

# **Balquhidder Deer Management Group**

**Balquhidder Hall, 7:30pm, 29th October 2018**

## **Minutes**

### **Present**

Alcuin Arktoxa-MacKenzie, Quintin Lyle, Richard Eadington, John Sinclair, Jimmy Irvine, Falcon Frost, Alex Bowers, David Sutherland, Ian Dingwall, Mike Luti, Alan Cory-Wright, Jack Cory-Wright, David Thow, Fraser Lamont, Paul Bekier, Alan Sneddon, George Coyne, Malcolm Walker, Hamish Thomson, Tom Turnbull, Nicola Colquhoun.

### **Apologies**

Malcolm McNaughton, Juan Arkotxa, David Lowes, Emma Paterson and Rolf Thornquist

### **Deer Vehicle Collisions**

Will Diamond informed members that there have been no reported DVC south of Lochearnhead since the various measures have been put in place to tackle this problem. All the various parties were commended for working together on this, from fixing the fences on the Carstran Woods, increasing the cull in the Edinchip Wood and raising awareness with Bear and Transport Scotland.

There is now a form for reporting DVC on the website and members are requested to use this to feed back to Police Scotland,

### **LLTNPA Trees & Woodland Strategy - Simon Franks**

Simon was not able to make the meeting but has sent me the following summary. The main points of the strategy are:

- Any relevant woodland management/ creation plan should include DMGs as a key stakeholder;
- Forest owners should be members of DMGs and share felling plans to aid planning of cull target;
- The importance of herbivore management in both native and productive woodland is a focus to improve native woodland condition as well as to enable a wider variety of productive conifer to be planted;
- Promotion of new woodland creation integration into existing land based enterprise as part of diversification for stock shelter, habitat enhancement, water quality and timber production; and
- Woodland creation.

“Spatial analysis has been undertaken to identify preferred and potential areas where native woodland creation would deliver strategy’s objectives. The analysis is based on Forestry Commission Scotland data sets, integrated habitat network forest habitat network, climate suitability for tree growth and Plantlife’s climate suitability for bryophyte habitat. Native woodland creation in these areas could include establishment at productive densities.

Preferred areas are where native woodland creation would have the greatest improvement in woodland connectivity, more suitable climate for tree growth and contribute to expansion of the Bryophyte Important Plant Areas. Potential areas are areas where native woodland creation would contribute to the wider strategy's objectives.

In sensitive areas, there is limited capacity for woodland creation due to nature conservation or landscape objectives. Individual tree planting, small scale planting (less than 0.25 ha) or agroforestry may be supported where it contributes to the strategy's objectives without negative impact on the particular sensitivity.

Notwithstanding the spatial analysis any proposal would still be required surveys to be undertaken to identify any site specific constraints."

This analysis is at scale that proposals could be designed around other land manager requirements. It is a "scale above" land use planning, land use planning could be a further step either on a single holding or multiple holding/ catchment scale.

In order to assess capacity for productive conifer there has been a landscape analysis undertaken which highlight where this type of woodland would fit in the landscape, the NP has been divided in to 10 areas to aid this work as well as detailing other requirement such as good road and hill track network, design requirements to increase native woodland habitat network between existing woodland/ remnant trees, and wider habitat enhancement without negative impact on important open habitats

As well as looking at location for new woodlands the strategy details the issues which any new woodland (native or productive conifer) should consider and included where possible depending on size and location, this could include enhancement for flag ship species such as Black grouse, red squirrels, trout, improvements in connectivity of existing woodlands and maintaining connectivity of priority open ground habitats, creation of montane and riparian woods.

### **Matters rising and minutes of the last meeting**

AAM gave an update on the minutes and action points (detailed below) from the meeting on the 30<sup>th</sup> May 2018. The minutes were proposed by Alan Cory-Wright and seconded by Mike Luti.

### **Budget**

A budget has been produced for 2018/19, the reasons for building up a buffer were discussed (such as supporting HIAs and an emergency fund) – it was decided that the Subs would be left at the current level.

### **2018 Foot Count**

Most of the members that did not participate in the foot count in February 2018 committed to counting in spring 2019, such as Benmore Farm, Blaircreich, Craigrue, Edinchip, Monachyle Mhor and Muirlaggan.

The timings of the annual count was debated and the various reasons as to why counting is done in the spring versus any other time of year. It was re-iterated that the count is only an estimate and a snap shot of the population due to the amount of tree cover and the mobile

nature of the deer population. It is only when deer managers start to consider the figures in light of all the other bits of information (the pieces of the jigsaw) that we start to see the proper meaning and value from the work and you start to build up a proper ecological picture of what is happening. This can only be done with access to all the relevant bits of information - information on designated sites and wider habitat condition, count data, cull data, information on other herbivores, maps of patterns of deer utilisation and movement, data on mortality/reproductive rates, maps of areas of available shelter.

**Action:** It was agreed that a foot count will be carried out in the spring and members will also carry out mortality and recruitment counts and feed that data back to the NFC.

### **HIA Data**

Members that had already carried out HIAs had sent the data to the NFC and to Cathy Mayne, the HIA consultant to collate in HIA Report (see below).

### **Native Woodland**

NFC produced a [map](#) showing the NWSS survey data from 2014 – this is on BqDMG website.

### **BPG Videos**

NFC circulated the link to the videos about carcass prep and handling.

## **DMG Deer Management Plan – Actions**

### **Culls**

#### **Woodland vs Open Range**

It was decided that areas where no counting takes place such as large woodlands around Lix Toll, Loch Ard/ Strathyre and Benmore/ Crianlarich will be classed as woodland. Where there is some opportunity for counting such as Blaircreich and North Katrine then these will be classed as open range.

#### **Review of 2018 Stag Season**

Two properties have struggled to make their stag cull targets due to staffing, however they have OSS Authorisations so will be able to make their numbers over the winter.

In general, the rut was mixed with different properties having different experiences; some only seeing young stags, some only mature stags and others seeing a “classic rut”.

#### **Proposed 2018/19 Hind culls**

Some properties have decided to alter their hind cull based on what they have seen (numbers and demographic split) on the hill so far (Proposed Hind Cull Targets 2018/19 attached).

### **Count**

#### **2018 Helicopter Count**

JI told the members present that the SNH helicopter count would be 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> November – but this would be dependent on weather and staff availability. ID is on leave, so RE kindly volunteered to be the Count Coordinator.

The use of the helicopter count data to feedback into this current hind season was discussed, and the timescales would be challenging for SNH to get the maps back to us in less than 4 weeks. But the figures we could have within a week of counting.

ACW reminded the Group that in the future, funding from SNH for helicopter counts was not certain and we may need to look at self-funding.

Recruitment and Mortality Counts needed especially after the weather extremes during 2018.

### **2019 Foot Count**

Members agreed that a foot count would be carried out over 1 day on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> February or first good day thereafter. ID will be the Count Coordinator.

**Action:** NFC will organise maps for each property.

**Action:** Any members that require help to count their property are requested to ask for assistance as early as possible to ensure as complete coverage of the DMG area as possible.

### **Authorisations**

WTS and FES have OSS and NS authorisations in place. Gleann Crotha is looking to apply for authorisations as it has recently been ring fenced and in preparation for planting, they wish to ensure there are no deer within the enclosure/

### **HIA**

The DMG currently has 7 properties carrying out Upland HIA – this equates to 58% of the open range. Edinchip has requested some help with training and then will carry out HIA in the spring. AAM was to speak with other properties to continue the uptake of HIA monitoring. Note: There is still funding from AECS to pay for HIAs as a standalone capital item – we can provide you with templates to get funding up to a maximum of £4,400.

**Action:** NFC and JI to liaise over organising training for AB and DS

We received the draft report from Cathy Mayne on the morning of the meeting. Until the report is signed off by the DMG it will not be publicly shared.

**Action:** NFC to circulate report to membership – there is a link in the DMG Business part of the website on the Members Only page.

### **Designated Sites**

NFC presented to the members present a map showing the 4 designated sites (out of 13 in the DMG area) which are under pressure from grazing in the DMG (see map on [website](#)).

The table below gives more details on the sites:

Site	Desig	Feature	Condition	Pressure	Spp	Properties Involved	Action
Edinchip Wood	SSSI	Upland oak woodland	Unfav	Over grazing	Deer	Edinchip	working with SNH to cull more deer in woodland
Pollochro Woods	SSSI	Wet woodland	Unfav	Over grazing	Deer, Goats	Glenfalloch	Goat Cull
						RSPB Inversnaid	
Loch Lomond Woods	SAC	Western acidic oak woodland	Unfav	Over grazing	Deer, Goats	Glenfalloch	
						RSPB Inversnaid	
Trossachs Woods	SAC	Western acidic oak woodland	Unfav	Over grazing	Deer, Goats	FES	

### **Peatland Restoration – see map on [website](#)**

NFC told the members present that the LLTNPA will do the feasibility study for properties; other DMGs out with Park have to apply to Peatland ACTION for funding for the feasibility phase before they even get to the restoration phase.

To date, 2 properties have carried out peatland projects: Suie has done 2 projects but on their north side in Breadalbane DMG; Glenfalloch has 2 projects (one in BqDMG and one in I&TDMG area); Glen Finglas due to apply next application window; and Edinchip has expressed an interest.

### **Native woodland**

The condition of the native woodland within the DMG was discussed and it was understood that it will be the next habitat to be focussed on after uplands. The NWSS data is now 4-5 years old but it gives us a baseline to work from. Most of the properties are shown to have native woodland with high or very high herbivore impacts. Members were reminded that the NWSS survey looked at many different aspects of the woodlands and that management may already been in place to improve the condition of the woodlands.

**Action:** Members to look at the map, identify on the ground if the condition is the same and think about how the present management could be changed to improve the condition of the native woodland and feed this back to the DMG.

### **Woodland Creation**

Members were reminded that the details of woodland creation schemes being entered into are shared at DMG meeting to ensure a holistic understanding of the effects (size dependent) it might have on deer movements and neighbours objectives.

### **ADMG report**

TT updated the Group on:

- The report from the Deer Working Group which will take into account the 2019 assessments of DMGs.
- The health checks that were offered by ADMG – Victor Clements carried this out for the BqDMG and provided useful feedback on the workings of the Group and where it needed to focus.
- The report from the Lowland deer panel which will give us an update on how deer can be collaboratively managed in the lowland setting.
- Review of compliance with Deer Code
- Public consultation on the National Forestry Strategy
- ADMG sporting rents
- Venison Strategy – wild and farmed
- Carcass Contamination Guidance
- Sporting rates – SLE guidance
- YouTube HIA – to be published soon

### **SNH report**

Jl updated the Group on the following:

- Thermal scopes and night vision equipment trial
- Lowland Deer Panel –
- SWARD project is for gathering HIA, count and cull data. There are ongoing issues with the database and funding. Once it is up and running it will be a very good tool but there are major complications with our causing delays.
- Bear and Transport Scotland are keen to know if there are hotspots DVC so Jl reminded members to report DVC and the good news from Lochearnhead shows how collaboration was worked to solve an issue.
- Annual cull returns – please get them in ASAP

### **National Park report**

The BqDMG has been asked to comment on the National Park Authority Outdoor Recreation Plan. It was discussed that we should provide feedback on the subject of herbivore management and the presence of Core paths (Balquhiddy to Ledcharrie, Glen Finglas to Balquhiddy) and Corbetts or Munros that are given more press.

**Action:** NFC to draft a response

### **Any other Business**

#### **Subs**

There are still a couple of members still to pay their Subs.

#### **Keilator**

Glenfalloch has taken on a contract farmer and there will a small reduction of stock.

#### **Sika**

RE informed the Group that a milk sika was shot in Ewich.

## **Information on Website**

DL had emailed NFC expressing concern about the information that was available on the website – in particular minutes from the Goat Sub-Group meeting carried out on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2017, in light of the recent media coverage of the culling of goats on Islay.

We discussed what information should be on the website and whether we should publish abbreviated minutes of meetings. There was a difference of opinion but it was understood by all that the culling of wild/ feral herbivores is a legitimate management tool that is used to ensure that the condition of the habitat is not compromised. It is also understood that it supports the rural economy in terms of employment and tourism/ accommodation. It was suggested that members were careful about what is posted on social media as all too easily things can be misconstrued. JI reminded the Group that SNH has a strong policy, that if a herbivore needs to be managed it should be carried out.

**Action:** all members to review the info on the website and respond to NFC if there are any amendments wanted to the info that is publically viewable.

Note: NFC has set up a Members Only page on the website, this can be used for sharing information that is too big to go via emails – this page is password protected. The password will be circulated via email.

Members have requested that info and papers are distributed via email. Links will be provided to the information on the website for individuals that struggle with a broadband connection.

## **SQWV**

ML reminded the Group that free assessments are still available until December.

## **Annual Audit of Competence**

**Action:** NFC to send out the forms to individual properties to get an update on qualifications and training.

## **Date of next meeting:**

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2019 7:30pm Balquhiddier Village Hall