LOCHALSH DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP (LDMG) minutes

Friday 27th October 2017 held at Attadale at 12.00 am

Present:

Ewen Macpherson, Attadale Gordon Macpherson, Arineckaig

Susan Jones, Attadale Thomas Watson, Attadale

Soeren Hoejlund, Attadale Alec Cormack, Attadale

Joanna Macpherson, Attadale Chris MacKenzie, Achnashellach

Russell Cooper, FES Sinclair Coghill, SNH

Linzi Sievwright, Affric & Kintail DMG & ADMG

In attendance:

Biz Campbell, Councillor Derek MacLeod, Councillor

Apologies:

Andrew Slaughter, Inverinate Donald MacKenzie, Arineckaig

David Sproule, Achintee Crofters Kate Stephens, Councillor

Willie Lamont, FES Nicholas Wills, Achnashellach

1) Minutes of 8th June 2017 were approved

2) **SNH update** from Sinclair Coghill gave summary of feedback from Scottish Government which requires DMG to deliver on their plans and was critical of SNH requiring them to enhance their efforts with DMGs, apply control schemes more strongly and to ensure Deer Management plans are started where there are none at present.

There is a league table of DMGs and their current performance against benchmark criteria. There will be a review in October 2018 so a year to get fully up to speed.

A Deer Advisory Group has been set up by the Scottish Government including various experts, Robin Callender, a special advisor on community involvement, Andrew Barbour a forestry expert from Perth, Jane Glass from the UHI. Richard Cooke will be an external advisor. Due to produce a report by end of April 2018 with recommendations to put to the Cabinet Secretary.

£1800 is currently available to each DMG to help implement habitat impact assessments as the original promised financial grants through ECAF are no longer available.

Not relevant for us as habitat surveys already under way.

3) **ADMG update** given by Linzi Seivwright and she emphasised the need to deliver on DMG plans, and they are looking for progress from all members.

Welcomed LDMG’s habitat survey establishing a baseline.

Need for native woodland to be expanded

Important to show the success of the voluntary approach

NB ADMG meeting at Inverness on 23rd November and all are encouraged to attend.

Health survey boxes had been sent out - to monitor ecoli, possibility of CWD (chronic wasting disease) from North America and cryptosporidium

Thomas Watson has already begun distribution of boxes

and remainder given out after meeting

Biz Campbell brought up subject of Lymes Disease as she is very aware of deer in Lochcarron - Russell pointed out that there are ticks on sheep as well. Emphasised that as on a farm, children should wash their hands etc.

An aerial count for whole of South Ross is planned for 2019 so members should start saving for it now.

4) **Hind cull numbers** were discussed at length.

In Willie Lamont’s absence, Russell had been briefed and he explained issues in Affric where number of stags on the marches of the area need adjusting..

They are currently aiming for a reduction from 11.3 per km2 to 7 stags per km2

SC had produced a computer projection for culling required to reach suitable numbers in LDMG - much discussion ensued.

Gordon Macpherson raised further questions about whether land was being managed for venison production or other purposes - low enough to avoid deterioration of forestry or other land

Russell explained FES was suffering from an increase in stags, as was the NTS too. Additional fencing is pushing them out

In light of further discussion, it was agreed that at the next full meeting of the entire South Ross Deer Management Group in Spring 2018, there should be a full discussion of issues around cull numbers as activities in one area impact on another. EAM to contact other chairs.

Hind Cull Figures agreed as follows:

Achnashellach 35

Attadale 85

Arineckaig 15

FES Achnashellach 1

Inverinate 400 hinds & calves

Each stated that more may be shot if weather conditions permit

5) **Peatland Restoration** - general discussion ensued

AGM had organised a visit for Arineckaig to investigate the possibility because it has a large area of blanket bog and it was previously a major peat-cutting area but it is very distant and much of it is in the Common Grazing area.

SNH grants available until 31st October but likely to be more in future.

Ronnie Ross is doing it at Achnasheen so worth investigating. Would be possible to test it at Attadale in-house and if works, potentially get financial backing

SC explained possible to get money for a feasibility study

6) U**pdate on Deer Management Plan**

Susan Jones asked everyone present to comment and give updates about her work prior to posting it on ADMG website page for LDMG

She has added in Chronic Wasting Disease update in case visitors come from abroad

Andrew S and Russell need to update on employees’ qualifications

Achnashellach has introduced new signage

Attadale closed Ben Dronaig Bothy temporarily during height of stag stalking season

Habitat assessment has been updated and SH will work on further analysis during winter

Forestry plan now in place for Attadale, both Inverinate & Achnashellach have plans to look at future planting

SJ happy to add details about Peatland restoration to current DMPlan

7) **Stag Culls**

Attadale 75

Arineckaig 9

Achnashellach (South) 18

FES 1

Inverinate  156

Sika Stags 6 (Crofts and Forestry), Red Hinds 4 (Crofts & Forestry), Red Calves 3 (Crofts & Forestry)

Inverinate 40 }

Killilan 60 } Red Stags 150   (Open Hill)

West Benula 50   }

8) **Habitat Surveys**

Progress is being made and Soeren will work on this during the winter to bring results up to date. He mentioned an example where the hydro schemes mean new deer paths show trampling - LS mentioned photographic evidence would provide better picture and she will explain mapping the results which can be a useful way of presenting them and LS is happy to take SH through it

8) **Treasurer’s Report**

AGM confirmed that invoices should be raised on basis of Stag Culls in 2016 and Hind culls in 2017 so Alec Cormack will do them now.

9) **AOB**

Derek MacLeod encouraged those for whom it was relevant to get in touch about valuations for sporting rates as he is meeting with the Assessors.

10) **Next meeting** to be held at end of May or early June after Spring counts, exact date to be confirmed.