

# **Inveraray & Tyndrum Deer Management Group**

## **Minutes of the Meeting on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2022 at 10am at Ardkinglas House, Cairndow**

### **Present**

Falcon Frost – Glenfalloch (Chair) (FF)  
David Lowes – Glenfalloch (Vice Chair) (DL)  
Helen MacIntyre (Secretary) (HM)  
Jimmy Irvine – NatureScot (JI)  
Peter Kelly – NatureScot Ben Lui (PK)  
Nicola Colquhoun – LLTNP (NC)  
Guy Cole – LLTNP Peatland Officer (GC)  
Tom Turnbull – Strone & ADMG Rep (TT)  
Hugh Nicol – Argyll Estates (HN)  
Tom Kirsop – Argyll Estates (TK)  
Jayne Young – Argyll Estates (JY)  
David Sumsion – Ardkinglas (DS)  
Jason Ferguson – Ardkinglas (JF)  
Tuggy Delap – Achadunan (TD)  
John Burton – Cononish (JB)  
David McPhie – Forestry and Land Scotland (DMP)  
Allan Kirsop – Forestry and Land Scotland (AK)

### **Apologies**

Martin O’Keeffe – Blarghour  
Ian Robinson – Scottish Woodlands  
Tiffany Douglas-Home – Glenfalloch  
John Duncan – Inveruglas  
Virginia Sumsion – Ardkinglas  
Diane Davidson-Kinghorn – Glencroe Farm  
Alan Cory-Wright – Auchreoch/Strathfillan  
Nicky Cory-Wright – Glenfalloch  
George MacPherson – Brackley  
Fiona Roebuck – Scottish Woodlands  
Alex McGrigor – Achlian/Ardchonnell  
Rolf Thornqvist – Strathfillan  
Colin Stark – Stuckendroin  
John Little – Tilhill  
Samuel Bristow – Tilhill

**1. Welcome and apologies** – FF thanked everyone for attending. See above for apologies.

### **2. Matters arising from minutes of meeting 21<sup>st</sup> April**

Regarding reclassification of open range/woodland, we are looking at classing deer as woodland only if they are behind a secure deer fence, otherwise they can move back and forward to the open range. The Executive Committee have discussed this and recommend it to the group. It will change the population model slightly. JF thinks it’s a common sense idea. Tuggy asked does it change when and where they are allowed to shoot deer. FF said no, the only change is for our records and in population modelling.

### **3. Chairman’s Report**

Since the last group meeting, we have had two executive committee meetings and FF has attended a couple of ADMG meetings in Inverness, which were very well attended. He went to a Woodland ‘HIA lite’ training day – a lite version is easier for land managers to use to assess their woodland. There is an update on the Best Practice website now. If this is to be accepted we can all use this in future for assessing our woodlands.

Lorna Slater MSP has been appointed to be in charge of deer, but we don't know if this will mean big changes.

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

#### **Secretary's report - HM**

Just a gentle reminder to please try your best to get cull returns and other information to the secretary as early as possible, otherwise it delays sending the group tables out to everyone before meetings. We are still waiting for cull returns from Tilhill and Balliemeanoch.

We have lost another group member - Keppochan on Lochawe side. They are bordered by Cladich Forest, who

left last year. Jon Strickland says that they are surrounded by commercial plantations that are stalked insufficiently and so belonging to the group seems pretty irrelevant.

Tilhill seem to think being part of the group is not that relevant to their clients. DL spoke to John Little before he moved on. Tilhill operate in a number of areas where there are no deer management groups so they think they can get along fine without DMGs. John had not been to a DMG meeting so perhaps doesn't understand everything we do. John acknowledged they would like to see positive venison marketing. In terms of representation and dealing with habitat impacts and issues that might arise between open hill and woodland, DMGs are very useful. DL pointed out that NS said at a recent ADMG meeting that if DMGs didn't exist they would have to invent them. Tilhill are to some extent benefitting from DMGs but getting a free ride from them if they don't engage/contribute.

HN asked do we still have enough core members to model our population. TT said yes, Tilhill manage wooded areas which aren't included in the population model. HN asked if we were a land management group would they be more likely to get involved? TT said it's more that they are involved in other areas that don't have DMGs. Timber and land prices are high just now so forestry members can afford to contribute. DL said we need to both work with Tilhill and also with NatureScot. HN said we in the executive committee have tried our best to keep people involved in the group, so perhaps it's time to ask NS to do more on this.

TT said we are on the cusp of some big changes on a national level. We are perhaps at a point where there are lower densities on the open hill than in the forests. If we don't plan now for the forests we are planting now then in 30 years time we will be in a difficult position with deer management. FF said it is much harder to control deer in forestry than on open hill. DMP said now FLS are trying to plant better to make it easier for stalkers to cull deer. JJ said historically, DMGs down to Mull of Kintyre and Cowal fell away as it fell onto the shoulders of mainly FLS to run them. NS are trying to revitalise them in Cowal but it's not easy and not going to happen straight away. There are other groups in Argyll that will hopefully be progressing in the next few months. FLS have recently recruited people specifically to work with their local neighbours and DMGs.

#### **Treasurer's report - HM**

There are several outstanding subscription payments and contributions to the group HIA project. Colin has told me that Stuckendroin have paid by cheque, so the total outstanding is £3,537. We will chase Keppochan and Tilhill for debts. **Action:** FF to draft letter to Keppochan.

#### **5. Culls**

- a) Results of hind cull 2021/22** – Thank you to everyone for putting the effort in to meet their culls. FF had a good hind season. TT said he was seeing more hinds at the end of the season possibly due to the mild weather. JB said Cononish had 2 stalkers out, but their cull was lower due to disturbance from walkers.
- b) Proposed stag cull 2022** – Glenfalloch is going to shoot 50, some around SSSIs or other areas of higher impacts. They might have to apply for OOS if they can't get them all in season. TT will be shooting a few more stags this year. We don't have Garabal's target yet and they are putting in woodland. **Action:** HM to chase stag targets.
- c) Group foot count 2022 results and future count plans** – It was a brilliant foot count turnout, thanks to everyone. FF counted more than he was expecting, considering how many he has shot in the last few years. He got a very good count. TK said he got a great count too, perfect weather for it. JB thanked NS for counting the deer on Cononish. If we could get a turnout like this, we could think about moving to counting every two years unless there are special circumstances such as a very bad winter etc. FF spent many hours on the phone encouraging members to count. Remember this is the bare minimum of the deer we have. Cobbler

didn't count any since their deer are disturbed more so they stay hidden during the daylight.

- d) Population model** – We should be near enough at our target of 1400 hinds by summer 2024. That's a pretty good achievement to have brought our hind numbers down from 2170 counted in 2017.

## **6. Deer Management Plan Priorities**

**a) Habitat Impact Assessments** – There are still some debts from the group project. If everybody can continue to monitor their habitats, it doesn't have to be done every year. Every 2-3 years is acceptable. JI said it's quality over quantity, make sure it's done right. HN wanted to check that NS and LLTNP are happy with their HIA funding. JI and NC agreed that they are. Now HIA has been set up, we encourage everyone to continue with their monitoring. On Glenfalloch, they use their results to see where higher culls are needed. FF thinks ScotGov will be putting more emphasis on habitat condition, e.g. farm payments etc.

HM sent out request for livestock areas but has had very few replies so far. It is essential we consider all livestock impacts, not just deer. Please try to get these in as it will be helpful to the group. **Action:** HM to send reminder.

**b) Native Woodlands** – As mentioned, there is a new Woodland HIA lite version for assessing impacts. As a group, we are trying to build our information on what native woodlands there are within the group, producing some maps from NS data. **Action:** HM to discuss further with JI.

### **c) Peatland Restoration**

A few members have been considering this. Glenfalloch are just at the survey stage of their fourth peatland restoration exercise. Recent projects have worked well already. They are lucky they are within the Park and have had help from them.

GC explained that the Park now have two peatland officers and can help landholdings with funding applications. Lots of restoration has been done in the past few years, mainly at Glenfalloch and Glenfinglas. Peatland Action works alongside the Peatland Code (not with them), giving funding for capital works, surveys etc. For those outside the park, Hazel White is the peatland action officer to speak to. GC recommends you get in touch with the Peatland Code as early as possible if you are interested in restoration. Ideally, they want to measure improvements so you need to register before you do work. NC suggested Glenfalloch could show people what restoration looks like on the ground. TT asked if his peatland is 2km outside the park boundary could the Park help him? TT has approached Hazel White but had no response. FF said there can be constraints on what times of year the work can be done.

HM asked if multi-year funding was available for everyone. GC said it is still at the discretion of Nature Scot. There is the possibility for larger sites for some work to be pushed into the next year.

DMP said FLS have their own peatland officers locally. Huge areas have been left unplanted and identified for potential restoration. It is unknown how the forest is changing with the open ground and scattered forestation. It could be good for deer management or maybe make things more difficult. At this time it is unknown what impact this will have on deer management going forward.

## **7. Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park update – NC**

LLTNP has been set up as a pilot for Regional Land Use groups, but it is still in the early stages. The aim is to try to encourage collaboration on changes to land use, all part of the battle plan on the diversity crisis and climate change. They are looking at the major stakeholders who need to be involved.

Fly tipping is still an issue within the Park. They have an environmental officer who can help deal with that. Speak to Nicola for details.

The Park have a new approach to restoring biodiversity and the natural environment, called Future Nature. They are looking to increase their strategies on biodiversity restoration, fundraising, peatland restoration.

TT asked if LLTNP has talked about having a target deer density, like the Cairngorms National Park plan, which has a target of 5-8 deer per sq km. NC said no, they do not currently have any target densities, but are looking at herbivore impacts as a priority. For NP, herbivore numbers are important. She recently did a FOI request for sheep and cow numbers in the park, and they have more livestock than deer, so habitat impacts are not just a deer issue. The Park will be looking at this more.

## 8. NatureScot report – JI

The Scottish Government have set up a new strategic **Deer Board**, which includes Robbie Kernahan, Donald Fraser, Alasdair McGougan, the National Parks, FLS, Scottish Forestry, SGRPID. They will use a multi-agency approach to work on 6 strategic priorities. It is recognised that whilst DMGs can try to deliver locally, national strategies are key to achieving the bigger picture. DMGs will be kept up-to-date. They will look at, amongst other things, legislation changes, reviewing venison dealer licensing, firearms orders (thermal, night sights), current incentives to deer management e.g. Scottish Forestry grants should ensure private forestry delivers on deer management. PK said perhaps they can feed back to their superiors about putting pressure on private forestry through the grants.

The **trial of thermal and night vision scopes** has now concluded, with the report to come possibly end of June. Safety concerns have been highlighted for more populated areas, where stalkers want to use them instead of lamps so they don't disturb people. AK said the difficulty can be in seeing what's in front or behind the animal picked up on thermals.

**Non-lead ammunition** – A number of game dealers will not take lead shot venison from July this year. TT said make sure to liaise with your dealer, and to order your non-lead ammo as soon as possible. Legally it has to be 100 grain minimum to shoot red, sika or fallow deer. They are looking at reducing it down to 80 grain for non-lead bullets, with further information to follow from NS, but this is likely to go ahead.

Recommendation from DWG of **10 deer per sq km**. This has raised questions on why are HIAs needed then. Some may think if they are below 10 then they can raise their density. In reality, 10 might not be appropriate in all situations. Use HIAs to gather information on impacts and judge appropriate densities. Looking at impacts on woodlands, native, Atlantic rainforest, etc. is also important.

**Trial on count techniques** – Satellites and drones are being assessed. Whilst the technology is quite good, satellites cannot classify deer and the weather can affect how good the results are. NS are also going to look at using planes, which operate somewhere between satellites and drones. The data from planes such as those used by Ordnance Survey can be used to monitor habitats too. Drone technology is there, but regulations mean they need to be within 500m of the operator. There is potential to apply for a licence to fly further, but the Civil Aviation Authority are not keen to give these. Drones are not great for counting larger areas like a whole DMG, but in terms of imagery and classification they do work well.

## Designated sites

**Ben Vorlich** on Stuckendroin and Inveruglas. Site Condition Monitoring was carried out by NS last year. The results are not that positive, suggesting that the habitats are disappearing. They are working out what that

means for the estates and their land management. Both estates have reduced sheep numbers significantly in the last few years and deer numbers are not that high. Changes to Garabal may help if deer numbers come down.

**Coille Coire Chuilc SSSI** in Cononish Glen. This has been in declining condition for quite a time, due to sheep and deer in the woods. NS and the Park have been talking to the owner, and are now close to getting agreement to completely fence the wood. NS will visit the site to discuss practical deer management implications and will look at culls around the area. They are looking for a grant from Scottish Forestry and possibly from the gold mine.

**Ben Lui SSSI** – Site Condition Monitoring was done last year. There is an expiring AECS scheme on Cononish. NS didn't get much HIA data so they will go out again this year to do more. They will look at the Ardkinglas area this year too. Some of the habitats are looking really good.

FF asked if the 10 deer per sq km density will impact grant applications. PK said for peatland action yes, with 11 already the maximum. For other AECS schemes it is likely that densities will be looked at.

FF had a thermal drone count done to look at goats, deer and sheep in their Balquhiddy area. It was impressive the detail you can get and it was really useful.

JB commented that NS said they are very happy with the higher habitat at Cononish but the lower ground is not so good. PK said that is historically where the impacts were, and things have improved but there is still some way to go. JB said the recommendation was to reduce deer numbers. Their 350 sheep graze the lower area in the winter and a neighbour also uses the grazing until December. Would it be better to get the cattle removed earlier? PK said yes possibly, but in combination with reducing the pressure from deer during the winter. JB asked how many sheep would need to be wintered away. PK said it is difficult to know exactly, they would need to try and see what works. If the cattle were removed completely then the area would be overgrown.

**NS new corporate plan** – This mentions a reduction in deer numbers. TT said it is disappointing that the plan didn't mention sheep. JI said in the last few years, agricultural damage from deer has gone through the roof.

## **9. ADMG Report**

This was given by Tom Turnbull. See full report circulated separately.

NC commented that Lorna Slater visited the Park a few weeks ago and they did tell her it's not just deer it's also livestock that cause impacts.

## **10. Any Other Business**

DS said work was done on the trunk road cutting back overhanging trees recently. Having a clear verge on the road with regards to deer collisions is important. JI said NS have been talking to transport about this for years. NC said unfortunately the council have seeded the verge at Lix Toll, providing grazing for deer right by the road!

FF said sika hinds have been seen by a stalker who shoots in Ewich. JF has seen one sika hind. TK has seen a few on the Dalmally road. JF said they don't seem to have spread as quickly as he had thought they would.

## **11. Date of Next Meeting** – Wed 9th November at Glenfalloch. A visit to their peatland restoration will be planned for the morning, with the group meeting in the afternoon.