

# Inveraray & Tyndrum Deer Management Group

## Summary Minutes of the Meeting on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2021 at 10am by Zoom call

**Present:** Hugh Nicol – Argyll Estates (Chair), David Lowes – Glenfalloch (Vice Chair), Helen MacIntyre (Secretary), Jimmy Irvine – NatureScot, Peter Kelly – NatureScot Ben Lui, Tom Turnbull – ADMG Rep, Nicola Colquhoun – LLTNP, representatives from Argyll Estates, Blarghour, Scottish Woodlands, Glenfalloch, Ardkinglas, Inveruglas, Forestry and Land Scotland, Auchreoch, Strathfillan, Tilhill.

**Apologies:** Achadunan, Achlian, Ardchonnell

**1. Welcome and apologies** – HN thanked everyone for attending. We invited the local wildlife crime officer and all local community councils but they have been unable to join us. They are aware they can contact us with any deer-related issues.

**2. Matters arising from minutes of meeting 5<sup>th</sup> November** – Minutes accepted by all.

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

Hugh Nicol reminded everyone that he is stepping down as Chair at the next meeting, but will stay on the executive committee. We now have Ian Robinson from Scottish Woodlands on the executive committee, giving us a forestry perspective. New exec members are always welcome.

### **4. Secretary and Treasurer Reports**

Accounts have been circulated. Some subscriptions outstanding. Budget for this year includes the final part of the group Habitat Impact Assessment project. Any questions about the accounts, please contact the secretary.

Jean Maskell at Ardkinglas has been our Treasurer for many years. She is leaving Ardkinglas this year but her replacement will continue to do the accounts for us, for which we are very grateful.

Subscription income will be lower this year since two private forestry members have decided to leave the group. These members also have forestry in Cowal and west of Loch Awe where there are no deer groups and they do not see any difference in their deer management in different areas so are not willing to continue as members of ITDMG. Jimmy Irvine said from a NatureScot (NS) perspective it is key to have landscape scale deer management with all landowners involved. They have a right to question if they are getting value for money but from an NS point of view there are plenty of positives from being involved in ITDMG. NS have worked over the past 20 years to try to get other areas of Argyll into the DMG system.

The executive committee have discussed whether we should change the group name to reflect what we are required to do by the Scottish Government (SG) and for our members. Some DMGs are changing their names to be more land management or nature oriented. It was decided that a discussion on name change should be considered in the future, but at the moment deer is the main issue that everyone attends meetings for and we risk losing members if we change the focus.

### **5. Culls**

**a) Results of hind cull 2020-21** – A lack of sporting clients this year has impacted culls, along with a low venison price and lots of venison in storage. FLS are down on their cull across Scotland due to covid.

- b) **Proposed stag cull 2021** – There are some figures still to come in. In terms of population modelling, we never count all of our stags.
- c) **Group foot count 2021 and future count plans** – Count weather conditions were again poor so we do not have complete count data. It was proposed that the group does another foot count in October, w/c 25th.
- d) **Population model** – The model is currently not very accurate since we don't have good recent count data. We can use it as a guide only. JI said that individually members probably have a better idea of what is happening with their deer populations on their ground. Overall, numbers in the model look good in terms of aiming for the target population of 1400 open hill hinds. NS recognise that targets may be difficult this year with covid and game dealer issues.

## 6. Game Dealer Arrangements

Fyne Game, the local venison dealer used by many of our members, are closing down. They haven't sold it on as a business so their customers will need to make new arrangement for venison collection. The Exec Committee have discussed whether to address this as a group, but decided it would be better to sort it out individually. This may have an impact on future culls if some members can't get a new dealer. Highland Game expect to be able to take all the deer that previously went through Fyne Game. It is vital that members contact them soon to make arrangements so that they can inspect your premises and plan for future collections. Their conditions may be more stringent than some are used to. A change in quality standards was coming anyway, including SQWV certification and a move away from lead bullets.

## 7. Habitat Impact Assessments

Nikki Dayton is completing the final part of the group HIA project. All members of this project need to assess all their plots this year, not just those being reassessed by Nikki. We are grateful for funding from NatureScot and LLTNP.

Glenfalloch, Auchreoch and Strathfillan will be doing their own HIA this year.

NC explained that if you have HIA data from blanket bogs then you can use this in planning peatland restoration. It is also useful for AECS schemes.

PK and JI at NatureScot are happy to help anyone who needs a hand with their HIA.

## 8. Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Report

NC explained that the National Park have a commitment to improving the designated sites within the Park. As part of this they want to look at the grazing in the whole area, not just designated sites. She would like to map both livestock and deer densities along with HIA results, upland and woodland, to help everyone understand the wider picture. She urged us to think about not just the deer numbers on the hill, but also sheep numbers since they will have an impact on the habitat. Often deer are looked at in isolation. There were concerns raised by the exec committee about the holding of ITDMG members' information on livestock by NP, what they would do with the information and whether it would be subject to FOI requests. DL asked about livestock equivalent units, and said Glenfalloch are happy to share sheep numbers on the understanding they would be aggregated across the group. NC said in 2013 there were twice as many sheep (in livestock equivalent units) as deer. There is a disparity in that there is a minimum stocking density of sheep for payments but at the same time pressure to reduce deer numbers.

The Park had a woodland assessment training session online last week, which went well. It is more complicated than upland assessments. They could arrange DMG-wide woodland training if there was interest.

Regarding visitor management in the Park, please pass any concerns on to her.

## 9. NatureScot Report

### a) General NatureScot update

Trials are ongoing to replace helicopter use with drones or satellite imagery. Drone UAVs can cover significant areas. With satellite imagery, image quality is not quite as good as drones, but it can also look at habitat changes, peatland condition etc. There will be further trials in early May (not within ITDMG).

PK explained that Ben Lui has Site Condition Monitoring planned for this year, which may run into next year. As part of this they will do HIA work to tie in with the rest of ITDMG. They are also looking at herbivore impacts in Coille Coire Chuilc SSSI woodland. There is an offer of HIA training for woodlands, which is a growing area of interest for NS for DMGs.

SG gave £50,000 for promoting venison across Scotland, which had to be spent by the end of March despite continued lockdown. In terms of venison marketing, conservation bodies want to see increases in deer culls but they are not happy to promote venison to the public. We need to improve the image of deer as a sustainable food source.

### b) ScotGov response to Deer Working Group recommendations and status of SNH 2019 report

NS are still waiting for feedback from SG on their 2019 report, and won't hear until after the election now. The DWG report had 99 recommendations covering a wide range of deer management issues. Around 85 of them have been accepted by SG. It is still early days on how they will work in terms of resources and details.

Some think the response is not very supportive of DMGs, but they believe DMGs are essential. JI said the SG response recognises the strength that DMGs have in certain areas, so NS will continue to support DMGs and also develop other structures where appropriate. It was suggested that we really need to focus on what we as a group want to do. A lot of the things we do in the group are moving towards land management rather than deer. If we move away from deer as a focus, what is the future for us as a group? Until we see concrete decisions coming out of the SG we should wait to make decisions on the group's future. There has been significant change over 30 years of DMGs. Many hours are put in by volunteers for DMGs, so what other structures would be able to take this forward. Our priority should still be on deer management. Deer management in itself is a complicated subject already, so to broaden the group to land management we would need many more meetings to cover everything. We are of course being asked to do HIAs and peatland restoration already.

It was pointed out that there is a lot expected of NS in the SG response. JI explained it is very early days in discussions about it, with no official response. Currently there are only 10 staff directly involved in deer management but many more would be needed for all the proposals.

Some members are not happy with the acceptance of no closed season for stags, but others are not so concerned, commenting that it is for individuals to choose when they cull deer. There was more concern about potentially extending the hind season, in terms of welfare and public relations, but it is still to be reviewed and will hopefully go out to consultation before any decisions are made. JI explained the reason for changing the seasons is due to changing land management practices across Scotland. NS will be looking at the evidence and ethics. There is a SG committee that has picked up on the welfare issues of changing hind seasons.

It was commented that if the venison market collapses and deer culls fall that will create an enormous crisis for looking after the natural environment of Scotland. The venison industry is in a precarious position, and all involved need to do their best to help it. It is extraordinary that environmental NGOs do not stand up to their

public and support venison consumption.

**c) Carbon credits – peatlands, woodlands and status of markets and regulations**

Carbon credits markets are evolving quickly for both peatland and woodland. However, if you have pristine peatland or have already restored it then it won't qualify for carbon credits. The worse condition it is in then the more money you can get for it since the potential carbon savings are higher. Some group members have had offers for carbon schemes. The market has developed very quickly over the past 12 months. One member advised planting woodland but don't be hasty in selling the carbon credits since the price is still going up. Investors are interested in buying land for planting woodland for carbon credits, and not just for timber plantations. In six months' time we will have a better perspective on the market. NS are encouraging people to carry on with peatland restoration and woodland planting.

**10. ADMG report**

TT gave his report – see separate document. He thinks the Scottish Government response recognises all the work that has been put in by DMGs. ADMG will continue to work with NS and will consult with members on how to address the issues in the SG response.

**11. Deer Management Plan**

The group DMP is not due for a big update yet. HM has circulated the updated contact information appendix and a draft update to the background information section of the plan with cull and count updates and sections on covid impacts and the venison industry.

**12. Any Other Business**

A reminder to members to update their stalking dates information on the Heading for the Scottish Hills website. Thank you to all contributors to the meeting today.

**13. Date of Next Meeting – Wed 10<sup>th</sup> November 2021, 10am. Venue TBC.**