

# WKDMG AGM and Meeting Minute 15 November 2021

Venue: Inverie Hall, virtually via Teams

Present: Rupert Soames (RS), Jim Brown (JB), David Fergusson, Craig Dunn, Grant Holdroyd (GH), Iain Biggart (IB), Richard Martin (RM), Rick Rohde (RR), A Hildred, Ally Macaskill (AMac), Luise Janniche (LJ), Fred Rous, Elisabeth van Basten Batenburg (EvBB), Tom Dayell, Cathy Mayne (CM), Linzi Seivwright (LS), Andrew MacMaster (AMacM).

## 1. Apologies

Michael Laing, Simon Laird.

## 2. AGM Business – Nomination of Office Bearers and Secretary; Group membership fees for 2021-22.

No new nomination forms have been received. JB proposed Rupert as Chair, IB seconded. RS as Chair proposed JB as VC, seconded IB. RS proposed CM remains as Sec, seconded by IB.

Finances in good order, some scope in 2022 to reduce loan to RS; decision to repay deferred until end 2022. No increase in membership fees required. Potential to reduce fees in 2023.

## 3. Minutes of last meeting

Minutes accepted and approved.

## 4. Reports from the Chair and the Treasurer; report from NatureScot

RS - Needing to continue to reduce numbers, so need a strong hind cull.

Conversations between RS and DB around JMT, all very courteous; thanks for that. But no progress for the 2 requests at last meeting – similar HIA work, that is up to date and cull expectations for population model. Paper circulated by JMT is helpful; any further update?

AMac, fences to remain, attempting to keep clear of deer. Also applying for OoS for one particular spot to support some regen. Difficult to say how many that OoS, if successfully given, would account for. EvBB; will deer be extracted?

AMac – will extract where possible but extraction should not restrict management.

RS – have the stags already shot been extracted?

AMac - Some left on hill, all open hill ones, left in Coire Dhorcail. Best venison removed. Li face carcasses can be dragged off but some also been left within the woodland scheme; not dragable.

RS – comment to say it is hard to know where we are on the proposed cull when we don't know how many JMT are shooting. Not aiming to hold JMT to a number, rather to have a rough ballpark. This is the first time that as many as 20 have been taken in season. This helps the OoS application but still need to provide evidence of damage; HIA dearth on JMT ground. Shooting hinds as well as stags under OoS?

AMac - Will apply to cull hinds to end March. Conditions will be applied by NatureScot so JMT would have to comply with any of those conditions. Small area of ground will be applied for, which will restrict the numbers that can be taken. Looking at the HIA; AMac maybe should have done this, but more woodland than DSH monitoring focus. Maybe use photos or a site visit from NS staff to show damage.

RS – not trying to stop deer culls and good to be in a dialogue, just slightly concerned for reputation if large numbers of carcasses are found, also for numbers to be appropriate and for HIA to be considered.

EvBB – would it be helpful if HIA could be done with NatureScot when they come over?

AMacM – recent impacts from last winter; difficulty of working with a fluctuating population with incursions from outside. Sympathy for that. Also sympathetic around the concerns around leaving carcasses on the hill. BP for woodland HIA due to be published shortly. But with the current deer densities and management objectives, if JMT have aspirations for woodland regen then our licencing dept would scrutinise but hard to say what the baseline cull will be.

AMac – open to establish monitoring of regen. Regen largely down to historic use of OoS authorisation; in order to protect, need the same management. Reluctant to do as realise it have been controversial, but choosing to shoot OoS in this area, they are carcasses that can be extracted and is adjacent to the main path, so extraction desirable. Targeting the troublemakers at the time when the damage is being done. Better than extracting from Coire Dhorcail, which can't be extracted from.

EvBB – responding that more about HIA that contributes to the group work.

AMac - Keen to continue previous plots so have been discussing whether more random plots should be done, no conclusion yet. Staff, access and other blips have made things challenging over the past couple of years, but clear that maybe better resourcing will be made available.

EvBB – that is positive and would be really good to see.

AMac – continuing with WKDMG rather than leaving as RS has had some really good conversations.

RR – concerns about state inside of fences, can't take them down; too many deer outside to remove them. Very different sets of processes inside and outside the fences. What is the point of monitoring unless it is to reduce the far too many deer outside the fences?

RS – patchwork of different objectives across the group. Advocating the density from previous correspondence (?2-3) but this differs from what other landowners want. Conversations with DB focus on the scale of the property – a small patch that is hard to manage this way. However, all agreed that numbers need to go down, but the question is to what level. All DMGs have to engage knowing that target densities are different.

RW – thanks to RS for constructive approach and will pass comments back to DB. Apologies for not being there in person. RW now Ops Manager in North. HIA point; approach for L&CD is similar to other properties, and demonstrating benefit is a key part of what we do.

EvBB – good to have a bit more of a focused discussion on how we, as a DMG, are contributing to wider environmental concerns. A stronger cull is part of that. Perhaps productive if we all contribute something by email and consider the density we are seeking to achieve. Global crisis needs us to act sooner rather than later.

RS – drawing together these strands, we have a population model, derived by previously set targets of roughly 10, look at these and can be pooled and added to a paper that outlines these different objectives and revisit this issue.

AMacM – coming from a different perspective – should work from how many sporting stags do you require, and then build density from there. Fecundity will change with changed density. Use HIA and population model using sporting stags, rather than aspirational density.

GH – doesn't understand what AMacM is saying – basing cull on sporting requirements?

AMacM – for some other properties, using the sporting stag model rather than the density model takes more account of fecundity and suggests a smaller population for a given number of stags.

RS – in the interests of time; we wish as a group to reconsider the issue of density and rebuild a consensus. Caution – we have widely varying densities even as it is, from v low to nearer 18+. By June 2022 meeting, RS and JB will go round landowners and ask what they all want.

LS – apologies from Simon Laird. KDMG has gone through this process, identifying that hind numbers are roughly double that which is required, reducing to 9-10/km sq for the same sporting cull. Reassure that KDMG is going to be doing the same thing.

### **ACTION – RS, JB to talk to landowners about aspirations.**

NatureScot – AMacM. NS is rolling out a new woodland HIA process. Training days proposed for groups. Widely accepted 10/km sq as target, but scale of application still to be decided. Population assessments – new drone testing. Also use of non-lead ammunition. But focus has to be for WKDMG reducing hind numbers.

## **5. Deer management – count, cull and population model**

Cull figures, population model and count plans for 2022.

Reports from estates.

KF – 45 stags on hill, 6 out of woodland fences. 14:03. 18:09, 8yo. No plans to cull goats. Hinds started, 4 and 2, 70 and calves planned. IW not here; 4 stags this season.

KE – target of 40, 37 off hill, 2 in woodland. 14:09, 21:11; 9.1yo. Inundated with campers and walkers. Hinds aiming at 110 and c55C. May get more if season goes well. Aware has a higher density so will be working hard over the next 2-3 years to reduce in line with everyone else. Hinds to date 16+12.

Camusrory – 13 stags. 14:03, 17:11; 9yo. Hinds propose 25 unless there is an incursion, but could take 60 or so.

Barisdale – 18 stags (20 target) 14:09, 16:07; 9yo. Not started hinds yet; planning 40+ minimum, possibly more.

JMT – continue culling below fence under general licence, but not large nos inside fence.

Scamadail – no news yet.

Foot count aiming for late winter/early spring 2022. Coordinate in the same way.

Population model shows an undercull so please kill more hinds. Message to all there is no argument that we need to reduce the numbers. Please all take hinds.

### **Action – JM to organise count 2022.**

## **6. Woodlands and forestry.**

Discussion of proposals for separation of the Black Hills from the rest of the peninsular open range.

Black Hills proposal; thanks to KF and Craig for including us in the consultation process. JB – linking existing woodland blocks to create a strategic fence to create woodland on small resident hind population and predominantly wintering stag population. Aiming to reduce deer to allow planting and woodland regen, including montane habitats. Compensatory cull also required for displaced stags. No definite number yet agreed.

RS – compensatory cull. Big variation in population seasonally.

JB – foot count had 266S, 50H, 27C (343). HC – 119S, 35H, 11C (165). NS would want compensatory cull based on heli count. Probably propose +50S on top of normal cull in that area, then monitor once fence is closed and impacts outside the fence.

IB – management structure within the fences? Zero tolerance or a low density accepted?

JB – based on browsing and growth levels. Contract to get these to grow.

General discussion. Potential to enclose the stags that are normally resident there and then kill inside the fence.

RM – don't have too many hang-ups on goats but will have a significant impact on western Knoydart.

Prehistoric presence of woodland. Worthwhile doing, but not so sure of zero tolerance.

JB – as woodland expands, roe will likely expand. Red deer will require more active management.

GH – zero tolerance on deer is misleading, the critical thing is deer damage to trees.

AMacM – supporting GH and damage. Will never eradicate the deer, focus on the impacts.

CH – apologies for late arrival. In Austria, herbivores are always present. Biggest concern is the economic impact of deer feeding on trees. Once trees established, some deer can be tolerated. Roe deer more a potential issue than red once woodland is established.

RS – a cunning plan to include a v large area with relatively little fencing. But linking back to RR comments, inside the fences at L&CD, vegetation has become really rank without some herbivory. Better to kill of stags INSIDE the fence – ie fence is closed with resident stag population INSIDE. DMG is on the whole supportive of this. Hope to see the monitoring, since it will change things in a positive way.

Camusrory likely to embark on some more serious planting – 30-50 ha identified by GH (thanks).

KE – proposals of c 220 ha (3 different blocks, first about to be closed off) still on-going.

Barisdale – scheme GH is taking forward is c 100 ha with a smaller one (c20 ha).

Braomisaig – inherited 70 ha enclosure, so posts renewed and added 13,500 trees to existing enclosure. Also been weeding bracken.

2 more KF blocks – Croulin fencing after Christmas.

## **7. Habitat impact assessment**

Discussion of report on HIA in 2020 and 2021.

CM – quick summary.

## **8. Invasive non-native species**

KE – been a pig at Kyles flats. Signs earlier in the autumn, coming and going.

Also pig rooting at Croulin, Sourlies. Young Sika inside fence at Inverie.

## **9. AOB**

KF has a night shooting authorisation for deer inside Inverie fence (mostly roe deer on clearfell restock).

GH – email re maximising contribution to Climate and Biodiversity crisis. Great that group recognises that deer numbers need to be reduced. Great that agreeing to look at densities and objectives. Like to go one step back and suggest all ought to be considering our objectives. Highest priority has to be how do our objectives fit with the current crises (climate, biodiversity and global community). Would like to ask the group to consider how our activities impact on those three things.

CH – understand the intention but not so sure what you mean by the social impact?

RS – want to understand what these words mean. As part of the consultation that RS and JB are going to carry out re land use objectives and deer densities, RS suggests GH adds in what you think we should, as a group, do to respond to those concerns.

GH – main thrust is that the group considers these things. Happy to set out what I might mean, but really asking everyone else sets out what they think it means.

## **10. Review of action points and Action Plan 2021 going forwards**

New KF larder; getting connected up this week, more processing of venison (mincing etc), lots of investment. Team now being got together to operate that. Hoping to process everything culled within a few years.

At least 1 case of Lyme disease in the village this year.

**11. DONM**

Barisdale 12:00 on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2022.