

# Inveraray & Tyndrum Deer Management Group

## Summary Minutes of the Meeting on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020, at 10am by Zoom call

**Present:** David Lowes – Glenfalloch (Acting Chair), Helen MacIntyre (Secretary), Jimmy Irvine – NatureScot, Ian Bray – NatureScot Area Manager Forth Region, Peter Kelly – NatureScot Ben Lui, Tom Turnbull – ADMG Rep, representatives from Argyll Estates, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park, Glenfalloch, Ardkinglas, Forestry and Land Scotland, Auchreoch, Strathfillan, Tilhill.

**Apologies:** Blarghour, Stuckendroin, Inveruglas, Brackley, Scottish Woodlands, Achadunan

**1. Welcome and apologies** – David Lowes thanked everyone for attending and welcomed Ian Bray from NatureScot.

**2. Matters arising from minutes of meeting 21<sup>st</sup> April** – None. Members were also sent an update in June.

### **3. Chairman's Report**

David Lowes said he has been honoured to be acting chair whilst Hugh has been unavailable and we welcome him back after this meeting. The executive committee has been working hard in the background, helping to focus the efforts of the group. We are always welcoming of anyone else who wants to join the exec. It meets 4-6 times a year in between group meetings. We have corresponded with Scottish Government, NatureScot and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park with regards to disturbance from public access, which has been unpleasant, worrying in terms of safety, mess to clean up, and can impact culls due to disturbance on the hill. This is likely to carry on increasing in the future, putting extra pressure on culls. We have also asked Fergus Ewing for help with venison marketing. David thanked Helen for her work as secretary.

### **4. Change of Office Bearers in Spring 2021**

David said Hugh has done a superb job as Chair of the group, so thank you to him for all his work. Hugh is stepping down in Spring 2021 after 5 years as Chair. David is willing to carry on as Vice Chair to help with the handover to the new Chair, but happy to step down if someone else wants to be Vice. The Exec Committee provides good support to the Chair and helps spread the workload. Hugh said it is good for the Chair to change every few years to bring new perspectives to the group. Hugh and David will continue on in the Exec. The new Chair will be coming into a good structure with everything working well. It was suggested that perhaps a forestry member could take a turn as Chair.

### **5. Impacts of Covid-19**

Of the 10 responses to the group questionnaire, only one member has reduced culls due to coronavirus. Members in the eastern part of the group have experienced increased public access, with a minority of these causing disturbances and significant littering problems. Everybody is struggling with the same problem and there doesn't seem a coherent long term solution to the problem brought to the front by the pandemic. On a positive note, some members have had many more emails and calls through Heading For The Scottish Hills asking about accessing the ground.

Jl said lots of people are starting to sell venison locally. They need to make sure someone in that supply chain is registered as a venison dealer. One member has obtained a venison licence so they can butcher and supply venison locally, including to the local fish vans. They place orders a week ahead so he knows what he needs to supply. Some have heard of other estates doing very well supplying their venison locally, but obviously there is some planning to do and hygiene standards. Local hotels are taking venison at the moment, but if we go into

lockdown again this will disappear. One member asked why the price from the dealer is so low considering the retail price hasn't gone down.

Highland Game is taking all the FLS venison at the moment, but if this dries up they won't have anywhere to put their carcasses to.

## 6. Secretary & Treasurer Reports

Thank you to Ardkinglas Estate for continuing to provide excellent treasurer services for the group.

See separate accounts document. Some subs are still outstanding plus several HIA project payments. Group subscription invoices for this year will be sent out shortly.

## 7. Culls

- a) **Results of stag cull 2020** – The group is 120 stags down on the total target due to out of season culling continuing. We will look at the numbers again in the Spring. Hind culls are more important than stags in terms of population control.
- b) **Proposed hind cull 2020/21** – The group total has reached the target of 500 open range hinds from our population model. JI commented that it is good to see targets being set in line with the group population model. We will need to review how Covid situation affects culls over the hind season.
- c) **Results of October count** – Should we continue with this count? As well as or instead of Spring count? October count better attended. It was suggested we should map where the deer are on the count, as was done in the past. It was decided that the group tries to continue with Spring counts because we have data going back many years. Spring counts have not been very successful recently due to the weather so the October count was an extra. **Date of next count – w/c 8th March 2021.** We will discuss at the Spring Meeting whether to do another October count. JI said NatureScot still have a rolling program of 5-6 years between helicopter counts. They are also doing trials of alternative count techniques which would be cheaper/more efficient. He doesn't know when next ITDMG helicopter count will be.
- d) **Population model** – This is still based on the 2017 helicopter count figures since we haven't had a reliable foot count since then.

## 8. Deer Management Plan

**Updates** – Some members have felling and planting plans to add to the group Deer Management Plan. The group wants an update about FLS woodland planting plans above the Rest – HM to ask FLS planning office.

NatureScot has set up an East Loch Lomond woodland project which includes Glenfalloch.

Glenfalloch is planning to do a small amount of peatland restoration early next year.

## 9. Habitat Impact Assessments – plans for Spring 2021

Nikki Dayton has confirmed she will complete the second part of the group HIA project next Apr/May. It was suggested we ask Nikki to spread the 100 plots over all landholdings so that she can take landowners out with her and provide training if necessary. TT said there are HIA videos on the ADMG website. Mar-May are the best months for HIA. NatureScot have offered to help members with their HIA assessments. Argyll Estates are also happy to take people out with them when they do their assessments.

## **10. Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) Report**

Tom Turnbull gave his report as ADMG rep. See separate report.

DL thanked Tom and ADMG for all the work that goes on behind the scenes.

## **11. NatureScot Report – Jimmy Irvine & Ian Bray**

IB said NatureScot's view of ITDMG is as an exceptionally well managed DMG, with a collaborative approach to collecting data and habitat monitoring.

Problems due to increased access to the countryside has been an issue across the country. NatureScot are working with the Scottish Government to address these issues. A number of groups have been formed to look at those access issues. Police Scotland and Visit Scotland are working with them. They have been promoting the Access Code and responsible access, including a media campaign that went out during the post-lockdown surge. They are preparing further media campaigns for next Spring. Other groups are tackling visitor management, such as local authorities and National Parks, and this needs to be co-ordinated. Police Scotland is leading a group looking at enforcement issues and lessons learned from how National Parks have used enforcement.

Rural land use partnerships will be an important part of land management in the future. The Land Commission have given advice to the Scottish Government on what these will entail. There are likely to be 12-15 groups across the country, using planning strategy boundaries. They are hoping to be operational by 2023-24. In the interim they will establish a number of trials. There are key questions over how they would be funded and whether they will be statutory or not.

The East Loch Lomond Woodlands Project is a trial lead by NatureScot, based on the Special Area of Conservation, gathering data for management at a landscape scale. Rather than individual woodland features, they will look at the services that the Trossachs woodlands provide at a landscape scale. The data collected will allow them to bid for public money, which is much easier to do with good data at a landscape scale.

DL asked about Land Use Partnerships – what will be the practical impact on land managers within ITDMG? IB said there will be different approaches in different areas, so impacts will be different depending on what the main land uses are. It will be directed towards climate change mitigation plans. The positive work that DMGs do in habitat work (both open hill and woodlands), such as peatland restoration, will be key in delivering carbon sequestration. DL commented that deer managers are well used to implementing new strategies, and speaking personally he finds they are asked to do a lot of things by the Government but pleas that the timetable of nature is taken into account. IB understands we are at the sharp end of trying to deliver lots of things. Rural support schemes will trial the best approaches, perhaps paying on the outcome that is achieved. DS asked if there is an official website regarding Land Use Partnerships. IB said not yet. The Land Commission have provided advice to the Scottish Government on the best options, who we hope will come back before Christmas with their decisions. Have a look at Land Commission and Scottish Government websites. TT said ADMG made a response on behalf of members, which is on their website, and it will be discussed at the upcoming ADMG meeting.

One member commented that in terms of access issues, it is the people parking on the side of the road rather than those going up the hills that are the problem. Members have tried to access rural funding schemes but have found them to be too restrictive, e.g. Peatland Action has cashflow and timescale issues, and Forestry Grant Schemes have so many conditions attached.

The National Park now get peatland restoration funding directly from the Scottish Government so that properties within the Park can apply directly to them for funding. DL told IB that without multiyear funding for peatland restoration, it is too difficult to use funding within one financial year. IB agreed that this is the number one hurdle and they continue to have this discussion with the Scottish Government.

A NatureScot update by JI was shared with members prior to the meeting. See separate document. DL thanked JI for his support and help with the group.

The UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties 26 (COP26) will be held in Glasgow next year, with the agenda set by the UK Government. The Scottish Government are keen to showcase their climate plan. NatureScot Chief Executive Francesca Osowska is planning to show the positive work that Scotland is doing to mitigate climate change. There will be discussions between world governments on actions they are taking, setting targets and monitoring. Alongside this is a world fair of positive ideas attended by many different organisation, like a massive trade fair. Scotland has a huge opportunity to showcase what it is doing. DL said he hopes ADMG will be well represented at this.

## **12. Any Other Business**

The National Park are re-scheduling the woodland HIA training day that had been organised for earlier this year and was postponed due to coronavirus. They are also running a tree planting grant scheme – a small pot of money for riparian planting, revitalising historic gardens and landscapes, agroforestry etc. DL thanked the National Park for their efforts.

It was commented that all our businesses are really struggling at the moment, and it is difficult for us to take on projects like peatland restoration. We need to turn what we have into natural capital. We have had no relief on rates this year, so the land is a financial liability. We see the land as an asset but the Scottish Government need to make it worth our while to restore the peatlands, for example. This time next year we will be clearer on Brexit and farm subsidies. This is a major part of our deer management. Natural capital, carbon capture etc., will definitely benefit from a group discussion. There is the hope that these conversations can be part of group meetings next year and in the years to come.

## **13. Date of Next Meeting – Wed 21st April 2021, 10am.**