

## **Minutes of the Balquhiddier Deer Management Group Meeting held at Mhor 84 on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2017 at 7:30pm**

### **Present:**

Mike Luti	ML	Paul Bekier	PB
Ian Dingwall	ID	Russell Lamont	RL
Malcolm McNaughton	MM	Jimmy Irvine	JI
Tom Turnbull	TT	David Thow	DT
Richard Eadington	RE	Juan Arktoxa	JA
Nicola Colquhoun	NC		

### **Population Data**

JI stated that FES need to increase deer cull to reduce habitat impacts on their ground.

JI said that there had been good discussion around the topic and how it would impact on neighbours. He explained why they were doing it and by sharing information (HIA & Cull data) the Group would have a better understanding of the Great Trossachs Forest Project (FCS/RSPB/WT), its 200 year plan and long term management objectives. FES has their own land management plans but wants to help achieve neighbouring objectives at the same time.

JI stated that there was little difference between the 2010 and 2017 counts so the population is relatively static but the population distribution may be changing - to understand where the impacts are coming from we need to understand where the deer are. It was discussed that north shore of Loch Katrine is a wintering ground and will hold a high proportion of the Group's stags. However, RL says there must be a lot of immigration as historically FES have shot 50% of the males counted.

FES wishes to reduce deer densities from current 15 (approx.) deer per km<sup>2</sup> to between 2 and 7. There was discussion about conflicting density figures which were attributed to inaccurate deer range areas. Therefore it is important for members to inform the Group if they deer-fence any areas (or remove fences) that will no longer be available for deer.

PB notified the members present that they may have funds for a helicopter count in March 2018.

ML stated that neighbours feel that cull is excessive and that neighbours need the income that stalking generates. ML asked if FES could be flexible and alter their cull target in the spirit of co-operation. RL stated to the members present that FES have had a similar cull for the last few years and it has not affected the ability of the neighbouring members to achieve their cull targets. PB asked how many stags the neighbours need to keep their stalking clients?

ID said that they achieve their targets but it is getting harder to do so. JA and DT agreed.

JI said that no one has talked timescales and RL & PB asked for timescales from the neighbouring members. The Great Trossachs Forest is a 200 year project, the fences on Loch Katrine are about 10 years and so have another 15 years life in them. So the population density could be brought down over the next 3 years.

There were discussions about whether FES could reduce their stag culls and increase their hind culls. This would then allow the neighbouring holdings to increase their stag cull and realise their sporting aspirations. ML asked that all DMG members will increase the hind cull.

PB said that FES wish to cull approximately 300 deer of North Loch Katrine. The ratio of stags to hinds is not so important to them, so they can potentially shoot more hinds - 225 hinds:75 stags.

Proposed Stag Cull Numbers:

<b>Holding</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>Proposed 2017/18</b>
FES	96	75
Inverlochlarig	20	26
Ballimore	30	40
Muirlaggan	12	15
Glenfalloch	20	20
Glen Finglas	50	50

ML asks if FES will be more selective in their stag cull and consider herd management rather than purely number reduction. ML want to have shootable stags, last few years there have not been enough mature stags.

PB said that they will use every legal method to ensure they reach their cull targets, for example, contractor stalkers, helicopters for stalker access and carcass extraction, OOS and night shooting authorisations.

Jl stated that the new arrangement will hopefully deliver population decrease and improvement in condition of habitat.

### **FES Habitat Impact Assessment Summary**

RL outlined the habitat impact assessments and the aims of Scottish water - to increase native woodland by 30% - so far they have planted ~800 ha of native. RL explained that they used the fences from previous WGS schemes to increase the area that is protected from grazers.

RL explained that FES carried out HIA in 2015 using Colin Wells. They monitored the grassland, dry heath and wet heath and the results showed that overall the condition of the area was favourable recovering and showing a low to moderate grassing pressure throughout the holding.

In March 2017, RPS (HIA consultant) carried out HIA (using BPG methodology) on the north shore of Loch Katrine looking at Heath and grass habitats. 120 plots were evenly distributed within and out-with fences and on heath and grass habitats.

The results showed that there was a lighter grazing pressure within the fenced enclosure, as would be expected, but it shows that the habitat can change if the grazing pressure is lessened. The grazing pressure was high above fenced enclosures on the open hill.

PB stated that he notices that the grazing pressure on the habitat increases as you travel north through FES ground toward Blaircreich and there is an increased in the amount of trampling noticeable on the ground.

PB want to be able to have a sustainable population that will not affect their trees and RL stated that grassland is not beneficial to deer over the winter so there is a need to increase the heather coverage. However, with high deer numbers the habitat moves from heath to grass and FES wish to reverse this.

## **Access from the North**

RL & PB explained that it is difficult to get passed the stags that over winter on the lower slopes north of Loch Katrine so that they can stalk the hinds.

The option of gaining access from the north, through Muirlaggan, to get passed the stags on the lower slopes on the north shore of Loch Katrine was discussed, this would allow FES to increase their hind cull and therefore reduce the overall grazing pressure.

PB asked if FES could get an access agreement from Muirlaggan.

With JA's permission, PB and RE are going to take an ATV to see if there is a route that would work for culling the hinds on the higher slopes around Beinn Mheadhonach & Meall Gaothach.

## **Blaircreich**

JI has written to Blaircreich but has received no reply and explained the option of asking SNH to issue a Section 10 (Follow & Kill) on Blaircreich. A neighbour will need to apply to SNH to say that deer are causing damage to habitat/ woodland and that all other options (Section 7 &/or 8) have been discussed and deemed not suitable.

## **Incursions**

PB stated that FES is worried about break-ins if there is a hard winter with deep snow - there is zero tolerance to deer inside their fences – so FES will keep up pressure on the deer along the fences.

ML asked FES to notify other DMG members if they have incursions and they intend to cull large than normal numbers within their fences.

## **Sheep**

FES Guidance on Stray Sheep was discussed and MM raised concerns about the guidelines and the consultation period with the farming sector. RL insisted that FES are going to work in with collaboration with neighbours so if ownership of sheep can be ascertained then all efforts will be made to return those sheep before any other course of action is taken.

## **Actions**

1. Proposed cull figures
2. FES to share HIA report with the Group
3. Members to update information with any new exclosures from deer fencing
4. FES to investigate if there is an access route from the north to allow hind cull on North Loch Katrine slopes.