

Inveraray & Tyndrum Deer Management Group

Summary Minutes of the Meeting on Wednesday 6th November 2019, at 10am at Dalmally Golf Club

Present: Hugh Nicol – Argyll Estates (Chair), David Lowes – Glenfalloch (Vice-chair), Helen MacIntyre (Secretary), Jimmy Irvine – SNH, Tom Turnbull – ADMG Rep, Angus Bevan – Woodland Consultant, representatives from Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, Glenfalloch, Argyll Estates, Ardkinglas, Achadunan, Stuckendroin, Garabal, Forestry and Land Scotland, SNH Ben Lui, Cononish, Inveruglas, Auchreoch, Strathfillan, Tilhill, Brackley

Apologies: Blarghour, Achlian, Ardchnnell, Scottish Woodlands, Glencroe Farm, Balliemanoach

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

1. **Apologies** – as above

2. **Matters arising from minutes of meeting 25th April**

None. Minutes approved by all.

3. **Chairman's Report**

On the day of our last meeting in April, we had our SNH performance assessment carried out by Jimmy Irvine. As you are all aware, of the 101 assessment points assessed, this group scored green in 98 with only 3 ambers and no reds. The three areas for further improvement are: native woodlands, economic impacts of deer management, and member attendance & collaboration.

Climate Change Emergency. This is an important item from SNH's perspective. We became the first nation in the world to declare a climate emergency. Seven months on we await tangible action. It is worth noting however that at present the grants in relation to us are focussed on planting trees and restoring peatlands.

Habitat Impact Assessment field surveys have taken place and some, or perhaps all, results have been submitted. The key at this stage is that individual members must take up the baton. SNH have this as a key priority and Jimmy may also touch on this later. I would highlight now that this is the time to say if you are off the pace with this. Let me know now or after the meeting and we will help get you on track if still required.

Peatland Action. We have useful data from our surveys by Strath Caulaidh. Have any members commenced peatland restoration? I am aware of moves afoot at Scottish Land & Estates to seek a coordinated approach to carbon offsetting working with companies to help fund the work but nothing solid has come of that yet.

Sporting rates appeals continue and while to most of us there appears to have been little perceptible movement in the past 6 months, a lot has been happening behind the scenes. Peter Wilkinson has been invited to speak at the next DMG meeting to give a full update on sporting rates.

Deer count. Having run into difficulties with weather and people able to participate, a suggestion was mooted previously to revise the date of the count. I will let Tom pick up on that in his report, but I think we must discuss the pro's and con's today before the next date is set automatically because that is the date we have always done it. Bear in mind that we may have to shoulder the cost for helicopter counts in future so getting a good system in place may minimise the need for this expensive item.

Money and information. Despite some late fees in, we have managed to juggle and keep in the black. As noted

in my last report, the pace and demands on deer management have stepped up a gear across all DMGs in Scotland. The ADMG itself works tirelessly and the fees of £4,300 we pay to them, while significant, does go a long way. Our own overheads are remarkably low, and this is only as a result of the executive committee working and travelling at no cost to the group – we must expect this to change as new blood comes in and demands increase. Helen’s fees have increased but so has the workload and they are very good value for the return. Not for raising for discussion today but to provide stability in the future, we do need to look at members fee levels again. I do not mention this lightly as I know some already find it hard while some question the value of membership at all. There is no easy answer to this but equally, we cannot bury our heads in the ‘peat’. The Scottish Government will come and get you! We will put fees and resources on the agenda for review at our next meeting. Meanwhile, I plead with the few who still have fees to pay to do so. In chasing both for money and information, this is time and time is money, so we all pay an increased cost for late fees or late information from a few.

To sum up, you, this collaboration forming ITDMG, is – overall - doing well. We are in a good position on all the government’s key benchmarking criteria and we are set up for the challenges ahead. On the ground there are fewer deer that we have become accustomed too and that matches the targets set by the group over several years to reach our long-term objectives. We are still on that journey; but as result that we will see improved welfare and health of the deer remaining and an improved habitat managed by you, the members of ITDMG. Let’s keep working as one for the benefit of all. And....well done.

DL added thanks to the executive group for getting us to where we are now, and ADMG for all their work too.

4. Secretary & Treasurer Reports – Helen MacIntyre

a) 2019/20 accounts & outstanding payments. There are some outstanding subscriptions and HIA payments. Please pay these as soon as you can. One member questioned whether their subscriptions are good value for money. The deficits shown for this year are due to the timing of receiving peatland grants in the previous financial year and paying out the money this financial year. Other than that, the accounts are looking healthy.

b) Budget forecast & helicopter count contributions. SNH are unsure whether helicopter counts will be taking place at all, considering the climate emergency. Some groups have been contributing to the counts for a few years. Some members think we shouldn’t contribute at all. We are more likely to avoid paying towards a helicopter count if we can get a good foot count. However, there are some group members who do not take part every year. It was discussed whether we should count at a different time of year. However, this would mean starting again with our baseline since distribution and numbers of deer vary throughout the year. SNH could not confirm if we would be forced to contribute to helicopter counts, even if we have good foot counts and HIA data. Using drones for counting deer has had mixed success in recent SNH trials. Satellites may possibly be used in future.

5. Culls

a) Results of stag cull 2019 – Some members commented that stags were in very good condition, with lots of good young stags, perhaps the best rut in 10 years.

b) Proposed hind cull 2019/20 – Numbers are lower than last year. JI believes we are still a way off the 1400 hinds target. We are probably culling over 20-25% of the counted deer, with little risk of a population crash. Breadalbane went through a Section 7 and worried whether they had reduced numbers too low, but are now almost back to where they were. Deer are very resilient and populations can grow quickly.

c) **Population model** – We need to get a complete foot count in 2020 since the 2018 and 2019 counts were not complete, and the 2017 helicopter count data is getting too old to use in the population model.

d) **Date of 2020 foot count** – This has been set for **w/c 9th March**.

6. Deer Management Plan

a) **SNH 2019 assessment result** – We scored 98 greens and 3 ambers (DMG attendance, retain/improve native woodland, quantify capital investment).

b) **Priorities from Working Plan** – These are: looking at native woodland, and quantifying economic impacts - ADMG to advise. JI said considering land reform, it would be beneficial to us to provide information on the private inputs to land management. Perhaps we should look at the wider economic impact of our deer management. ITDMG is quite different to a lot of other groups which have a mainly stalking emphasis. JI pointed out that the information should be useful for the group, not just SNH. Although it is scored amber, it's not as important as other issues such as native woodland, counting and HIA.

7. Native Woodlands

Forestry Co-operation Grant (Forestry Grant Scheme) of up to £10,000 can be used for a consultant to scope out options on behalf of 4 or more landowners. Victor Clements is currently doing this for East Loch Shiel DMG, and could do this for ITDMG. However, landowners need to show a keen interest in doing native woodland planting or improvement following the scoping study, and there is also grant funding for this. Two members noted their interest in taking part.

Angus Bevan, consultant for Integrated Woodland Management, has offered to do ancient woodlands surveys for individual DMG members, which would be funded by The Woodland Trust.

8. Habitat Impact Assessments – 2019 results

We have 2019 results from six members. Results look better this year than last, likely due to heavier browsing over 2017-18 winter than last winter. Only three members of the group HIA project have assessed their own plots since Nikki set them up in 2018. It is vital that all members of the group project do their own assessments before Nikki returns in 2021. **Therefore, if you did not do your HIA in 2019 you must do it in 2020. Otherwise the National Park will request their funding back, and it will cost everyone double.** Please get in touch with the secretary, Helen MacIntyre, if you need help finding someone to do your assessments. SNH Ben Lui will commit to doing HIA in 2020.

9. Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) Report

Tom Turnbull gave his report as ADMG rep. *Report to follow separately.*

The ADMG AGM will be on 18th March 2020.

10. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Report – Jimmy Irvine

SNH review shows that deer management groups have stepped up and more planning is in place that wasn't there before. Lowland deer project report also included.

The climate emergency has brought scrutiny of various sectors of land management. Scottish Government is likely to be looking at how land can help with carbon capture. TT asked if there has been any data on peatland restoration from reducing grazing. JI said there was some work looking at this. Trampling impact is always an issue for damaging peatland. One member's peatland hags have improved over the past 30 years with reduced grazing, so is it worth using diggers to restore peatland? Carbon offsetting and carbon credits, getting funding through Peatland Action, means there is money now to restore peatland so we should take advantage of this now. However, annualised budgets make funding difficult to use. Our experience with Peatland Action was

difficult last year. In comparison, the Forestry Grants are slick and easy to use. Peatland Action are trying to make grants available earlier in the year so work can start August onwards. The private market on carbon credits is developing quite quickly, with set payments per tonne of carbon locked up. SLE are also trying to link land owners with those wanting to buy carbon credits.

Regarding SNH assessments of DMGs, it was asked if there was cross referencing in SNH across different groups? JI said there were guidelines on how the assessments should have been interpreted, and they were all quality assessed by the same person. HN pointed out that a few groups suggested that SNH do assessments every 5 rather than 3 years.

TT asked if the WMOs saw the SNH report before it went to the minister? JI said it has been more open this time round, and the final draft was shared with them as it was sent.

There was a discussion on the ideal deer density. It will vary depending on location. Using HIA data can help if deer counts are high on one day. The desired density for natural woodland regeneration is now only 4 deer per 100 ha. Regarding deer densities in woodland, dung counts can be used but only to see trends year on year, not calculate actual densities. Smaller woodlands with transient populations can have big changes in numbers day to day.

11. Any Other Business

The group welcomes the new owners of Garabal.

One member asked whether they are getting value for money from the group. HN said he believes the DMG is good value for money, but no-one can force members to take part. One member suggested evening meetings.

12. Date of Next Meeting – 10am on 22nd April 2020 at Argyll Estates, Cherry Park, Inveraray.