

Meeting of Upper Deeside and Donside Land Management Group

Keiloch, Invercauld and By ZOOM on 11th November 2021 at 2.30pm.

<p>Present (in person)</p> <p>Angus McNicol Invercauld (Chairman) Dr Linzi Seivwright Caorann (Secretary) Arthur Fernie Mar Estate Will Reid Invercauld (Baddoch) Ben Carter Invercauld (Home Beat) Richard Thomas Invercauld (Home Beat) Richard Greenlaw Glenavon Michael Skelly FLS Alex Jenkins Edinglassie Les George Candacraig Michael Bennet Delnadamph David Frew Mar Lodge Tom Turnbull ADMG</p>	<p>Present (by Zoom)</p> <p>Capt Mark Nicolson Mar Estate Andrew Salvesen DWTS Iain Wilkinson DWTS Robin Leslie-Melville Candacraig Stuart Jenkins RSPB Richard Cooke ADMG Representative</p>
<p>Apologies</p> <p>Craig Barnett DWTS Richard Gledson Delnadamph Chris Murphy Mar Lodge Adrian Walker Allargue Hal Salvesen Tullich</p>	

Item		Action
1.	Welcome and Apologies	
1.1	<p>The Chair welcomed all to the meeting both those attending in person and those joining by Zoom. The Chair remarked that it was good to be able to meet in person again.</p> <p>The Chair introduced and welcomed Tom Turnbull as new Chair of ADMG and Richard Cooke as regional representative. Alex Jenkins was also welcomed from Edinglassie, a new member of the Group.</p>	
2.	Draft Minutes of Meeting of held on March 24th 2021	Paper 7
2.1	Minutes were approved by DF and seconded by BC.	
3.	Matters Arising from Meeting held on March 24th 2021	Paper 7
	<p>1. Meeting at Auchnerran. There was interest in the Group in visiting. Meeting agreed to try and arrange a visit in 2022 before lambing and spring nesting of waders – LS to check with Rory Kennedy at GCWT. Rory may well wish to join in meetings in future – LS to include in the circulation list.</p> <p>2. Count completed in spring including a joint heli count – covered in Agenda.</p> <p>3. SCM of Designated Sites. LS to update through the plan. AM reported that Invercauld had been having discussion about Conservation Advice Packages for SACs and Group to be aware that these new public documents are being prepared describing the management of SACs. Implications of document unknown but maybe things attached to them in future.</p> <p>4. Mapping and deer movement in Agenda.</p> <p>5. Update of website actioned.</p>	AP1: LS

	<p>6. Community councils will be sent reports. 7. Edinglassie has joined Group and is present. 8. Deer movements to be picked up with MC from CNPA. 9. HIA Training completed and DWTS to carry out HIA 2022. 10. Review of DMP to be reported under the agenda. 11. Subscriptions circulated and will cover under the agenda.</p>	<p>AP2: LS AP3: LS</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Population Model and Culls</p>	<p>Paper 8</p>
	<p>LS talked to the paper. Of note is that since 1996, deer numbers in the LMG area have halved. Current population is estimated to be around 3,480 deer.</p> <p>Each member then reviewed the past season and their current cull/population management plans.</p> <p>Mar Lodge – DF indicated that the heli count had shown 1600 deer. LS to amend the figures in the table to include the heli-count figure. Cull planning -would be aiming of the status quo. Had shot 105 stags though season (target 120). Hind numbers had been dropping, so will aim to start with 100 hinds – normally 140. Cull in the regen zone will be what they will be. Culls in the regen zone have been coming down year on year. Over 100 deer in regen at last heli count but haven’t been seen again – chased out.</p> <p>A question was asked about the strategy to extend the regen zone. DF confirmed NTS had consulted on a management plan a few years back and were currently rewriting the management plan – will set out what NTS will do on the ground with North Geldie no longer part of the regen zone. Since 2011 no change in the 1650 deer target – remains the target today. Last count December 1680 about as close as can get.</p> <p>Glenavon – 32 stags shot this season (down from 45). Hinds - will aim for 70 – short of deer at west side of the ground. Lot of deer moved onto Dorback and Delnabo and didn’t come back.</p> <p>Baddoch – 26 stags shot this season which was down on the target. Not defined how many hinds will be culled yet as still early– 30 to 40 hinds planned but will shoot more if they appear.</p> <p>Edinglassie – red deer policy to keep numbers low. 5 stags shot this season which is average but will shoot about 10 hinds. Aim is to keep population as low as possible.</p> <p>Mar - 53 stags shot this season and target is 100 hinds– seem to have numbers on the ground. Well through hind cull already. Noticeable that more hikers on the ground have caused greater disturbance.</p> <p>FLS – will provide numbers. The organisation had experienced period of disruption with COVID and procurement. Have been long periods of no culling and periods of limbo. Auchernach and Bunzeach main areas. Policy to cull on site in Bunzeach – numbers have greatly reduced from 5 years ago.</p> <p>Candacraig – Half of Candacraig estate sits within the Group. 1 stag shot (3 in total) – operations at Auchernach have caused deer to move to bottom of Glenbuchat – movement from Bunzeach – seeing more deer than in the past. Any deer now coming from the east – red but not in significant numbers, very much migratory.</p> <p>Delnadampf – 5 stags shot this season – 7 hinds and 2 calves so far.</p> <p>Homebeat – 46 stags shot this season and 50 hinds planned. Deer spread around the ground better than in 2020.</p>	

	<p>DWTS – increasing numbers of red deer reported moving in – Hal Salvesen has shot a number of stags on Tullich. Stag in Lumphanan for first time. Not known if coming from across the river or other places.</p> <p>RSPB- not seeing more deer – don’t count deer but monitoring doesn’t suggest any change. Some roe – not controlling deer currently but under review.</p> <p>AM indicated that deer numbers and culls seemed to be consistent with estate policies, but it seemed there were more deer coming into the Group area from the east. The review of the Deer Management Plan would provide an opportunity for the Group to review the population target– must try to meet sporting objectives but needs to be sustainable in terms of habitats.</p> <p>DF clarified that the Section 7 agreement had finished in 2017 and that the overall population target hasn’t changed from the 1650 level in that agreement.</p> <p>MN noted that if one looked at figures to the early 1980’s, one would see an even bigger reduction in deer numbers. There had been a halving of deer from the early 1980’s to 1995. As result there had been a better balance of mature stags on Mar and they hadn’t seen a shortage of stags. With reductions in hinds, mustn’t take eye off recruitment rate – deer in better condition and better recruitment – risk that may get caught unawares with groups of young stags.</p> <p>LS reported that an NatureScot count of South Deeside and North Angus is to be conducted in Spring. Group will aim to do a foot count this spring as usual. Late February Mar Lodge will try and carry out a heli count, potentially along with Homebeat (AM to confirm). Glenavon will do a foot count.</p> <p>LS to speak to Jimmy to ensure that Count proposed for East Grampians (South Deeside and North Angus) is coordinated with Mar Lodge if possible.</p> <p>There was a discussion about future count methods. A NatureScot note from Iain Hope had outlined research being conducted into the use of unmanned drones and satellite imagery. TT reported that research projects are still ongoing, but accuracy is not great yet.</p>	<p>AP4: AM</p> <p>AP5: LS</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Working Plan - Outstanding Actions</p>	<p>Paper 8</p>
	<p>LS provided an overview of the outstanding actions in the Working Plan and indicated that most of the outstanding issues will be addressed through the collaborative count, the agreed HIA planned for the Spring and through the proposed plan refresh.</p> <p>TT reported that when Deer Working Group recommendations came out some people may have been relieved that the recommendation that the NatureScot DMG assessment should be ceased was supported by Scottish Government. However, the assessments had been valuable and demonstrated the work that had been undertaken and allowed DMGs to show improvement in a relatively short space of time. How do we continue to demonstrate future work and progress and competence? ADMG will be looking to replace the process to help maintain momentum in Groups. AM agreed that it would be useful to have an objective measure to be able to work to and would support in principle something to be able to measure progress. LS will incorporate this as appropriate in the new Deer Management Plan.</p> <p>MN also indicated full support for the proposed way forward.</p> <p>LS updated the Group on the Deer Management Plan refresh. Broadly there were three things being considered: a review of the role and future working of the group to encompass the broad range of objectives; a summary of achievements over the last 5 years and a planned way forward / agreed targets for the group to work to. There were still a couple of properties</p>	

	<p>to speak to (including Edinglassie). LS thanked all those who had engaged so far and indicated that it had been really useful to get out on the ground.</p> <p>AM emphasised that the intention was that the refreshed plan would not be a prescriptive one – rather it would be more of a framework to allow people to collaborate and facilitate positive actions or to allow smaller sub-groups to form if there are specific interests e.g. ticks or carbon or projects that people want to take forward.</p> <p>AM encouraged everyone to feed information to LS and also to highlight good news stories.</p>	
6.	HIA Review	
	<p>Mar Lodge – DF confirmed NTS do HIA on 5 year rolling cycle looking at 500 sample points and all habitat types in one go. Completed fieldwork for this year with draft data and report imminent. Initial look at data suggests that habitats look fine given deer numbers.</p> <p>Invercauld – ASM confirmed they had completed their second round of blanket bog monitoring. LS currently collating data and Invercauld will look at those data and use to inform management moving forward.</p> <p>DWTS – IW confirmed GCWT training was completed in 2021 And they are ready to set up monitoring in Spring 2022.</p> <p>Candacraig – RL-M highlighted the need to use the information to inform your own management, particularly when it comes to managing sheep grazing for tick management. Peatland restoration – damage due to historic grazing and also need to include hares in the interpretation of the results.</p> <p>Edinglassie – AJ commented that NatureScot don’t seem to be doing SCM on their designated site. LS will address in plan.</p> <p>RC commented that NatureScot appear to be downplaying things that they were interested in previously, including the need for HIA. RC did not know how the SG DWG response consultation is going to go and suggested this just increases the necessity and importance for Groups to be able to undertake HIA. Collaboration will need to continue and it will be important to have information to hand.</p> <p>LS highlighted that one area the Group could consider monitoring was Woodlands. Best Practice Guidance in woodland monitoring was still being developed but once adopted it was something members might wish to undertake. Invercauld and Mar Lodge currently undertake woodland HIA monitoring.</p>	
7.	ADMG Update	
	<p>TT – thanked everyone for the invitation to the meeting and commented that it was good to meet new faces. TT explained that over COVID lockdowns, ADMG had been able to continue through online meetings (7 in total) the most recent being an office bearer’s meeting on 26th October 2021. It was planned to have more meetings with Chairs and Secretaries and to encourage a closer link with the membership.</p> <p>With regards to the DWG, TT explained that the Scottish Government have accepted most of the 99 recommendations. Many of the recommendations relate to caveats and nuances surrounding wording in the legislation, but there were also some headline recommendations: end of use of lead ammunition, NatureScot (NS) trialling night sights, removal of a Close Season for males and reduced Close Season for females, increased information on cull returns and an end to the DMG Assessments. TT indicated that these were all issues that ADMG would be looking at closely.</p>	

TT commented that NS seemed to be committed to supporting collaborative structures, but he is not sure whether groups are going to get the same support moving forward.

It was likely that there would be an end to the heli counts and NS were looking to replace these with technology.

Another recommendation related to a cull approval system which NS was currently looking into.

ADMG were also keen to talk to Scottish Government and had requested meetings with Mairi Macallan and Lorna Slater who was the Minister for Green skills, circular economy and biodiversity. An invitation had been extended to the Minister to visit an estate and to see deer management in action.

Venison marketing – TT confirmed that the Scottish Venison Association had secured £160,000 from Scottish Government and were looking to develop pilot projects for larders encouraging local sales initiatives to preserve the value of venison. TT thought the venison price is likely to remain low for now although SQWV assured venison is currently attracting a 40p/kg premium. There had been some problems with SQWV having been difficult to get a hold of but restructuring of the organisation should improve this. Game dealers would be requesting only carcasses shot with non-lead after July 2022.

Access during the COVID period has been a problem – ADMG is liaising with NS and raising awareness of this issue. NS has produced a Social Media information poster available on the NS website as well as a Twitter campaign informing people about culling. ADMG is encouraging members who have been having positive or negative issues to get in touch.

ADMG have been involved recently in several projects. The apparent conflict of views between sporting interests and environmental campaign groups had led to the Common Ground Project involving Scottish Land & Estates, Trees For Life, Woodland Trust, Scottish Environment Link and ADMG. The Centre for Good Relations had interviewed 40 participants and future pieces of work were being identified. It was recognised that a perception of a polarisation of views was not always applicable as some Groups work well.

The Scottish Venison Association are undertaking a project looking at contribution to greenhouse gases from deer & the carbon footprint from deer management. There have been various figures published recently so it is important to understand this better.

ADMG were considering use of a modelling programme called Deer Map to assess the potential impact of management decisions.

As mentioned earlier, ADMG were looking to develop an Assessment process. It is important this is user friendly and is able to identify areas where Groups may require further input or support.

ADMG had been contacted by members about September culling of hinds and calves. The ADMG stance is clear that all efforts should be made to cull hinds in season where possible. If it is to be undertaken, the Best Practice Guidance should be followed, and every attempt made to avoid orphaning dependent calves.

ADMG had hosted a webinar by David Bavin from the Vincent Wildlife Trust to promote discussion and to explore the issues surrounding the potential reintroduction of LYMX. It was important to have an informed understanding of the topic.

	<p>TT assured the Group that he was always at the end of the telephone if anyone wants to get in touch. It is hoped that RC will be able to come to meetings in future as ADMG rep (he is also recently appointed Chair of Scottish Venison Association).</p> <p>There followed a discussion on the use of non-lead ammunition. Different calibres and bullet weight combinations have differing results. Seems more investigation is required. NS is carrying out some work at the moment.</p>	
8.	NatureScot	
	<p>LS explained NS hadn't been invited to the meeting in error and would apologise to them for this and update them on the meeting and seek input from them that could be circulated round members.</p>	
9.	CNPA	
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10.	Communications	Paper 9
	<p>LS confirmed the website had been updated.</p> <p>LS also advised that the Draft Annual Report had been circulated prior to the meeting. This was approved.</p> <p>There was a discussion about the importance of the Group being more engaged with the public. It was suggested that Rangers could be an important source of two-way information. The Group also discussed the possibility of an Estate Open Day as a way of building links with the local communities. There was discussion about similar projects where members of the local community have been invited to an open day on FLS land and has resulted in a positive outcome. The value of engaging young people was also discussed. There was an Estates who Educate programme being run primarily in Angus to get local schools out and about – this could provide a useful template for future education days. Some groups have had Hill to Grill days. The Group agreed to explore possibly opportunities for 2022.</p> <p>There was a discussion about the role of the Group moving forward. The Chair reiterated that although there was still a strong deer focus, the assessment process had brought a range of different things into the last Deer Management Plan and demonstrated the value of wider local collaboration and hence the evolution of the Group into a land management group. Moving forward there was an opportunity for the Group to have a more fluid way of operating. The Group would provide more of a local framework to allow better collaboration. It is the members' Group so the most important thing is that it delivers what members want.</p> <p>RC commented that it had been a good discussion and that it was valuable to have experience from other projects and helpful to capture the things that work.</p>	AP6: LS/AM
11.	AOCB	
	<p>The issue of E-bikes and access was raised. AM agreed to ask MC about policy within the CNPA. TT indicated that it was due to be raised with the National Access Forum and would be fed into NAF through the ADMG representative Frank Spencer-Nairn.</p> <p>AM indicated that when there were gaps on the training courses on Invercauld there may be the potential for places to be available for other Group members and other members may be in a similar position.</p>	AP7: LS/AM
12.	Draft response to CNPA Consultation	

	<p>The CNPA were currently consulting on the draft 5-year National Park Plan which will result in a final plan going to the Minister around the middle of next year. This will be a core CNPA policy document for the next 5 years.</p> <p>It was agreed that in principle it was important and appropriate that as a land management group UDDLGM provides feedback and a response based on evidence. AMcN had previously prepared a response which had been circulated previously and which was discussed in more detail in a closed session.</p>	
13.	Financial Position	Paper 10
	<p>LS circulated a paper outlining the current financial position and a proposed draft budget for approval at the next meeting of the DMG. It was explained that there had been a delay in asking for subscriptions for 2021/22 as it had proved extremely difficult to open a Bank Account This had recently been approved, however. Subscriptions would be sought again in Spring 2022, but subscription levels would be lower, the 2021/22 costs including an allowance for renewing the Group's Deer Management Plan.</p>	
14.	Date and Time of Next Meeting	
	<p>The intention is to have a March 2022 meeting but there may be other smaller subgroup meetings in the meantime. AM encouraged all members to provide feedback to LS for the Monthly Bulletins.</p> <p>The Chair thanked all for attending and in particular TT for joining from the ADMG.</p>	

Summary of Action Points from Meeting on 11th November 2021

1.	Meeting to be arranged at Auchnerran.	LS
2.	LS to circulate Annual Reports to Community Councils	LS
3.	MC to be asked about wider deer movements across CNPA	AM/LS
4.	AM to confirm if Invercauld counting by helicopter	AM
5.	LS to ask NS to coordinate heli count with East Gramps and Mar Lodge	LS
6.	Group to explore opportunities for community engagement and education days.	LS
7.	AM to ask CNPA about E-bikes and access policy	AM