

West Knoydart Deer Management group
Minutes of meeting held at Inverie village hall
Tuesday 18th November 2014, 11.15

Present: Iain Biggart, Nigel Boston, Jim Brown, Ian Dow, Peter Fletcher, Grant Holroyd, Davie Newton (chair), Lester Standen, Graeme Taylor, Iain Wilson.

1. **Apologies:** Eric Delwart, Fred Rous.
2. **Minutes of meeting** held on 22nd July 2014 were agreed.

3. Review of action points

Action point	Who by	Progress
Information and invitation of membership to Doug Hawthorn	LS	JB & LS now in contact with stalker
Circulate data records and continue to add to/amend as necessary	DN	Ongoing
Finish compiling objectives spreadsheet and append to DMP	JB	Not done
Add count detail to density map	JB	Not done
Draft map of seasonal (summer/winter) stag/hind ranges	JB	Not done
Look at feasibility of allocating culls by area	JB	Not done
Prepare charts of population change	DN/JB	Not done
Habitat Monitoring results for KF and Kilchoan to next meeting	JB, IB	On agenda
Consider additional publicity of group activities, inc. web sites	All	Not done
Update DMP detail for next meeting	JB	Done
SNH funding for DMP	JB/DN/GT	On agenda
DMG audit, August 11th	JB/DN/GT	Done
Description of rationale for cull animal selection	JB	Not done
Habitat distribution and condition information available for group area	GT	Not done

4. 2014 Habitat impact monitoring results and analysis

KF results received from Lewis Pate, but not yet analysed due to changes of staff in Ranger service. New ranger Rachel Moore will probably be taking forward. Kilchoan had a similar situation, with monitoring completed but no analysis done as it was the first year. JMT results could be combined to give an overall group survey, if we decide what we want from them.

KDMG are still considering using Lewis as a contractor. Ideally, estate staff should also be involved.

5. 2014-15 cull progress

See also data table appended.

- IB reported Kilchoan had met their target of 32 stags, with an average weight of 14st01, and age of 8.6 years old; similar to previous years. Hind cull to date was 27 hinds and 18 calves, and still planning 80 to 90 hinds plus calves.
- IW had culled 9 stags, averaging 13st11 and 9.5 years old, and also had a 3 year old stag caught up in fencing. 3 hinds and a calf had been culled, with a target of probably 10 to 12 for the season.
- JB reported that KF had culled their target of 90 stags, averaging 13st09 and 10 years old. Weights were down. The only big beasts had come from the low ground and plantation edges. Hind cull to date was 18 and 6 calves, with a target of around 100. Had also shot 1 roe buck, 1 sika stag and 7 goats. Will be culling more roe deer in Inverie Woods, prior to felling and restocking this winter. Will be applying for a night shooting license here.
- LS had culled 17 (?) stags and 4 hinds, and planned about 35 hinds plus any out of season stags.

There was general agreement that the previous poor winter had knocked the hill stags back to such an extent that even the excellent spring and summer weather hadn't provided enough recovery to achieve good body condition.

6. Deer Management Plan Update

The latest draft was looked at, with alterations agreed being:

- Membership list all to be included together, rather than separating non-landowning.
- IB passed on message that ED would prefer Kilchoan to be classed as an "active participant" rather than a member. This category should then also include SNH.
- Table in section 7.2 to include current population densities. This might then remove the need for population numbers in section 6.2.

SNH funding might be payable to a member's bank account, so we may be able to claim through KF; to be confirmed by GT. Claims would need to provide evidence of work done, for example KF could claim for JB's hours if there was an auditable trail of costs and JB was charging his time to the DMG as a self employed contractor. Still hope to have mapping/GIS supported. Funding is over 2 years, with year one ending April 2015, probably being under less pressure so we should get in before then.

GT advised that the WKDMG and EKDMG will need to ensure that their deer management plans contain management actions that are compatible with each other and in order to do that WKDMG will need to share their draft plan with whoever is creating/finishing the EKDMG plan.

7. Response to SNH regarding JMT out of season authorisation letter

There was lengthy discussion of the current situation regarding the JMT out of season authorisation, and the relationship between the two DMG's.

The main points discussed were:

- The authorisation is limited to 15 stags and to the end of February, though this will be reviewed by SNH.
- The SNH helicopter deer count currently being carried out was already in the pipeline, but brought up in priority as a response to the current situation. (IB was happy with how the count on Kilchoan had gone. JB thought some deer could have been missed, but generally ground was well covered.) The Knoydart results should be ready within 3 weeks, at which point the authorisation will be reviewed.
- SNH had assessed the application in terms of the culling effort made 'in season', and the damage to habitat being caused. It was authorised under these parameters, but restricted due to submissions relating to socio-economic impacts made by KDMG.
- There is currently no system in place for analysing the socio-economic impacts of an authorisation being approved or rejected; applications are assessed on a case by case basis and a judgement is made taking into account all representations made.
- The East KDMG had made representations to the SNH chair about the issue.
- The East KDMG has so far declined to be involved with the DMG Assessment process, which must be completed to enable progress. There has so far been a lack of progress toward sustainable deer management planning within the East group. Their draft DMP is relevant and demonstrates shared objectives but needs updating and remains un-adopted.
- The WKDMG and draft DMP do comply with SNH's expectations of sustainable deer management planning. It was confirmed that neighbouring objectives are currently being taken into account, and that through the planning process and ongoing communication with EKDMG this will be further addressed.
- In order to achieve sustainable deer management planning over the whole deer range, the East and West groups need to improve communications. Furthermore the WKDMG needs to resolve the issue of an apparent lack of understanding, by KDMG members, of its' objectives and activities.
- If the situation doesn't quickly improve, SNH may consider a Section 7 Agreement, which would bind participants to prescribed actions. If progress still didn't happen, then SNH would use their powers to enforce actions on those individuals not delivering.
- A sensible deer range management area for Knoydart is the whole peninsula area, and so Camusrory and Barisdale should be reminded of the open invitation to membership of WKDMG.
- The current closed season for stags do not specifically relate to protecting deer welfare. They were initially set to protect sporting stags, were enshrined in the Deer

(Scotland) act and have persisted despite advice from SNH during consultation for the WANE 2011 bill. SNH/DCS had advised that all deer managers should be required to achieve DSC level 2, and then individuals would decide on the timing of culling, in relation to local management plans.

LS was asked if he could give a brief summary of JMT management objectives and actions at Li& C.D. The main points made were:

- JMT want to cull deer during the winter when they are on the lower ground causing damage to the habitats being protected and improved, specifically dwarf scrub heath and native woodland.
- Shooting deer in season when they are generally on the higher ground is unproductive, as it does not target the specific animals causing damage, and often the carcasses cannot be extracted due to the in-accessible locations. This is then a net cost rather than a benefit to both JMT and the wider local economy.
- They have removed deer fences from the small woodland to the east of Inbhir Dhorcail as the trees are now mature. Another deer fence to the west is planned to be reduced in size and re-aligned, but are awaiting an FC site visit before proceeding. The larger deer fenced enclosure at Li will remain for longer as more tree planting is required to fulfil FC requirements.

Some specific actions were decided upon:

- DN will invite the KDMG chair and DMP consultant to a meeting with WKDMG chair and SNH, to ensure that the 2 DMP's and groups will work collaboratively and sustainably into the future.
- JB is to email data, minutes and draft DMP to KDMG chair before their meeting next Monday, as we need to ensure that the flow of information continues effectively.

A couple of other relevant issues discussed were:

- Concerns were expressed that the ongoing very high levels of annual natural mortality over large areas of Knoydart (over 300 reported on East KDMG area) are indicative of over-population and poor habitat condition. This is a much bigger deer welfare issue than out of season shooting of stags, and completely unsustainable. (Post-meeting note: JB had stated 15 mortalities on KF ground last winter; this should have been 27).
- It was questioned whether the issues being raised by the East DMG could be more about maintaining capital land values and political agendas related to a fear of land reform, rather than actual land management concerns.

8. AOB

- JMT are making a film about Li & C.D., which will be available online.

- We should have some kind of event in Inverie this winter to help promote WKDMG members activities within the local community.
- Patrick Grant may have stood down as KDMG chair(?).
- GT was thanked for clarifying issues clearly and frankly.

9. 2014/2015 meeting dates

- Tuesday March 3rd
- Tuesday June 23rd

Action Points

Circulate data records and continue to add to/amend as necessary	DN
Finish compiling objectives spreadsheet and append to DMP	JB
Add count detail to density map	JB
Draft map of seasonal (summer/winter) stag/hind ranges	JB
Look at feasibility of allocating culls by area	JB
Prepare charts of population change	DN/JB
Habitat Monitoring results for KF and Kilchoan to next meeting	JB, IB
Consider additional publicity of group activities, inc. web sites, for minutes, agendas, etc	JB/DN/IB/LSt
Update DMP detail for next meeting	JB
SNH funding for DMP	JB/DN/GT
Description of rationale for cull animal selection	JB
Habitat condition information available for group area	GT
Circulate SNH count results	GT/JB
Reminder of open invitation of membership to Barisdale and Camusrory	JB/DN
Invite KDMG chair and their DMP consultant to a meeting with WKDMG chair and SNH	DN
Data, minutes and draft plan to KDMG before their meeting next Monday	JB