

West Knoydart Deer Management Group
Minutes of meeting held at Inverie Village Hall
Tuesday 22nd November 2016, 11.15

Present:

Amie Dow, Angela Williams, Chris Donald, Davie Newton (chair), Eric Delwart, Graeme Taylor, Grant Holroyd, Iain Biggart, Jim Brown, Lester Standen, Mike Daniels.

In attendance: John Crosthwaite-Eyre, John Gordon (via Skype), Robert Cooper, Rupert Soames, Stuart Pitts.

1. **Apologies:** Fred Rous, Iain Wilson, Mike Kenny, Peter Fletcher.
2. **Minutes of last meeting** held on 21st June 2016 were agreed. Comments made on those minutes by Patrick Grant were highlighted.
3. **Review of action points**

Action point	Who	Progress
Keep display area folder and Web page up to date; minutes, DMP, etc.	JB	Done, ongoing
Draft map of seasonal (summer/winter) stag/hind ranges	JB	Carry forward
DMP update following input from SNH re-assessment	JB/DN	More to do, update website
Population model update to follow 2017 spring count	DN/GT	In hand
Look to use new SNH GIS system for count/cull data processing when available	GT	Still in development. Funding issues to be resolved.
Complete 2016 HIA and send data to LS	LS/JB/IB	Done
HIA collate group results	LS	Done
HIA map of collated results	CM	Ongoing
Re-affirm invitation of membership to Camusrory and Barisdale	JB/DN	Done
Request KDMG data, proposed culls and meeting dates	JB	Ongoing
Communicate/coordinate with Camusrory and Barisdale for 2017 spring count	JB/IB	In hand
Maintain good communications through the season	All	Ongoing
Use the Public Interest Criteria as future meeting agendas	All	Done
Web page payment	IW/JB	Done, IW paid
Organise DMG community event this summer	DN/JB/CM	Done
KFT and all to input new woodland expansion plans to DMP	GH/All	Awaiting KFT Forest Plan review
Woodland condition surveys/monitoring proposals	GH/All	In hand

4. **Mechanisms to Manage Deer**

a) WKDMP update

The DMP is on the Visit Knoydart website, but needs some updating as still showing in draft format.

b) Population Plan Update and

c) Count Planning

The reason for WKDMG using a model different from SNH standard was queried. DN stated that the two DMG models use the same methodology, with the baseline data being the only significant difference. WKDMG & Kilchoan have 20 years consistent foot count data which can't be ignored, so that has been used in conjunction with the SNH data. Only the SNH data is available for Barisdale and Camusrory, so that alone was used as baseline for them in the inclusive model. VC's reasons for objection to that model were unclear.

RS said that public money spent on SNH count, so shouldn't be ignored, and still no clear explanation for the significant difference in numbers returned between that and foot counts.

DN highlighted the value of foot counts alongside, as heli count is just a snapshot and that data is already 3 years old.

GT said that SNH is keen for DMGs to consider how to deal with these issues, but also to move on with collaborative count and cull planning. SNH would use their own helicopter count data for model baseline, but also fine-tune with more recent foot count data.

IB was happy with the foot/heli count comparisons.

ED stressed need for consistent timing of future counts.

GT said that DMGs should focus on their own counts, as can't rely on SNH to always count in the future.

JG and RS committed to collaborative spring count for Barisdale and Camusrory, alongside WKDMG & Kilchoan.

ED thought the pop model should aim to achieve a more balanced deer population across the peninsula.

LS thought that if there is another heli count in the future it would be useful to corroborate with a foot count for comparison.

JG said that Barisdale will also be additionally counting to inform their moorland management plan.

d) Stag Cull Reports and

e) Hind Cull Targets and Update

JB reported KF stag cull target of 65 was achieved, with 58 on KF ground, 1 from ACGC woodland and 6 from JMT ground. Average weight was 13st 09lbs, heaviest 17st 12lbs and average age of 9 years (JMT ground heaviest 18st 12lbs, average age 10.5 years). Had also culled 6 feral goats and 1 roe buck. Hind cull of 65 plus calves is planned. About 23 hinds and 15 calves taken so far. Recruitment appears very high, and struggling to find yield hinds. The proportion of calves to hinds culled will therefore probably be higher this season, than normal. All in good condition so far. IW had 2 stags at Inverguserein and planned about 6 hinds. So in relation to the population model target for the Knoydart cull, only 60 of the proposed 70 had so far been achieved. However, more might still be culled, under the general authorisation, if any get into fenced woodland establishment areas and are causing damage during the winter.

IB reported Kilchoan had 25 stags, with the cull target reduced from pop model of 35, due to unexpectedly high cull by JMT last year. Average weight 14st 07lbs, heaviest 17st 07lbs, and average age 8.8 years. They had struggled to find mature stags early in the season, with 7 blank days, but there were more about once the rut started. However, the rut was again quite late and short. Plan to

cull 90 hinds plus calves, with 23 hinds and 17 calves taken to date. Calving also reported as high and difficult to find yield hinds. Weights are good so far.

DN noted that the pop model shows a requirement for 120 hinds plus calves for 3 or 4 years to achieve population targets, and wondered if this significantly lower plan could lead to ongoing problems with hinds out-performing stags, due to the high hind density. This might then not help achieve the aim to balance stag/hind population.

ED said they now aim to reduce the hind density over 5 to 7 years, mainly in sympathy with their neighbours' concerns about low numbers, so particularly culling less adjacent to Camusrory. The cull this year might then be more of a population maintenance rather than reduction.

GT pointed out that there is often better recruitment following high mortality events, and that research on Rum has shown that at lower hind densities, a higher proportion of calves are male, along with lower stag mortality. Need to be careful that maintenance cull doesn't allow the population to get too high.

JC queried the reason for the lack of stags at Camusrory, suggesting that it had come about due to high cull levels from JMT. IB thought that too many had been culled over the whole area in recent years, based on his observations.

DN suggested that other evidence and research based reasons might exist. For example past management leading to excessive hind densities mean that the feeding potential of the ground has been degraded. In these conditions stags do not perform as well as hinds and so more are lost to mortality or move off.

JC stressed that their deer population at Camusrory, stags and hinds, had significantly reduced since 2000, with the average cull coming down as a result of a lack of deer.

GT said that historically habitat conditions have been changing and the condition of the ground is not static. Therefore how attractive an area is to deer is also changing.

ED thought the density here would react quickly to culling compared to areas with higher recruitment.

DN said that looking back, around 8 years ago there was very low recruitment, so we could expect a slightly reduced population about now. However in context nationally, this area still has some of the highest deer densities in Scotland. Also pointed out that WKDMG actual culls have never exceeded recruitment.

LS reported that the only stags culled on JMT ground so far are the 6 taken by KF. Hind cull target is 15, with one hind and calf taken so far; also one roe. As the cull target is limited to 35 by the pop model, they want to maximise the cull available if stags are causing damage to woodland in the winter. During the season he has been going over the ground, but not seen any deer within the target woodland area, so none shot. Hasn't yet applied for OOSA, as wanted to get feedback from this meeting first. JC and RS expressed concern, and couldn't understand why no effort was made in season this year, when 86 had been shot last season. LS explained it has been clarified by SNH that 'effort' in-season does not necessarily relate to actually culling, but also includes time spent on the ground and disturbance. DN said that JMT objectives relate to woodland rather than cull targets, so better discussed under 6a.

JG reported stag cull of 13. Planning a low hind cull of maybe only 3, but keeping an eye on pressure on fences and might cull more if necessary. On the SSSI, they are aiming for zero deer inside the fences, and the unfenced ground condition not declining. GT said the herbivore impacts must not

increase. JG thought that in recent years 85% of their cull had been localised around Barisdale, which has contributed to the current low density there. GT thought the hind target of 3 is low, and a close eye would need to be kept on impacts.

RC reported 14 stags culled; average weight 90kg, heaviest 103kg. Hind groups had been small this year during the rut. Planning hind cull of just 12, with 3 hinds and 2 calves taken so far.

Concentrating on poor condition beasts. Noted that hind population had reduced from 320 down to 163. RS highlighted the density difference of 9/100ha at Camusrory compared to 19/100ha at Kilchoan. It seems unfeasible, suggesting movement of deer onto Kilchoan. Current collaboration between neighbours a good thing.

GT queried whether any attempts were being made to improve habitat in order to make the ground more attractive to deer. RS said they are clearing bracken, and now have a feeding program. However, they don't want deer fences as want to 'keep it pristine'.

5. Delivery of designated features into favourable condition

Barisdale SSSI already discussed.

6. Manage deer to retain and improve existing native woodland cover

a. Current open range native woodland deer management

GH said that nearly all woodland KFT manage on KF ground is now within deer fences so protected, but need to think about what will happen when the fences are no longer viable. Some areas on Kilchoan have good natural regeneration without fencing, despite high deer density.

MD said JMT main priority is to regenerate woodland, and that is now happening in places. They are willing to work within the pop model number, but need the OOSA to achieve objectives. Their previous concessions made to KDMG had already limited cull number to 45 over a 5 year average, so this reduction to 35 is a further compromise. Request for support from WKDMG for OOSA application.

JB said he is happy with that, as it is within the group pop model, and assists both the group and JMT achieving their objectives. Also within scope of public interest criteria.

ED queried whether it was possible to chase deer from the area, or cull in season to achieve objectives. MD said that neither would work in practice; no evidence for disturbance working elsewhere; fencing and culling are the only practical tools at present. The seasons are artificially imposed, and there is no deer welfare reason to prevent culling stags in winter.

ED expressed concerns about the absolute number proposed in the OOSA, (ie: 35) even though it was in the population model, noting that the 86 shot the year before certainly was not within the population model. However he would support the proposed OOSA, as long as in the future cull numbers are kept within the plan and neighbours are kept informed of cull progress.

IB thought the less that need to be shot for JMT to achieve their objectives the better, so would support if it meant less would be culled.

GT said that they had not yet received an application, but if/when it does, it will be assessed on its' merits as any other would be. Support from evidence of effort in season and collaboration with neighbours would help.

RS thought numbers were more important than timing ('better to shoot the definitely guilty, rather than the probably innocent'), however SNH should take account of the 86 culled last year which has

had an impact on the wider stag population. It was a grave mistake, especially without consulting neighbours, so a limit of less than 35 would be better this year.

JG queried why JMT remove fences while trees are still vulnerable? They will keep fence up until trees strong enough.

DN asked what action would be taken if the Barisdale SSSI were to be heavily impacted, and JG said they would have no option but to shoot if it were degrading. Could accept the concept/theory of JMT OOSA if the number were limited to say 5 or 10. JMT ground draws in deer, so need to consider neighbours.

JC asserted that JMT culls are economically damaging to Camusrory. They now have 2 less staff, ghillie and ponyman, due to reduction in stag cull achievable from 27 to 12. Happy for JMT to achieve objectives, but with regard to neighbours. Camusrory will make representations to SNH re OOSA application.

GT said that SNH have a balancing duty, and could refuse or limit an OOSA.

LS explained the JMT position regarding the need to cull deer to protect unenclosed woodland, and how the JMT stag cull target of 35 for 2016-17 had come about. That Stuart Brooks had written a document outlining the JMT position on culling and what it would be necessary to cull in order to meet its habitat objectives. The document proposed that if no in-season stag culling was required then an average of 35 out of season per annum for 5 years would be sufficient. This position had been put to Victor Clements (representing KDMG) at a meeting in February and the document was subsequently emailed to WKDMG and KDMG. LS said that WKDMG had agreed the figure and incorporated it into its population model.

JC stated he still doesn't agree with JMT point of view or basis for cull targets.

CD said it was good that this discussion was happening, and achieving a balance across the area is important. We need to consider mechanisms which might help to remove the high impact or focus of just one relatively small property. DMGs need to look to the medium term, including habitat improvement to help sustain deer.

JC continued with a quote from a document by VC, stating that JMT was 15 years too early with their attempt at woodland regeneration, as deer pressure could be better absorbed once other WKDMG fences come down. DN replied that the purpose of WKDMG woodland establishment is not to shelter deer to sustain sport shooting. Further, it is possible that when fences are opened in the west, open range densities might prove to be causing excessive damage to young woodland, and then densities might actually need to be reduced. Focus of DMGs needs to be wider than just sustaining stag culls. SNH support validity of wider objectives, regardless of timing.

At this point there was an intermission, and RS, RC and SP left the meeting.

- b) Current woodland deer management within fenced enclosures and
- c) Plans for expansion of targeted deer management within native woodland

GH said KF fenced woods being kept mostly clear of deer. Possibility for change in management at Rubha Raonuill, where the last significant unfenced remnant of woodland could be protected and regenerated. Currently looking at feasibility of fencing/planting. Will try to maintain Garsley fence until trees no longer vulnerable, but if there were catastrophic damage then would need to manage deer to protect woodland. DN pointed out that there could be a future need for DMG level of contribution towards protecting SSI, but GT said that responsibility is with Barisdale to manage impacts at present.

7. Contribution to woodland expansion targets

KFT woodland management plan review has identified 8 potential new expansion schemes, which could total 400ha over the next 10 years if all go ahead. Just the relatively small scheme at 'White Gate' Inverie going ahead at present.

JC said they are aware of the need to do something, but no definite plans at present.

ED is in discussion about new woodland schemes with GH.

JG said their priority is getting current schemes away. Anything additional would more likely be at the east of the ground.

GT confirmed SNH woodland cover target is still 25%.

8. Monitor and manage deer impacts

LS presented a summary of collated impact monitoring by JMT, KF & Kilchoan. Highlighted some mistakes and irregularities to be ironed out. Stressed the need to record systematically. Not yet enough data for trends to become apparent. JMT now monitoring tree regen. on circular plots as well as marked seedlings. KF have some old circular plots still monitored, as well as the bog and heath plots.

JG said that Cathy Maine is doing the monitoring inside SSSI fences and they have a contractor helping on the rest of the estate. Good for continuity of survey results.

GT said the uptake and delivery of monitoring is good, and well done. Still scope to expand programs. In the future, will need to consider how to translate monitoring results into actions, to achieve SNH target of <10% heavily impacted. Will be useful to have results mapped to identify areas suffering high impacts.

JB contributed that the DMP states if over 10% heavy impacts are consistently recorded over 3 years, then culling level will be increased in response.

ED questioned SNH guidance on impacts, and GT said outside designations it could be up to the DMG to decide whether high impacts were acceptable in certain areas, if necessary for members to meet wider objectives.

CD added that habitat monitoring can be a good opportunity for collaboration, but needs to be consistent for future reliability. Results should be shared between the 2 groups. CM can help with standard presentation.

9. Ability to store carbon through ecosystem health

a) Peatlands condition – plan for baseline surveys?

DN queried what was expected here. JB thought it difficult to assess, especially where habitat monitoring demonstrates low impacts, but deep peat hags are still eroding rapidly.

CN informed that Peatland Action funding is available for surveys and management plans as well as implementing actions. Limited pot, so should consider applying, for initial surveys at least.

b) River basin management plan

DN had looked at SEPA website, and advice on this is unclear. Need to contact to understand requirements for us.

10. Reduce and mitigate invasive non-native species

IB reported the signs and sighting of wild boar at Kyles Knoydart. Suspect that origin is the feral population at Glen Dessary. Asked SNH point of view.

GT said that there can be beneficial impacts at low density, but that is almost impossible to maintain. SNH advice is to cull at earliest possible opportunity and attempt to prevent colonising. Efficient control options such as trapping are being investigated. JB reported small number of sika now on the ground. Attempts to cull, but difficult to find.

The meeting drew to a close due to time constraints. GT thanked Barisdale and Camusrory representatives for attendance/contributions, and also DN for a well chaired, effective meeting.

19. DONM

Tuesday June 13th 2017 (KDMG on 12th?)

Tuesday November 21st 2017

Action Points

Keep display area folder and Web page up to date; minutes, DMP, etc.	JB
Draft map of seasonal (summer/winter) stag/hind ranges	JB
DMP update following input from SNH re-assessment	JB/DN
Look to use new SNH GIS system for count/cull data processing when available	GT
Use the Public Interest Criteria as future meeting agendas	All
Maintain open invitation of membership to Camusrory and Barisdale	JB/DN
Maintain exchange of information and data with KDMG	JB/DN
Web page payment	IW/JB
KFT and all to input new woodland expansion plans to DMP	GH/All
Woodland condition surveys/monitoring proposals	GH/All
Maintain good internal communications through the season	All
Ensure hind cull targets achieved	All
HIA map of collated results	CM
Communicate/coordinate with Camusrory and Barisdale for 2017 spring count	JB/IB
Population model update to follow 2017 spring count	DN/GT
Habitat impact monitoring surveys spring 2017	LS/IB/JB
Peatlands Action Fund – consider application for surveys	DN/JB
River basin management plan – contact SEPA	DN/JB
Continue invasive/non-natives management	IB/JB
DMP annual review at next meeting	JB

Post Meeting Note

From JC, following on from Para 4(e), please note that “Camusrory have now committed to fencing in part of the ancient birch and oak woodland on the side of Sgur Na Ciche (the Dhruim) and have put in hand the application process with a view to carrying out the work during 2017.”