

Balquhiddier Deer Management Group

AGM

Balquhiddier Hall, 2pm, 30th May 2018

Apologies: Alan Sneddon, Malcolm McNaughton, Tom Turnbull, David Lowes, Alex Caraffi, Rolf Thornquist, Malcolm Walker and George Coyne

Attendees: Mike Luti, Falcon Frost, Estelle Gill, Victor Clements, Emma Paterson, Alan Cory-Wright, Quintin Lyle, Alcuin Arktoxa-MacKenzie, Nicola Colquhoun, Ian Dingwall, John Reid, Paul Bekier, Richard Eadington, David Thow, Jimmy Irvine and Fraser Lamont.

Matters rising and minutes of the last meeting: NC gave an update on the minutes and action points from the meeting on the 31st October 2017. The minutes were proposed by Emma Paterson and seconded by Falcon Frost.

Election of Office Bearers: Mike Luti stood down as Chair of BqDMG – Alcuin Arkotxa-MacDonald volunteered to take this place and was proposed by Mike Luti and seconded by Falcon Frost. Ian Dingwall stood down as Vice Chair and Quintin Lyle volunteered for the position. Mike Luti proposed and Ian Dingwall seconded. Malcolm McNaughton, although not present, requested in writing to stand down from the treasurer's role. Nicola Colquhoun said she was happy to continue on as the secretary and to take up the additional duties of treasurer and was proposed by Mike Luti and seconded by Alcuin Arkotxa-MacKenzie.

Accounts for 2017-18: NC gave the members present a summary of the accounts and highlighted that we would have just over £1200 once we have paid for ADMG subs and paid out the SNH HIA grant to the consultant. ML said that it was appropriate that the DMG have a buffer and that we should keep the subs at the same level. VC suggested that including a simple budget to show next year's projections would be useful.

Action: NC to provide a budget for 2018/19.

Review of 2017-18 Season: Members gave a summary of last season and many members stated that the number of mature stags has decreased. The density of hinds was more variable with some properties wishing to increase their hind cull and others not having enough and struggling to reach cull targets.

Proposed 2018/19 deer culls: Members discussed the proposed cull figures which are based on last year's figures, this year's count and taking into account the properties land management objectives and any HIAs carried out to date. It was mentioned that we can only cull what is on the ground and EP stated that it will dependent on winter mortality and the effect that this may have had on the population. There have clearly been hotspots in the winter mortality and not all properties have been equally affected. Mortality will also be linked to winter deer density and the condition of the ground. An earlier count (mid-November 2018) would give us more accurate information on which to base management decisions¹.

Herd management was discussed and members were asked to be mindful of neighbours' objectives, i.e. whether there was a requirement for "trophies" or rather to reduce population size.

¹ Feb 2018 Count only covered 80% of the open range.

Members were reminded that sending in their recruitment counts to NC will help in the setting of cull targets. Glenfalloch recorded 38%.

ID reported to RE in Oct/Nov that there was a 25m section of fenced down on Ben More. Due to contractors and the weather this fence was not repaired and many of the deer from Coire Chaorach went into the forestry, which will have caused damage to the restock on Forest Estate. ID is worried that these deer will all have been culled by the contractor stalkers. FES schedule of maintenance was discussed and their obligation to repair fences, PB told members that FES do not have an in house fencing squad and contractors are brought in – the fencing budget is also dropping. JI reminded members that they should check their title deeds as the cost to the maintenance of boundary fences is often 50:50.

Count 2018: Due to technical difficulties with the helicopter, the foot count did not occur on the same day as the FES helicopter count. FF thanked FES for counting his southern ground. Only 80% of the open range properties were counted and it is essential that we can improve this coverage.

Action: NC is to speak with members that did not count and ask them what help they require to carry out a foot count.

Count 2018/19: JI told the group, that BqDMG are due for a helicopter count. SNH is trying to ensure that each DMG gets a helicopter count every 5 years. JI reminded the Group that FES have offered cost sharing and it might be worth pulling resources in 2-3 years' time (2020-21) and have an interim helicopter count.

It was decided that we would go for a mid-November count – this will depend on helicopter availability and weather, but it will give us a good indication of the hind population and whether more needs to be done to reduce the numbers during the rest of the open season. Misgivings were raised regarding having a count at a different time of year to normal (Feb/Mar) and getting a completely different data set which cannot be compared to previous years. But it was thought that it might give us more information on wintering ground pressures on areas such as North Katrine and the north side of Balquhidder glen. ID is happy to continue as Count Coordinator.

Authorisations: FES have applied and been granted authorisations (Out of Season (5/6) and Night Shooting (18/2)) over all Cowal and Trossachs. They intend to use the OSS on the open range and NS within fenced areas. JI reminded members that anyone can control deer within an enclosed² area in the closed season. But that the general authorisation does not allow the culling of female deer over one year old, of any species, anywhere, between 1 April and 31 August.

JI said that WTS Glenfinglas and Dochart Woods also normally apply for authorisations (OOS and NS) but were not present to confirm this. Also that the Authorisations were under review and information was being gathered on image intensifying equipment.

Upland HIA: Members were happy to follow proposal set out in Cathy Mayne's spec.

Action: Members that have already carried out HIAs were asked to send data to NC.

Members that had currently not carried out HIAs were urged to do so.

² 'enclosed land' as defined by the Deer Act means enclosed by a stock-proof fence or other barrier.

Woodland HIA: It was discussed that although it is important to know what the condition of the open hill, as a third of the DMG area is wooded, knowing the condition of the woodlands is equally important.

Three members of the DMG attended the Woodland HIA day organised by the LLTNPA and kindly hosted at Glenfalloch. There was discussion around the methodology and how members found it difficult to follow. The methodology was devised to look at a whole range of impacts, and the impacts assessed could be refined depending on what is going on the wood. The methodology should allow discussion regarding the impacts and the damage being caused. It was meant to be simple but some have found it quite subjective. However, it should give results that are within certain thresholds (i.e. if 2 different people assessed the same woodland their results might show low or medium impact but not low and high impact) and more importantly over the years the assessor will be able to pick up trends. It also requires a lot background knowledge and strategic thinking. AAM suggest that fixed transects should be walked noting trees, species, damage etc. JI advocated looking at the same plot every time; however, the purpose is to look at the condition of native woodland over time.

Action: NC to send out woodland HIA methodology.

Improving the condition of native woodland is the overall aim based on the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS) and the target is for 60% to be in favourable condition by 2020. 77% of native woodlands in the BqDMG area are in the low or medium category for grazing impacts, so we are well above the National Target; however NC suggested that we should be trying to improve on our score. AAM stated that this is an individual land management objective, however JI pointed out that when the woodlands need collaborative management, it becomes a DMG issue.

Action: NC to look at NWSS survey and pull out where action could be taken to improve the condition of native woodlands in the BqDMG area.

ML told the members present that the LLTNPA were writing a Trees & Woodland Strategy this year and were having a Stakeholder Event on the 28th June and urged members to get in touch with NC if they would like to go.

Feral Goats: EG from SNH told the members present about the meeting had in December 2017 with land managers involved with feral goats. We discussed cull targets, population reduction tools (immune-contraception, translocation & lethal control) and that it was a case of population reduction not eradication. However, due to their location the extraction of carcasses is difficult and a boat is required.

The 2018 Spring Count was 96 - numbers have increased in the woodland and continuing to cause damage to the habitat. FF culled 49 on Glenfalloch and FES 56 on their ground (which is out with the count area), however nothing has been shot by FES since 6th December due to welfare reasons (nannies being in kid or with dependents). RSPB is very supportive of this collaborative approach.

Training: Members were reminded that anyone that took the DSC1 before December 2014 needs to attend a meat hygiene refresher course.

Action: Members to update NC if they have received training or carried out a course such as DSC1 or DSC2.

Native Woodland Creation: In the meeting on the 9th May, it was discussed whether there was an opportunity to create a buffer to The Great Trossachs Forest (TGTF) to attempt to mitigate the conflicting land management objectives between the properties in the Southern Area of the Group. Glenfalloch are in the process of writing their Forest Plan and may look to create more native woodlands. FES North Katrine is also looking at creating more woodland. Blaircreich & Murilaggan are well wooded and would struggle to fit any more trees in.

The long term plans for TGTF were discussed. The fences will be removed when successful establishment has occurred and trees are above browsing height (approximately 15-20 years). After this time grazing by a sustainable level of deer will be allowed throughout these areas. Members present voiced their concerns over removing the fences and how this will affect the movement of the deer. JI reminded the Group that there is potentially another 7 years to look at the collective objectives of neighbours and continue to move discussions forwards .

ADMG report: VC attended on behalf of Tom Turnbull for the ADMG. He reminded the Group that there is the assessment in the Spring of 2019 assessment and that ADMG are paying for a consultant to carry out a pre-assessment which will flag up strong and weak points that the DMG should look to address.

VC reminded members present that the focus for this and next year should be the HIAs of both the upland habitats and familiarising ourselves with the woodland methodology.

Food Standard Scotland has been trying to raise the standards in the Venison industry and have prepared some videos to show the best practise for practioneers. SQWV are still offering larder assessments.

Action: NC to circulate videos to the Group.

VC reminded Members that Chronic Wasting Disease is still a threat and any visitors from USA or Scandinavia are high risk and they should be asked to buy new kit in the UK rather than risk bring contaminated items.

The Scottish Deer Health Survey 2017-18 carried out by the Moredun Institute which was to research the prevalence of Cryptosporidium, E Coli O157, and CWD will publish a report soon, but the preliminary findings have not found any of the afore mentioned parasites / diseases.

ADMG are having regional meetings and workshops in the beginning of June and ML and QL will go to represent the BqDMG.

SNH report: JI told the Members present that the assessment will be done by ADMG, SNH, the chair and secretary of the Group by 31st March 2019.

The Best Practice Guides are being refreshed and are no longer going to continue in paper format.

National Park report: JR circulated the "NPPP: At a Glance" booklet and gave a summary of the NPPP 2018-23 which was launched in March. The NPPP sets out the NPA objectives for the next 5 years and how they wish to work with partners to achieve this. The 3 main

themes are Conservation & Land Management, Visitor Experience and Rural Development. There are 13 outcomes which we want to achieve. Four are directly relevant to us as land managers – natural capital, landscape qualities, land partnership and climate change. There are 4 key performance indicators by which we can measure if we are achieving our outcomes – woodland, peatland, water quality, designated sites. The NPA realise that they cannot achieve these targets alone and only by working with land managers can they be delivered.

Any other Business:

Mike Baillie-Hamilton emailed NC to say that Cambusmore had sold Stroneslaney Woods.

LLTNPA is looking to see if there is resource to have a look at the Constitution. VC reminded NC that ADMG have a template that was written in 2015.

One of the tenanted farms (Kelliator) on Glenfalloch is coming back in hand, there are currently 1200 sheep and 100 cattle on the ground. The estate has not finalised what will happen.

One of the tenanted farms (Ledcharrie) on Suie is coming back in hand – they are still looking at the options availability to them.

FES is keen that we continue to discuss collaborative management in the southern area.

There were discussions about contaminated carcasses going into food chain. 0.33% of all (just over 37,000 total cull, with 34,000 being sent to the game dealer) FES carcasses being sent to Highland Game were condemned as not fit for human consumption. The main controller has to be the producer/ stalker but there should also be a secondary level of control by the game dealer.

ID reported to the Group that there had been approximately 6 Deer Vehicle Collisions on A85 at Suie over the Spring, so 1,000m of new electric fencing has been put up to stop the deer crossing the road and coming down into the silage fields.

The timing of the next meeting was discussed and given the attendance at 2pm it was decided to return to a 7:30pm meeting time in October.

Date of next meeting: Monday 29th October 7:30pm