

Lochalsh Deer Management Group

Meeting 3rd May 2023 – Inverinate Lodge

Present: Joanna Macpherson (Chair), Thomas Watson, Russell Cooper, Willie Fraser, Andrew Slaughter, Chris MacKenzie, Linzi Sievwright, Catriona MacRae

Apologies: William Nicolson, Biz Campbell, Donald MacKenzie, Nicholas Wills, Arran Matheson, Dean Baillie, David Mackenzie

Joanna welcomed everyone to the meeting and the minutes of the last meeting were approved. She summarised her thoughts about the recent meeting led by the senior management team of NatureScot including the Chairman Mike Cantlay and CEO Francesca Osowska. She emphasised the direction of travel in reducing deer numbers in Scotland and the encouragement of positive biodiversity outcomes and nature recovery. She mentioned the development of natural capital assets and invited Linzi to expand on this further.

Introduction to Linzi Sievwright

Linzi described the recent event in Perth held by NatureScot also attended by her and Willie Fraser. Estates can gain carbon credits based on the ecosystems of their soils, water, peatland and habitats. These carbon credits have a potential monetary value which can be traded to offset biodiversity losses created by business through property development, air pollution etc. The Government has been paying grants to landowners for Woodland Schemes etc, but this will be too costly long-term. The concept is that carbon credits will create additional investment by private organisations, in addition to government grants. This is seen as a potential opportunity for landowners but on a large landscape scale and will increase the value of Highland Estates.

Willie Fraser said there was huge interest and pressure for the 2045 target to be met.

In future Deer Management Groups could potentially develop into Land Management Groups.

Cull Figures

Linzi distributed individual cull figures for both Lochalsh and Affric & Kintail together with the Combined Population Model for Affric, Kintail and the Lochalsh Deer Management Groups. For the first time croft and woodland figures for Inverinate were included. There was discussion about the figures, and everyone was asked to double check them.

Russell reported that some fences had been breached in Strathglass which could affect the stag population but this should not be a problem in future as significant repairs have been made to those fences and an additional fence erected at Fasnakyle. There are now dramatically less deer in Strathglass. He pointed out that the population model would only really work if the whole of South Ross were included.

Willie and Andrew made the point about the deer population moving areas and that this can be weather related. This is why we must work as a group as the deer do not belong or stay on any one Estate.

The group has to agree a density target. The target on the model was calculated using previous years' figures. The model currently shows that not enough hinds are being shot and if things continue as they are, then the stag cull numbers will be too high. Each estate must think about what the target density is going to look like and set an objective.

Both Chris and Thomas commented that habitat surveys were a waste of time as all that was really wanted is more deer culled.

The 10 per KM² figure was discussed again. Linzi reminded the group of the fundamental changes in deer legislation that are currently going through Parliament.

Basically, more hinds need to be shot but less stags.

Andrew suggested putting an increase of 500 hinds (spread over all estates in proportion to estate size) into the model to see how this came out. Linzi did this and the results were positive, it was felt that if this approach was taken over the next two years then despite weather and other unforeseeable problems, this would be achievable. Numbers need to be tweaked and everyone would need to sign up for this. It was agreed that 500 hinds between nine estates are a sensible target.

Total figures are coming down but the balance of hinds to stags needs to be adjusted.

The lack of information and low numbers being shot in East Benula and Mullardoch needs to be addressed. Strathglass are currently at 15 deer per KM² and may be a possible Section 7 ruling if they do not reduce numbers.

Thomas suggested Arineckaig needs to increase hind cull numbers.

For the model the proposal is that hind cull is increased by 500 and the stags possibly reduced by 300. Linzi made a diary note to check how culls are progressing around Xmas time so that everyone knows where they are which will keep a focus on targets.

Joanna said that Lochalsh Deer Management Group have been delivering and are doing well.

Nature Scot Report

Not available.

Venison Sales

Everyone seems content with venison sales. Attadale doing well with the venison burgers and sausages.

Game dealers are still happy to accept lead bullet shot beasts. Copper bullets are not available for all calibre of guns. No legislation in place yet regarding this.

Thomas recommended RWS Evolution Greencore bullets as being highly effective.

Treasurer's Report

Invoices have been sent out.

AOB

South Ross Liaison Group are meeting on 16th May 2023. Neither Joanna or Andrew can make it so Ewen Macpherson will join via zoom.

Linzi advised of an event which is a site visit to Glenfeshie Estate wildland which has had very low deer numbers for the last 20 years.

Chris mentioned that Recruitment numbers are low this year at about 23%.

Next Meeting to be confirmed

End of October