

Lochalsh Deer Management Group Meeting May 3rd 2024 at Inverinate Estate

Attendees: Russell Cooper, Willie Fraser, Chloe Macfarlane, Chris Mackenzie, Joanna Macpherson (Chair), Megan Rowland, Linzi Seivwright, Andrew Slaughter, Tom Turnbull (ADMG), Thomas Watson

Apologies: Councillor Biz Campbell, Alec Cormack, Donald Mackenzie, Ewen Macpherson, Nicholas Wills, Nicola Williamson, Catriona Macrae.

Previous minutes were accepted

Chairman's & ADMG Report:

Joanna congratulated everyone for reaching their targets.

- Tom said that there will be challenges ahead and potentially the government may be taken to court, but that they are seeking legal advice, however they have been told this could be a long process. They have received several generous offers of financial help. Joanna also offered her father's help if needed, which Tom thanked her for the offer but said he was not sure whether funds would be required.
- 15 Stalkers had gone to Holyrood to speak on deer management issues, Tom commented on how well they had spoken, and how well they communicated with the ministers. The subject has generated a lot of press coverage
- Chris questioned why the deer management consultation had not taken sheep into consideration, particularly if the hill was shared with sheep. He wanted this to be challenged. Tom said the matter is being looked into.
- Willie stated that the NTS are confused by the lack of clarity on this subject, and that more information was needed for the future.

NatureScot Report:

Megan reported that not much has changed since the last meeting other than Lorna's leaving.

Update On Deer Management Plan & 2023/2024 Stag & Hind Cull Figures:

- Linzi congratulated the estates that had done well this year and that they had obtained the numbers that were required of them. Overall figures had fallen just short of the targeted cull of around 1000 deer. She is happy that the

population is coming down in the right direction, however they are still waiting for figures to come in from East Benula, which may have an effect on the overall target.

- Linzi said NTS had fallen slightly short on their target - Willie explained how he had trouble finding hinds due to the weather conditions, and he had spoken with North Affric about their numbers and targets.
- Combined culls and models for both groups are now available, Linzi pointed out that the key messages are:

The combined groups should have met the 10 deer per km² Scot Gov target by now.

The combined targets for both groups is slightly lower, given that Affric is looking to reduce deer further, hence the Groups would be advised to continue to aim for the same hind cull as last year - however, this may be split differently between properties - *this remains to be agreed*

The stag numbers are really difficult to model as they are highly mobile and also prone to breaking into porous forestry fences.

- **2024/2025 Stag & Hind Cull Targets**
For planning figures for autumn stag culls Joanna asked what each estate planned:
- Thomas aims for around 45/50 stags.
- Chris was not certain but estimated it would be 20/25 stags, hinds he was unsure about.
- Willie could not give any targets at this moment.
- Andrew aims to cull 150 stags max. He is concerned that recruitment this summer will be very low as not many calves had survived until now, and not many hinds were in calf. He believes that hind cull will not be as high as last winter.
- Linzi suggested that estates should not slacken off too much with hind culls as even after the very bad winter with “the beast from the east” after which estates had slackened off, there had still been an increase in numbers.
- Andrew concluded that it was such a harsh wet winter, they were seeing hinds dropping calves as early as December.

- Linzi concluded that it would be helpful to get recruitment figures from everyone this year, and then confirm later this summer what has actually been born.
- **Treasurer's Report:**
Not much to report - money is still to be paid to the ADMG, this will be sorted soon, just awaiting some payments to be made. *Now paid*
- **AOB:**
 - Chris expressed his concern and disappointment over the fact that the public are still being told there is a population of over 1 million deer, when this is not the case. Chris urged that the correct statistics need to be conveyed to the public and the good news spread that deer numbers are in fact going down and that particularly the Highlands is the only place where the population is reducing.
- Thomas suggested that social media should be used to get these figures out there and show people that deer numbers are decreasing.
- Andrew questioned if NatureScot were giving the government the correct figures, and if so, where is it all going wrong? How are we meant to set future goals based on data they are providing us with, if it is inaccurate?
- Linzi explained that figures given to the Government are rounded up around 20%, and that there is no accurate count of the deer population. It is easier to use a figure of 1 million as it has more impact than a figure like 700,000 would have, so when talking to the public about deer statistics, it makes impact and draws more attention to the issue.
- Willie added that whoever the new environment minister is, they need to be told about the inaccuracy in data and deer management the government are providing ASAP. Tom assured him, as soon as they know who it is they will speak with them.
- Linzi and Andrew would both be attending the South Ross Liaison Meeting on Tuesday the 14th of May.
- **Next Meeting:** The next Lochalsh Deer Management Group meeting will place in the first week of November 2024.