

Balquhiddar Deer Management Group

Minutes of the Group Meeting

7.30pm on Wednesday 27th May 2020 by Zoom online

This meeting was held online due to Government restrictions on the movement of people to help reduce the spread of Covid-19.

Present

Alcuin Arkotxa-MacKenzie (Chair) – Blaircreich (AAM)
Quintin Lyle (Vice-Chair) – Craighuie (QL)
Nicola Colquhoun (Treasurer) – Suie (NC)
Helen MacIntyre (Secretary) (HM)
Jimmy Irvine – SNH (JI)
Estelle Gill – SNH (EG)
Tom Turnbull – ADMG Rep (TT)
David Lowes – Glenfalloch (DL)
Falcon Frost – Glenfalloch (FF)
Mike Luti – Auchleskine/Monachyle Beag (ML)
Paul Bekier – FLS (PB)
Richard Eadington – FLS (RE)
Fraser Lamont – RSPB (FL)
Emma Paterson – Suie (EP)

Alan Cory-Wright – Leskine Woods (ACW)
Nicki Cory-Wright – Glenfalloch (NCW)

Apologies

Malcolm Walker – Scottish Water
John Sinclair – Glenogle & Leskine
Eddy Dixon – Dochart Woods
Douglas McDade – Glen Finglas WTS
Malcolm McNaughton – Inverlochlarig
Alan Sneddon – Monachyle Mhor
Juan Arkotxa – Muirlaggan
Ian Dingwall – Suie
Hamish Thomson – Glen Finglas WTS (tried to join but poor connection)

1. Welcome & Apologies – Alcuin welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies above.

2. Approval of minutes of the meeting on 6th November 2019 and matters arising

FLS report on reinstating/re-siting of fences – PB confirmed this is still in draft form so cannot yet be shared with the group. ADMG shared FLS's fencing strategy recently – their budget is limited so they will focus on culling rather than fencing. **Action:** PB to share report with the group when ready.

HM asked if the executive committee set up last November will address specific issues. AAM confirmed they can cover all issues.

Action: Nicola to check if HIA spreadsheet was shared, and if not will forward to HM for circulation.

The action to organise training days for upland and woodland HIAs has been postponed due to coronavirus. Depending on reduction of lockdown there may be time to do some training this summer. FF said Glenfalloch have been advised they have to do their HIAs for their AECs funded scheme.

Approval of minutes was proposed by DL, seconded by NC. Minutes approved.

3. Election of Office Bearers

The deadline for voting is Friday (29th May).

4. Accounts for 2019-20 – Nicola Colquhoun (Treasurer)

There was a surplus for the year. The group subs for 2020-21 are likely to be around £7100. Secretarial expenses will be lower due to less travel. Likely surplus of £1500 but could be significantly different. NC advises the group to start building up a buffer. Group subs invoices are usually sent out in August or September.

ADMG are delaying their subs invoicing until Oct, to see what happens with the stag stalking market and venison prices. In terms of budget, subs figure could be significantly different. AAM suggested we try to cut costs and decide whether we continue paying ADMG. ML questioned whether we will be able to take clients out. If there is no market for venison do we still cull? The public would not like seeing culled deer left on the hill.

PB said FLS payments to ADMG are now paid directly to ADMG, not through the DMG. He wants to discuss how to divide up the group subs, perhaps dividing it up per member rather than on deer culled. ML thinks FLS shoot more than anyone else, with tax payers' money, so FLS should pay more. DL accepts Glenfalloch's higher payments because they shoot more deer and get more out of the group. AAM suggested ADMG should have a discussion with FLS at executive level to find out about this. PB confirmed he has spoken to the most senior deer management in FLS about this. **Action:** TT to discuss FLS subs with senior FLS staff.

5. Deer Management Plan – Population data

a) **Results of 2019-20 culls** – PB explained that FLS were 134 hinds short of target because they couldn't access 50% of the ground due to landslides last year. Every fence from Portnellan round the west end of the loch has breaches large enough for deer. ML is concerned that the fence might not be fixed at all, and there will be a big drawdown from neighbouring properties. PB said Scottish Water have to survey the ground to determine safety before FLS can do anything, but lockdown has put a stop to this. ML asked can we as a group or ADMG put pressure on to get this problem solved. QL asked whether you need good fencing for authorisations. PB said not for OoS authorisations, it just needs to be stock fencing. AAM commented that it is almost a year since the landslips, and asked from a mountain rescue perspective has the public been advised of the risk? ML said no, they are responsible for their own safety. RE explained that the access road is fenced off to prevent the public accessing it, with notices all the way along the road. Nicola said the NP did a campaign to say to avoid the area until further notice. Once the midges are out, the deer will move up to higher ground again.

ML explained that the Auchleskine hind cull wasn't met since there weren't many there whenever they've been up. They get many walkers that move the deer away.

NP explained that Suie didn't get the grant paperwork through early enough to do the deer capture for the farm. They will do live capture in November of 30-40 deer. FF asked if they are going to catch that many every year? NC said they will capture up to as much as they can sustain. They will also buy in deer. They have fenced up to half of the lower ground, which could take up to 70 hinds. FF asked if there will be any culls in Coire Chaorach. EP said they will try to take a few out, but not a great number.

AAM asked about Ballimore cull figures from JI. He has emailed Ballimore but not heard back.

Blaircreich – AAM said the weather caught up with them at the end of the season so they missed their cull target by 1 hind.

Inverlochlarig – ML said Malcolm is always light on the hinds as he likes to keep a small group around his farm for visitors.

RSPB Inversnaid – FL explained that although they didn't quite meet the targets, this was their highest cull for a few years, and they will hope to keep it up again next year.

Cancelled count – The weather was poor. AMM suggested doing a count at the end of the stags. Winter counts show where deer are in winter but not the rest of year. After the stag season ends the hinds will be out of the trees and easier to count. FF said ITDMG have also arranged an October count this year, for w/c 26th. Most members present agreed with trying a late October count. PB doesn't think the count will be very

beneficial and the group has the SNH helicopter count figures from 2019. FF thinks the hind numbers shouldn't be that different if they are hefted to the hill. The stag numbers may be different though. ML said hinds move onto south facing slopes of North Loch Katrine in winter. **Action:** the executive committee will contact members about the October count. ML to ask Inverlochlarig and Monachyle Mhor. FF to ask Glenogle and Edinchip. FL to ask Glen Finglas. AMM to talk to Ballimore about counting. **Date for count – 22nd/23rd Oct.** Count co-ordinators – Ian and Falcon.

- b) Population modelling and proposed 2020-21 culls** – JI explained that the population model is a rough calculation to show what a population could be doing based on calving, culls, mortality figures. This updated model is similar to what was shared in November plus the 2019-20 cull data. A much higher summer calving is predicted for this year. The model can be used to help group deliver what is in the deer management plan (DMP). Some members might need to update their objectives, e.g. Suie with a new deer farm. Total cull targets across the group need to be met, but there are also some members whose culls are questionable e.g. Inverlochlarig have culled no hinds in the centre of the group. In terms of welfare, a cull of hinds need to be taken. ML said there do not seem to be many hinds on Inverlochlarig whenever he is there. FF said there are some hinds where it marches with Glenfalloch. JI said the South population will come down with current cull levels, but maybe not within the desired timescales for some members. In the North the population appears to be going up by accident. If this is intentional then it needs to be fed into the DMP to show this.

Auchlyne are getting 30-40 deer coming across the river from Dochart Woods & Leskine, so if more pressure could be put in these areas that would be great. ACW said they will do this if they can, but deer are probably going through Leskine not Leskine Woods. **Action:** HM to email other properties for cull targets.

- c) Out of season and night authorisations** – ML suggested that out of season shooting be reduced on the overwintering ground on Glen Finglas and North Katrine since the ground can hold the deer. He thinks they should rent it out to a local stalker who would look after the ground in a more sustainable way, along with an observation site and maybe a big enclosure and education centre for learning about wild deer in their environment. PB said he agrees there are places for these things, but doesn't think The Great Trossachs Forest is the right place. If FLS rented for sporting they would have to pay sporting rates which would cost £1000s. Private deer farms could be used instead.

PB pointed out that most members have said they are keeping their culls the same, despite the population model showing that the numbers are rising. ML said they have HIA data at Monachyle Beag, and asked what can the FLS ground hold – where is the HIA data? PB said they have a third party report from 2017 showing the ground is heavily impacted by herbivores. FLS is aiming to help the Scottish Government meet climate change objectives by planting more trees, and they may want to plant extra areas in future. ML said he believes the tourists come to the area for the open landscape and the deer. PB agrees, and said any new planting schemes would need to enhance the landscape, and can even bring in more wildlife. FF explained that Glenfalloch are shooting over 40% of their counted population and doing HIA monitoring. AAM said Blaircreich is now shooting 50 a year, up from zero a few years ago. However, the group is 292 hinds off the target according to the population model.

AAM asked about FLS contractors using thermal night scopes, since there have been many reports of this. PB said please bring us any evidence if you have it. ML asked if there are any contractors on the Balquhidder area. PB said not at the moment. ML asked if they are paid on a headage system. PB said yes. ML asked if this risks them just shooting anything rather than selective culling. PB said it is the most sensible way to do it with public money.

TT suggested that members could up their culls slightly. He asked about the 63 OOS stags culled on North Katrine. PB said they were all done under authorisations from SNH. This year hinds will be culled from Sept.

TT asked how do you get authorisations, locally or regionally? PB said they are done on a regional basis with named blocks and controllers. PB explained they have not set cull targets yet since they need to understand the break-ins, fence repairs etc., and also to look at the population model. **Action:** PB to submit cull targets before July.

6. Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) Report

See separate report from Tom Turnbull.

7. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Report – Jimmy Irvine

See also separate report.

It looks likely that local unaccompanied stalking could start from 1st June. It is difficult to say what will happen in the coming months. Ongoing assessments are uncertain, depending on what the Scottish Government decides.

Thermal image night vision trial – no recommendations yet so no changes to legislation. ML said most European countries do not allow using thermal images for night shooting for deer welfare and safety concerns. Asked if DMGs will be consulted. JI said yes SNH will fully consult on this, but it is still early days.

ACW asked about the number of deer culled with copper bullets. The DWG has recommendations on minimum grains if copper is to be used.

8. Any Other Business

- a) Issue of **deer on A84** between Balquhiddier Station and Lochearnhead Church has been raised by Malcolm McNaughton. **Actions:** HM to send email to JI. JI to contact Neil Diamond to find out how many are being reported. A group of estates met about this and a fence upgrade was done.
- b) Do we need **public liability insurance** (raised by Malcolm McNaughton)? HM checked with ADMG and this has not been asked of them before, but they would assume liability rests with the landholding concerned. FF agrees with this. EG said for groups doing something if there is a group leader then there could be some liability. Maybe BASC insurance covers it. FL suggested that we could put a line in the minutes that individual landholdings are responsible. **Actions:** FF to ask GKA and BASC. TT to ask further through ADMG.
- c) **Members' satisfaction with the DMG** (raised by AAM). A large landholding in the middle of the group, Ballimore, has left the DMG. AAM has talked to the owner, David Thow, about this. David didn't feel that anyone in the group was interested in supporting his objectives or his needs within his ground. Agreement had been made with neighbours to the south that more mature stags wouldn't be shot and he feels that this agreement has been breached. He has been affected by heavy culls in Glen Finglas and North Katrine. The final straw was when North Katrine announced they would shoot an additional 50 stags out of season. There are also others in the group who are unhappy, shown in the poor attendance. FF asked what are the issues for the other members. For Muirlaggan, they are unhappy with the south shooting mature stags. Inverlochlarig is also unhappy with this. If people leave or don't participate then the group ceases to work. ML thinks the members need to keep talking, and we need compromise. He is concerned about deer welfare, although the deer numbers issue doesn't affect him directly. Trust has been lost. We should try to get David Thow back if we can. David isn't interested in more talking. He wants to see change, then he might reconsider. FF said he can understand David's concerns, and if that is happening then that is not easy to remedy overnight. However, from the other organisations' points of view they see not enough hinds being shot so question why should we change our behaviour. Ballimore have taken off 2000 ewes in the last few years, so he says he is swapping grazing from sheep to deer. FL agrees with FF. There have been real improvements over the past 10 years and we should try to get David back and not throw it all away. NC thinks it is a good idea to get a handle on sheep and cattle numbers. RPID livestock numbers in the Park from

2000 to 2019 show that numbers have dropped by a third. We need to look at the habitat condition. DL said the deer group has achieved something over the years, and we still need this forum to help us work together. JI explained Ballimore has completely different objectives to his neighbours to the south, and the frustration goes both ways. They have not felt they could share this frustration in meetings, so maybe the format needs to change. EG said there are different understandings over what the land can support, and what the landscape should look like. We should discuss these more to find out what people think. DL said the forum of a DMG is not an easy one to talk in. Potentially a much smaller group of the key players is an alternative. PB said FLS have backed off from shooting mature stags, and thinks Woodland Trust have also done this, and they have seen some big stags around. It's a shame we couldn't have discussed this before Ballimore left. He agrees we are better together.

9. **Date of Next Group Meeting** – 11th November 2020.
Additional foot count –22/23rd October 2020.