

Susan Jones  
Lochalsh Deer Management Group  
by email

24 May 2016

Dear Susan,

### **Lochalsh Deer Management Plan**

Trees for Life have received a copy of the draft Lochalsh Deer Management Plan, which covers a large area of ground used by deer that also use land where we operate in Glen Affric and Glenmoriston. We would like to see increasing communication and collaboration between DMGs and we hope that the following comments on the draft plan from ourselves will be seen as constructive by the Lochalsh DMG.

#### **Background Information**

We found the level of background information on the DMG area, deer count data, past cull totals and the different estates in the Lochalsh DMG very useful. This background information provides helpful context for the plan and for understanding what it proposes.

#### **Actions to meet the ADMG/SNH Benchmark**

The plan does not currently contain a target deer density for the DMG area, or any clear indication for the direction of travel for deer management in the area. We appreciate that this may well be because the recent South Ross helicopter deer count reported some unexpectedly high deer numbers and because the results of the pending SNH monitoring of the Strathglass Complex SAC could have a fundamental impact on deer management decisions.

We understand the advantages of waiting until you can look at all of this key information in the round before setting out a clear direction for deer management information such as target deer densities. However, this does mean that it is not yet possible to comment on whether the plan can deliver the several of the Actions designed to meet the ADMG/SNH Benchmark. Still, we would like to offer the following points of view on the plan and hope that they are helpful to the Group.

#### *The potential for native woodland*

Trees for Life's objectives relate to increasing native woodland cover in places like Lochalsh. We appreciate that these objectives may not be shared by everyone in the DMG, but our view is that the DMG area is capable of hosting a lot more native

woodland than at present, including in areas at higher altitudes and on poorer soils. We would cite SNH's Native Woodland Model <http://www.snh.org.uk/publications/online/heritagemanagement/nativewoodland/execsum.asp> and examples of successful regeneration and planting schemes on such ground in Glenmoriston and Glen Affric in support of this. We would argue that there is scope to make a bigger contribution to the Scottish Government's woodland expansion target under Action 4 in the plan. We would be happy to provide advice on this based on our experience of such woodland creation projects if any member of the DMG feels this would be of value.

#### *Deer welfare and deer habitat*

We strongly welcome the proposed combined use of habitat monitoring, deer population data and larder records to inform the DMG's assessment of deer welfare and to understand the relationship between this and habitat quality. Our comments about woodland expansion above have this relationship partly in mind, in that more ambitious plans for creating new native woodland would lead to more shelter and natural feeding availability for both deer and other wildlife. The fact that some supplementary feeding is carried out in the area suggests that the current quality of the habitat is not sufficient to maintain deer health and condition. Increasing the availability of natural shelter and forage, from woodland and other habitats, would therefore seem to be in the medium and long term interests of the deer.

#### *Sex ratios*

On the issue of meeting the group's aim to manage numbers of both deer sexes to protect their welfare and the surrounding environment, we support the view that moving towards a 1:1 sex ratio for the population would make a strong contribution to this aim. This would reduce the overall forage requirement of the deer population and therefore contribute to habitat improvements, while maintaining sporting interests.

#### *Deer movements and communication*

The deer in Lochalsh are part of a wider population which ranges across areas including Glen Affric, Glenmoriston and Glen Strathfarrar. Deer movements between the glens affect a range of landowning interests and objectives with financial implications for some. Communication and collaboration between these DMGs therefore seems essential to understanding how deer move in this landscape and therefore to how they can be effectively managed. We are of course keen to contribute to this, irrespective of any differences in land management objectives that may exist between the various stakeholders.

I hope that these comments are useful and constructive. I will be happy to discuss the issues further at any time, or to discuss ways in which Trees for Life might be able to offer practical assistance if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Alan McDonnell  
Conservation Projects Manager