatland grant money was received and will be paid out in the 2019-20 financial year instead of 2018-19.

**4. Chairman's Report – Hugh Nicol**

Quoting Richard Cooke (ADMG): "While it is customary for organisations to report a busy year past, and 2018 has certainly been an extremely busy one, it has been a year where our workload has been mainly behind the scenes." This paragraph could have been written for ITDMG alone.

Following this meeting we have our tri-annual SNH performance assessment to be carried out by Jimmy Irvine. This will take in 101 assessment points which the group will be judged upon. Preparing for this has been a long-term task and it will continue again immediately, hopefully in an upward trajectory, aiming for the 2022 assessment.

We did have a Health Check (effectively a dry run of today's assessment) carried out by Victor Clements. The result was positive with some scope for improvement, so we have made a number of tweaks to hopefully improve our delivery, and in turn, our score today.

Habitat Impact Assessment work has progressed to the stage where field surveys and some training have taken

place. While almost all the work to date has been carried out on a group basis, we are now at a stage where individual members must take up the baton. We must be in no doubt that SNH have this as a key priority. We will discuss this later.

Peatland Action surveys have been carried out across much of the DMG area. This was again organised centrally on a group basis but future work in our DMG area will most likely be on the basis of individual projects or a few neighbours working together rather than all at once as the HIA project has been rolled out. We await a final report from Strath Caulaidh. Again, we will discuss this later.

Sporting rates have been a significant issue for many of us over the past couple of years and the appeals process is far from concluded. My observation is that this indirect land tax has not produced the clean results expected and certainly in the case of Argyll estates it has resulted in more areas let and more guns on the ground which I am sure was not the intention but is an inevitable consequence. I understand Argyll & Bute Council have been one of the more difficult authorities Savills have dealt with.

Our deer count this year was in a difficult period with the pre-set count landing coincidentally on the only clear weather window in the fortnight. Unfortunately, accumulated snow meant access to some areas was restricted so previous year's figures have been used with some local knowledge making tweaks. Whether this is the best time to count and the discussion of the figures will follow.

The Deer Management Plan is central to our group direction and it continues to evolve. We will also hear more on that soon.

Similarly, our website, data and communications continue to evolve to meet the growing onus on this DMG as it also increases on all other DMGs. Extra time and funds are required to be conjured up to meet the increased correspondence, revised plans, HIAs, surveys etc – not to mention increased scrutiny on our performance. Without the relatively new structure of the Executive Group, which meets several times a year and is in contact by Skype, phone or email on a regular basis, the performance achieved recently would not be possible. I thank the group for agreeing to this new structure and for permitting the Executive Group to make strategic decisions without the direct involvement of all here. Without the input of the Executive Group we would struggle to keep up the current high pace of activity and I thank Tom, Martin and Helen for their work on behalf of ITDMG. We cannot ignore this current new required pace or scrutiny level, nor can we turn the clock back, and it may be that we need to look again at how to structure and finance the group for the future. I should note that like this meeting, the Executive Group is not a closed shop and any person who wishes to attend or assist Tom, Martin, Helen or I would be most welcome to join us.

2019 is another important year for ITDMG to build on the recent hard work and deliver on several fronts – not least the day to day management of deer. I am confident that with the continued commitment and cooperation of all here (and a few absent) we can emerge on that aspired upward trajectory.

## **5. Culls**

### **a) Results of hind cull 2018-19**

The group was short of the hind target by 100. We are still waiting for some cull returns. There is anecdotal evidence that there were fewer hinds in some areas. JI said mortality would have been higher and calving lower. We should still aim to cull 500 hinds this year.

### **b) Proposed stag cull 2019**

As has been discussed before, it is difficult to model our stags. One member is seeing a slow increase sika

stags, but not hinds yet. More roe deer have been seen on a couple of properties.

**c) Group foot count 2019**

The count was unsuccessful due to the snow cover and accessibility issues. There are some members that still do not take part in the count. It was asked if the group should count in Autumn instead when members may be more in 'deer mode'. Several thought that this wouldn't make any difference to the numbers counting. JI suggested perhaps splitting the count over two days so that members could count areas that would otherwise not be counted. **Action:** SNH to meet with landowners who don't take part in the count.

**d) Population model**

The group will use the 2018 count figures and hind targets will be discussed further at the next meeting.

**6. Deer Management Plan & draft SNH assessment**

The circulated latest version of the group's Working Plan includes updated actions in different colours to show progress over the past few years.

The draft SNH assessment shows the significant progress that the group has made since the 2016 assessment. UPDATE: The group's SNH assessment meeting held after the group meeting resulted in us scoring all greens except for 3 ambers, for the 101 criteria. The ambers were received for: a) not having all members attending meetings; b) not identifying actions to retain and improve native woodland; c) not identifying and quantifying capital investment in deer management related infrastructure. The ITDMG Executive Committee agree with Jimmy Irvine's overall assessment, including the three ambers.

**7. Native Woodlands**

Herbivore impact maps from the National Woodland Survey of Scotland have been circulated to the group and many members have commented on whether impacts may have changed. There is increased pressure from conservation groups on SNH to look at native woodland condition. Most members will have long term forest plans that look at condition.

LLTNP are having a woodland training day today and hope to host another one end of May. JI said there are a couple of methods on Best Practice Guidance. Methodology has been created and adapted for around 10 years, so it may be better to use a new one. SNH are trying to encourage those on the ground to look at what kinds of impacts there are and manage based on this. It was originally designed for farmers keeping stock in woodland. One member described doing photographic impact monitoring in woodland. If there is no impact on preferred species, such as rowan trees, then you can see there is not much of a problem. He still records it and returns to the same tree next time to see any change. It depends on your perspective, if you want native woodland open to deer or not, to provide shelter. There have been problems with forestry grants, paying upfront and when checking for claiming the grant they can be overly critical, which is a big financial risk.

**8. Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) Report**

Tom Turnbull gave his report as ADMG rep.

**Review**

We await the report from the Deer Working Group which will now come out in the Autumn in conjunction with SNHs report on the progress of the deer sector. Spring DMG assessments are well underway. Deer Management Groups should be well prepared for these following the ADMG health checks, these showed improvements by most groups, however there was some complacency seen from some groups. It is hoped that progress will be shown by groups.

## **Communications**

ADMG are keen to convey to members the work that is undertaken on their behalf, much of which goes under the radar. In order to improve communications between individual groups and deer managers and ADMG. We have published an annual review at the time of the AGM. This will be aimed at providing information on the work undertaken by ADMG on behalf of members.

Scope will continue to be produced twice a year and E-Scope will continue to be published when required and it is vital that DMG secretaries forward E-Scope on to members so they are aware of the work that we are doing.

## **Record Cull**

2017 saw a record red deer cull in Scotland, with just over 75,000 red deer culled. This was coupled with some very high mortality during the 2017/18 winter. There are an estimated 350,000 red deer now in Scotland.

## **ADMG survey of Sporting rents**

We have now received 46 responses, covering approximately 1.2 million acres across most DMGs. The 2011 survey covered 1,360,000 acres. A short report on the findings so far is included in the new edition of Scope and show an increase in the rents charged for all stalking since 2011. Charges for stags vary between estates with variations depending on factors like the numbers of ghillies used on a day. There is a feeling amongst quite a lot of people in the industry that stalking is under-valued.

## **Habitat Impact Assessment**

Landowners that are undertaking HIA should be aware that this year's HIA should really be done in the next month or so for the best results. If in doubt, have a look at the best practice guidance online.

## **Venison Marketing**

Many of you will remember that the Moredun Institute undertook a survey on the prevalence of *E.Coli* 0157 in deer. 1087 samples taken from all over Scotland and *E.Coli* was present in three of the samples. Two in red deer and one in Sika. Despite the relatively low levels of *E.Coli* 0157 in venison, managers and processors are urged to continue to do everything within their control to minimise the risk of infection.

## **Sporting Rates**

We are still waiting to hear the outcome of the sporting rates appeals and it is likely that we will have to wait a little longer on this.

## **9. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Report – Jimmy Irvine**

The Lowland Deer Panel have finalised their report – [www.nature.scot/report-lowland-deer-panel-2019](http://www.nature.scot/report-lowland-deer-panel-2019). JI reassured everyone that the situation with changes to general (bird) licences in England is not happening in Scotland.

## **10. Habitat Impact Assessment**

Nikki Dayton could not make it to the meeting. JI suggests that members all do HIA this year and next year too. Then they can do it every 2 or 3 years if wanted. From experience, it is better to do HIA by end of May. You can split the plots i.e. for total 15 plots: 5 plots this year, 5 different plots the next year, 5 plots in third year, and rotate. It was noted that SNH Ben Lui are not undertaking HIAs on their land to the frequency that SNH is expecting the rest of the group to do.

**Action:** HM to put note out specifically about HIA to all members and regarding grant position.

## **11. Peatland Restoration – Hazel White & Andrew McBride, SNH Peatland Action**

Peatland Action has funded restoration of 20,000 ha since 2012, spread across Scotland. The current application

round is open till end of May.

What impact do deer have on peatland restoration? Can have quite a lot if you have high deer density. Where do you get the turf from? You re-profile and use the turf that is there, sometimes taking some from higher up the slope. What has damaged the peat? Different reasons, incl. drainage, burning, trampling. Where does the peat go? It ends up in burns. Fisheries trusts are interested in peatland restoration because eroding peat ends up in the burns and is bad for the fish (in the gills and covering salmon redds). It eventually ends up in the sea and can enhance algal blooms by changing the pH of the water. There are benefits to grouse and invertebrates from keeping water on the hills, and it provides a source of water for putting out fires.

HN asked what steps had been taken to address potential objections from tenant farmers or crofters that were raised last year. AM noted that SNH have been taking steps with farming and crofting bodies to ensure their buy in to peatland action.

ITDMG feasibility study identified potential drain blocking on the west and erosion restoration on the east. Group members, due to other environmental activities, are not generally in a position to apply this year, a couple maybe next year. Auchlyne restoration work is excellent. Does it work well with moorland management and AECS schemes? Yes. At the moment it is 100% funding, but we don't know what it will be in the future. Project management is included but ongoing management and administration costs are not. Risks on delivery remain with the applicant. If projects go over budget due to weather there is scope for some flexibility in interpretation of the rules, but no guarantees. LLTNP can help with applications for properties within the Park. Applicants are responsible for paying VAT on grant payments.

## **12. Any Other Business**

Hugh Nicol was re-elected as Chair for another two years but will then step down.

It was commented that Argyll & Bute Council are not following the guidance that they don't have to charge sporting rates for those not letting stalking. **Action:** TT to ask ADMG about which councils are doing this.

LLTNP woodland event consultation - 6th May. Drop-in Fri 10th May.

Thanks to Glenfalloch for hosting the meeting.

## **13. Date of Next Meeting – 10am on Wed 6<sup>th</sup> November 2019 at Dalmally Community Hall.**