

SOUTH PERTSHIRE DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Minutes of the 21st Annual General Meeting Held on Thursday 7 May 2015 At Fordie, Comrie

Present	Martin Robb	Carroglen, Chairman
	Michael Aldridge	Secretary
	James Duncan Millar	Remony, ADMG
	John Murdock	Glenbeich
	Chris Gordon	Logiealmond
	Jamie Hammond	S.N.H
	Vincent Brigode	Fordie/Eighton Estates
	P Leonard	Fordie
	Leif Brag	Griffin
	M Sinclair	Glenalmond
	Paddy	
	Mattias Pedersen	Dalchonzie
	Iain Fridge	Aberuchill
	Daniel Parker	Abercairny
	Doug Stewart	Dunira
	Jimmy Anderson	Lochearnside, Drummond Estates
	Andrew Templeton	Carroglen
	Alix Whitaker	Auchnafree
	John Sinclair	Glenturret and Invergeldie
Apologies	Ian Duncan Millar	Wester Tullich
	Alex Baillie-Hamilton	Kinnell
	Michael Baillie-Hamilton	Kinnell
	Mark Duncan	
	Charmian Holcroft	Glenbeich
	Phil Lowe	Abercairny
	Randal Wilson	Aberuchill
	Bill Drummond Moray	Abercairney
	Jack Whitaker	Auchnafree

Welcome

The Chairman opened the meeting expressing thanks to Xavier Louis Vuitton and Vincent Brigode for hosting the meeting.

1. Minutes of 21st AGM

The minutes of the 2014 meeting were accepted as a true record.

2. Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2015

The surplus for the year including one uncashed cheque is £366.64, slightly less than the budget surplus of £500. No change proposed for ADMG subscriptions, which remain at £3 for stags, £1.50 for hinds and 75p other species. The Group subscriptions remain at £5 for stags, £2 and 75p for other species. On this basis a budgeted surplus of £500 is forecast. The accounts were approved.

3. Election of Office Bearers

The Chairman expressed the view that Office Bearers should change from time to time, with both the Chairman and Secretary having held the posts for an extended period. He also recommended that there should be a Vice Chairman. In the absence of any nominations for any of the posts, the Chairman and Secretary were re-elected. A note of thanks should be passed to Jackie Smith and Margaret Moran for carrying out the administration at Drummond Estates.

4. Chairman's Report

As well as the meeting being held on Election Day, there are many political issues relevant to deer management, including Land Reform, Community Legislation and the Government re-assessment of deer management, all of which have an impact on how deer and land in general are managed. Much has happened within the last 12 months and the next will be busy with the development of a Deer Management Plan. The Chairman stressed however that members are part of the community and for many their livelihood depends on managing deer, which is also a service to the public.

5. ADMG matters

James Duncan Millar presented a report from the ADMG AGM which is attached as an appendix. He urged those, who have not done so, to respond to the Pacec questionnaire.

6. SNH Matters

Jamie Hammond confirmed that most current developments had been covered under the ADMG report. The Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach (WDNA) 2014 Review had just been published. This develops the theme of the public interest in deer management.

The Benchmark Assessment for the group had been circulated prior to the meeting. The majority of assessments, coloured red, refer to the lack of the Deer Management Plan for the entire group – the Northern Sub Group has a plan which is now five years old, and some individual estates have plans tied in with long term forest plans. The public interest section looks at deer management as part of wider land management issues, such as designated sites, carbon storage, competence, economic value and cost, welfare and road safety.

SNH has provided much resource to supporting the voluntary principle. More often than not groups are performing well but performance and progress is not documented, both of which can be captured in an assessment and plan.

7. Deer Management Plans

The Chairman stated that four individuals had been approached to act as consultants and each had provided a proposal with costs in a range between £11,000 and £20,000. Of this 50% of the cost would be reclaimable from SNH.

The consultants are:-

Victor Clements, Linzi Seivwright, Colin McClean and Ian Thomas.

In discussion it was suggested that an off the shelf plan might be used at considerably less cost. Some felt this underestimated the amount of work involved in preparing a plan and that it might be so broadly based as to be of less use. A comparison was made with Inveraray/Tyndrum DMG where a plan had been written some years ago for less cost. The public interest dimension may have enlarged the scope of the plan and the restricted timescale may have introduced supply and demand issues into pricing. It was questioned whether meeting each individual participant was necessary and whether the information could be gathered by questionnaire. Advantage was seen in having the plan done by an external person who would be seen as neutral and could, if need be, mediate on contentious issues.

After discussion it was agreed that the group should proceed with the preparation of a plan carried out by a third party. The process would be delegated to a Chairman and subcommittee to be made up of Martin Robb, Doug Stewart, Vincent Brigode, Andrew Templeton, James Duncan Miller and Michael Aldridge. The payment process will be assessed by the subcommittee but agreement at the meeting to basing payment on a £100 flat fee topped up with a variable levy based on all deer culls was approved. The subcommittee would scrutinise the tenders at the earliest opportunity and was given authority to appoint the preferred consultant.

8. Deer counts and recommended culls

The count was carried out in good weather and counting conditions. Unfortunately it clashed in some areas with gathering and some members did not carry out a count. It is hoped that the deer management plan process will help to make counts more comprehensive. At Fordie it was noted that many deer resident in woodlands will be missed. As previously stated, counts are valuable as a snap shot of what is happening on the day and a consistent approach over the years is helpful in establishing trends, accepting that it will most probably fall short of the true population.

Culls will be discussed and agreed by sub group.

9. Sub Group Reports

Daniel Murray Parker gave an account of the Eastern Sub Group Meeting which took place on 4 August 2014. The sub group does not generally meet outside the main deer management group meeting, although the grouse group, which covers a wider area, does meet regularly. In the meeting the benefit of an umbrella deer management plan was agreed. Culls are considered to be well balanced, primarily, to benefit grouse and farming but also contributing to deer management more generally. The meeting considered many aspects of benchmarking and it was accepted that the sub group falls short on meetings,

constitutions and having a deer management plan. Glenturret, Monzie, West Glenalmond and Abercairny are seen as a sub group within a sub group, which now communicates regularly and as a result has led to an increase in culls. Despite this there are still complaints from farmers about deer damage. Regular sub group meetings are not planned other than within the grouse group structure, during which it was suggested that deer management issues be considered as an agenda item

Date of Next Meeting

It was requested that the meeting avoids mid-May due to the IACS form submission deadline. It was suggested that the meeting take place in the third week of May, after this deadline. The spring count would take place as before on the second Tuesday of March.

The Western Sub Group will meet in early August at a date to be agreed.

APPENDIX

ADMG Report

South Perthshire DMG

A year ago after last year's AGM I was briefing informally the Bench Marking system aimed at analysing the effectiveness of individual DMGs following the previous year's RACCE committee's focus on rural affairs and particularly deer management; and Scot Govt requirement to re-evaluate the continuing acceptance of the effectiveness of the voluntary principle by 2016. A lot has happened in a year! The Govt further refined their requirement to justify the continued support of SNH towards this end by requiring an additional assessment of the Public Benefit at DMG level of deer management and control.

The upshot has been a busy year and all 43 DMGs have been individually assessed on their management and control of the deer and the habitat in addition to the public benefit arising from this. Rather than taking the view that this was a tick box exercise the ADMG together with the chairs and Secretaries of each group have embraced this whole principle and each one has identified the strengths and weaknesses within their organisation.

The Chair of ADMG, Richard Cooke, who incidentally was reappointed for a further two years, at the February AGM, congratulated groups on the progress made but reminded us that we will be judged on the speed of the hindmost.

So what are the key areas? He reminded us all that there was no one size fits all and he also recognised that all were at different stages in their progress.

The key areas are:

DMPs. Updated or rewritten or simply created. Not as worthy toms to sit on shelves but to be dynamic reflection of the work of the group, be inclusive of all, analysing data, sharing information, creating a greater understanding of the deer and their environment, reflecting the public benefit that their work creates.

Habitat Assessments. Aiming to achieve a greater understanding of the impacts of deer along with the other herbivores on the flora and fauna, not just in environmentally sensitive areas.

Community Involvement. Being open and transparent. Offer them the opportunity to become involved, but in the event of lack of interest in some areas, not to get too worried so long as the overture is made at every opportunity.

RC had constructive meeting with Dr Aileen McLeod, the new minister for Rural Affairs at the end of January only a few weeks after her appointment. She had been well briefed and was clearly highly intelligent, quick on the uptake, and understood the messages that RC had been putting across; especially that of 'one size does not fit all' in relation to deer management on the red deer range (and incidentally within the Lowland Network area also)! They talked about Land reform including the possibility of reintroduction of Sporting Rates; RC making the points that reintroduction of rates on sporting estates would be inequitable and costly if there was to be a re-evaluation of all rateable values not only in rural areas but also urban one. The review of the land Reform bill was covered and the draft Land Reform Bill is likely to published this month so there will be another opportunity to comment upon it then. RC expressed the hope that it would be a surgical instrument based on the evidence of the 120 odd responses that had been received. It is also hoped that the Govt avoid the unintended consequences that had been pointed out in the many professional responses made by membership organisations such as SLE, NFUS, and legal experts.

ADMG held a seminar in Birnam on the 20th March for all chairs and Secretaries along with those who may be offering to draft new DMPs. They looked at the data management process and in the afternoon information management and in particular how DMPs can be open in transparent including where and how information might be distributed. An entry on the ADMG web site was offered for every DMG and it was agreed that most should contain names of office bearers, a map or description showing the extent of the group and a note on how often they met as a minimum. Things like cull and count data were probably too sensitive, although the fact that they take place should be included. Some of you may be aware that Inverary and Tyndrum DMG have been involved in a trial 'Data Management Tool' which aims to help habitat, cull and count data be more usefully employed to help in deer management. It is hope that this pilot will be rolled out later in the summer

Perhaps the overriding message is that while progress was good, there is still a lot which each and every group can and should do. It is recognised that not all groups will be physically able to get an all sing / dancing DMP up and running by the end of 2016, but what was very important was that everyone should be moving in that direction and those that are ahead should be taking strides to make good and constructive use of the information that they now have at their fingertips.

Ian Ross who is the new chair of SNH, was introduced to the AGM and said that he was listening to the views expressed by the industry not just from the top table and that he met fairly frequently with the Minister. He stated that SNH valued the close cooperation and working relationship that he and his staff has with ADMG and that he was fully committed to a collaborative approach. He reported that Linzi Seivwright's position was being advertised so he was looking for volunteers! He saw the Deer Manager playing a key role in realizing the potential of DMGs not only in managing the deer but also in ensuring a good quality habitat on our hills which can be appreciated by the visitor's perception of our countryside. He reiterated the various steps that he and his officers had taken along the self-assessment road including bench marking, self-assessment, code of practice for Deer management, Wild Deer a National Approach and Best Practice Guidance.

On the political front he emphasised;

The Land Use Strategy, which was operating on a wider than deer only, land use sector.

The Community Empowerment bill, and which is building on community engagement and social justice.

Land Reform draft Bill, which should come out later this month.

Review of WDNA focusing on deer in the community, native woodlands and crucially support for the voluntary principle, has been completed and should arrive on our desks any day.

All of which he summed up as having the emphasis on sustainability, which should be better defined and better demonstrated.

The SNH are also working on their corporate Plan looking especially at the Nations Natural Capital.

I think that that is enough from me on the SNH and I will leave others to take some of the issues raised there forward if they want. But perhaps I should mention that in the Q & A session of the AGM Mr Ross did express optimism that the voluntary approach was likely in his view to endure so long as the good work and tremendous efforts made so far continue along the present direction of travel.

Turning to other matters:

PACEC 2. In 2006 PACEC 1 identified the deer industry brought in £105m annually and 2500 FTE jobs. The new study aims to go deeper into deer trends in numbers, planning habitat monitoring and indeed provide the best possible data on what deer management does for the economy. The interim results suggest that from the 132 responses to date out of a potential 500 the following:

84% members of DMGs

88% count deer

75% part of DMG with DMP

89% cull deer to keep habitat in balance

45% engaged in shooting deer for sport

42% engaged in shooting deer for conservation balance were to protect trees etc.

It was hope to finalize the study this summer, but in the meantime if anyone has not completed the survey, Finlay Clark has asked that you should do so as every response will deliver greater weight. There was discussion and concern expressed about the confidentiality of the financial information included. The advantage was that the information contained in the responses was anonymous and independent, but on interrogating the system they could if required be aggregated into the different DMG areas but certainly not down to estate level. The FCS was in the process of responding. The SNH would use the information to determine trends and relate especially the count data to their current program of helicopter counts which this year has covered some 500,000Ha

Scottish Venison Project The Deer Farm / Parks Demonstrations days had been a great success with 305 people visit over 5 days in Strathdon, 2/3rd were landowners –farmers. In 2015 focus will be on parks rather than farms. There are currently over 2,000 deer behind fences. The strong demand for venison had only just been met in 2014 so the prospects for this side of the industry look good.

A pgi status application for Scottish Wild deer had been submitted to Govt with a response expected in the summer.

A best practice Guide on Venison production chain from field to restaurant is being looked at.

Heading for Scottish Hills SNH (Mark Wrightham) explained that they were developing a new and more versatile system giving a wider coverage and enhancing the public benefit. It would be more proactive and contain ‘fixed’ estate information about routes, entry points, size etc and contact details. All of which would remain the same, unless contacts change during the season. No online procedure needed. It could link to estates own website and could provide contact details for daily changing information. It would be hosted by the Scottish Outdoor Access Code website. It would have a general guide to responsible access and land management; a map covering the whole of Scotland probably divided into 8 areas; list of all Munro, and Corbett’s.

Next steps: agree transfer of existing info - contact Fiona Cunningham

Create new entries for other interested estates providing guidance as required.

Upload the site on or by 1st July this year.

Likely to be constantly evolving. See www.outdooraccess-scotland.com

That is probably more than enough from me. More detail can be found on the latest issue of Scope and I will make available for the record a copy of my notes to your Secretary, which comes with caveat that in some cases they are my interpretation of the AGM!