

Minutes for Lochalsh Deer Management Group Meeting

held via Zoom on Thursday 29th April 2021

Present: Ewen Macpherson - Chair, Sinclair Coghill, Russell Cooper, Alec Cormack, Chris MacKenzie, Linzi Sievwright Andrew Slaughter, Thomas Watson, Nicholas Wills, Joanna Macpherson - Secretary

1. **Apologies:** Donald MacKenzie
2. **Approval of minutes** from 2nd December 2020 - no comments
3. **Chairman's Report** - EAM thanked Susan Jones for her hard work over many years as she had created our original deer plan and maintained it for so long. He would thank her on behalf of the group. He welcome Linzi who will take on this responsibility. The benefit will be that she also acts for other deer management groups in the South Ross area

4. **Linzi Sievwright**

She gave an overview of the current situation across the South Ross Group, (relevant maps are attached to these minutes).

Key results she emphasised were that the density for the LDMG had come down from 15.4 per km² to 13.2 which was a significant amount.

Hind numbers in particular had been reduced significantly

She pointed out that the overall South Ross area had reduced numbers from 15.2 deer per km² to 13.3 deer per km² but this was still higher than the national average which is currently estimated to be 9.3 per m². The challenge now is to consider the density across a wider scale of landscape while bearing in mind individual estate requirements. Analysis of these maps indicate that deer move more across a wider range than is often recognised; the example of the Strathconon and Strathfarrer groups provides a clear indication that this is the case. A holistic approach is needed

Obviously there are other considerations ie Habitat impacts, Public interest & Woodland & peatland restoration

She emphasised the next 5-10 years will make carbon capture more of a priority.

Each deer management group will have to commit to a certain density, while considering a combination of both sporting and conservation requirements.

5. **Nature Scot Report** -

Sinclair had some problems with his broadband. The results of the helicopter count in map form is still awaited.

The upcoming election means the Deer Working Group's results and the Scottish Government's response is still awaited

The mitigation of climate change and biodiversity loss will remain a key priority whatever the outcome of the election.

He also emphasised the importance of the deer density as a priority, deer culling figures should be planned on the need to deliver those objectives.

6. **Forestry & Land Scotland**

Russell Cooper was invited to comment - he subsequently sent over cull results for South Strome - see below

Ross MacMillan is still off sick at present. The fences at Achnashellach South and along South Strome have been fixed.

7. Willie Frazer on behalf of ADMG reinforced Linzi's remarks explaining how despite determined culling taking place in Affric and Kintail DMG, deer had come in from elsewhere so levels of density remained high. Linzi stressed the need to remain ahead of the curve in terms of future government demands. A strategic view of the South Ross area has to be taken. Heavy winter losses will mean the deer population will bounce back very quickly as it has done before. Individual estates must consider their own priorities and must plan together.

8 **Updating Deer Management Plan**

This will be carried out after the June foot count of deer - Linzi needs to be kept informed about the results and then targets for future culls can be considered. The results of the individual habitat surveys will also be taken into consideration

Linzi will use recruitment calculations and all available information to model the population based on the NatureScot's population model

9. **2021 Hind Actual Cull Figures**

	Hinds	Calves
Inverinate beat	80	34
Killilan beat	115	31
West Benula	<u>100</u>	35
Total Inverinate	295	100
Achnashellach	26	15
out of season	<u>5</u>	<u>2</u>
	31	17
Attadale	73	22
Arineckaig	<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>
Total	398	94

Russell has kindly provided the following figures:

Achnashellach South	7 Red stags	0 hinds	1 calf
	0 Roe buck	2 roe does	3 calves
	4 Sika stags		

10. **2020 Spring Count & 2020/21 Planned Stag & Hind Cull targets**

These are both still to come

11. **Treasurer's Report**

He asked for payment of helicopter fees, where NatureScot had kindly contributed 85% towards the cost.

12. **AOB**

Final emphasis on need to take a strategic view and plan for the future. There has been a paradigm shift in priorities.

13. **Post meeting**

1) Venison sales - Inverinate sales were similar to prepandemic except for the major price decline, collections were fine. Attadale sales experienced the same.

2) Forestry & peat restoration - Inverinate are progressing with native regeneration and restocking the Dorus Duain which had been clear felled. Peat restoration not yet been investigated. Attadale has a 20 year forestry plan for broadleaf planting. Next stage to seek planning for major planting on hillside above the farm with a small amount of commercial planting with easy access. An application has been made to investigate the potential for peat restoration through NatureScot, results should be known by the autumn.

Date of next meeting will be post-stalking season **To be confirmed**