

Meeting of Upper Deeside and Donside Land Management Group

Keiloch, Invercauld and By ZOOM on Friday 25th March 2022 at 2.30pm.

Present (in person)	Present (by Zoom)	Apologies
Angus McNicol (Chair & Invercauld) Capt Mark Nicolson (Mar Estate) Richard Thomas (IC Home Beat)	Adrian Walker (Allargue) David Frew (Mar Lodge) Richard Cooke (ADMG Rep) Richard Gledson (Delnadamph) Mike Cottam (CNPA) Mary Bowman (Glenavon) Rory Kennedy (GWCT) Andrew Salvesen (DWTS) Dr Linzi Seivwright (Secretary)	Michael Skelly (FLS) Craig Barnett (DWTS) Ben Carter (IC Home Beat) Iain Wilkinson (DWTS) Will Reid (Invercauld Baddoch) Ben Carter (Invercauld Homebeat) Stuart Young (Edinglassie) Stuart Jenkins (RSPB) Arthur Fernie (Mar Estate) Robin Leslie-Melville (Candacraig) Iain Hope (NatureScot) Chris Murphy (Mar Lodge)

Item	Action
1. Welcome and Apologies	
1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the meeting.	
2. Draft Minutes of Meeting of held on 11th November 2021	Paper 3
2.1 Minutes were approved by MN and seconded by RG.	
3. Matters Arising from Meeting held on 11th November 2021	Paper 3
<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. Review of deer movements being developed as part of the plan refresh.</p> <p>3. Foot count completed in the East area and Heli count covered Baddoch, Mar, Invercauld Home Beat and Mar Lodge. Glenavon didn't manage to count. It was noted that Andrew Young had taken over from Richard Greenlaw. MB to check if a count could be completed on Glenavon. Meeting recorded thanks to Richard Greenlaw for his engagement over the years. AM to write to RG.</p> <p>3. Education: Group discussed Hill to Grill opportunities. Regional Moorland Groups doing more on education so don't want to duplicate or overlap with other work. Other DMGs will be looking to roll this out this year so could build on their experience and consider again later. Glen Tanar have done quite a bit with Aboyne Academy and Invercauld and Balmoral do work with schools. Delnadamph also do some work with Strathdon schools. Might be a gap in Ballater – so will make sure that schools know. AM to follow up with school.</p> <p>4. E-bikes. Had been raised as a concern previously. Motorised vehicles are not part of the Outdoor Access Code so AM had contacted the CNPA Access officer to check the status of e-bikes- CNPA supportive of E-bikes in principle but no current policy on this. Will be a review of Access Strategy later in the year – AM has asked UDD LMG be included in that conversation.</p> <p>DF- explained this had been raised directly with NTS. A number of test cases have gone through courts – not considered motorised vehicles so SOAC does apply. NTS monitoring the impact on tracks and paths. May be an issue if bikes appear on plateau. No one property or organisation would probably want to take forward on their own. Will impact everyone but need a collective response when the time is right.</p>	<p>AP1: LS</p> <p>AP2: MB</p> <p>AP3: AM</p> <p>AP4: AM</p>

	<p>RC -ADMG will be making a presentation on deer management to Access Forum in June. TT has asked for representation. LMG members asked to be provided with feedback through Secretary and for any issues/evidence to also be forwarded to ADMG.</p> <p>AS - has asked lawyers on behalf of the Easter Charitable Trust whether the interpretation on E-bikes can be challenged and whether management principles (a legal document) with respect to how Mar Lodge is managed provides any form of protection within the law. AS clarified that issue relates to management on Mar Lodge specifically.</p> <p>DF- Issue is intrinsically tied up not just with Outdoor Access legislation but also with Road Traffic Act and relates to whether they are motorised vehicles or not. Not just outdoor access issues in the mountains, also urban issues. Seems to be moving faster than law can keep up. Law in relation to electric powered vehicles of any type needs to catch up with what is happening on the ground. Need to feed into the process and where LMG can be most helpful – particularly in relation to damage to protected habitats.</p>	<p>AP5: LMG</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Population Model and Culls</p> <p>Group up to date with culls. LS will ask for roe culls in the questionnaire as well as other species to ensure that she has a full suite of information.</p> <p>LS talked to paper 4 and highlighted that still need information from Edinglassie. Recognise as a Group that the current population model doesn't quite work. Helicopter counts show more deer than expected so assume immigration into the Group area. Glenavon didn't count in 2021 so pop figure will be an underestimate. Also recognise that there is quite a bit of movement between Glenavon and the properties to the west in the Cairngorms Speyside Group that can cause counts to fluctuate unexpectedly. LS to collate counts that have just been undertaken. Will recirculate the population model once we have count data. Otherwise, up to date with actions in old plan and new refreshed plan will set out actions to be delivered in the next 5 years.</p> <p>Note that the population figure estimate for the LMG is for the whole Group but the densities in the main open range, although higher, still fall within the aspirations of the new Cairngorms National Park Plan.</p> <p>AM updated the Group on a meeting organised by ADMG at Balmoral on the 8th Feb with members of all the DMGs and representatives from the CNPA. Opportunity to discuss the proposals within the plan regarding deer and other land management activities. Plan going through a review in light of the consultation – meeting had tried to steer focus away from prescribed deer densities and suggested focussing on impacts instead. However, the feeling from the meeting was that the direction of travel will continue to focus on having less deer. Meeting had raised concerns regarding the socio economic impact of deer reductions on stalking businesses but whether this will be taken into account by CNPA is unclear.</p> <p>Draft is due to go the Minister in May for approval.</p> <p>LS had meeting with owner of Dinnet Estate and future plan will include an additional area called Dinnet Low Ground which is run by a separate syndicate. Issue there with deer coming across the river onto the estate. LS to ensure that future culls refer to DWTS and Dinnet Low Ground.</p> <p>Group were asked about future culls and asked whether anyone had different aspirations for their populations in order to help set future population targets. Glenavon to confirm.</p>	<p>Paper 4</p> <p>AP6: LS</p> <p>AP?: MB</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Plan Refresh</p>	<p>Paper 5</p>

LS updated the Group on progress with the Deer Management Plan refresh and outlined the proposed sections. Will be tagging on the land management brief which will be more about facilitation. The new plan will be more of a facilitation plan than old one – because of the previous criteria required for the DMG assessment. New plan will have more flexibility in what the Group would like to include.

AM thought a useful addition might be a specific chapter on deer and the economy.

LS talked to Paper 5 and provided more detail on the chapters to be included. Reiterated that it was not about reinventing plan but taking the key issues for the Group and brigading into headings that NatureScot will be reporting on in the future. Allows collation of those data at higher level. Have a good message to get across so the easier we can do that the better. Focus will be on trying to capture the broad management of land management objectives as well as highlighting the importance of collaboration.

LS will be preparing to send out a questionnaire to capture the information needed for the plan. She urged everyone to provide as much detailed information as possible. Also asked Group to provide information on any HIA being undertaken this year and to let her know if anyone needs any training.

MN- Open range red deer management will be focusing on trampling on restored peatland sites. What monitoring is there that could be put in place? **LS** indicated that the blanket bog methodology picked up trampling but advised that could focus monitoring on specific areas of interest. **LS** happy to help with setting up monitoring. **LS** noted that new best practice guidance (about to be published) would be best to use as more sensitive than the old guide and will allow you to look at more detailed changes over time.

DF – Have just finished 90 ha restoration scheme and have put 4 ha enclosure for monitoring purposes and to measure impacts of deer.

AM- Tends to be on the flat areas of exposed peat that tend to be impacted most by deer. This was raised at the CNPA meeting – peat damage was the impact of most concern to CNPA.

LS- Discussed how best to operate as a land management group moving forward and how best to make meetings more effective. Full Group could hold a strategic meeting once or twice a year ie NatureScot, Government Policy, CNPA and ADMG. May be that small working parties could be used to deal with specific issues. Also need to have spring and autumn deer meetings – all need to attend but where the Group gets more into the practical elements of deer management meetings??. **LS** would circulate a questionnaire prior to spring meetings to gather as much information as possible (as well as reports). Conscious that asking for a lot of information but would ask once a year for information to make it more efficient.

AM- Asked what other Groups were doing and how they were approaching this?

LS – seemed to be a mixed bag. Each group is completely different in objectives and composition – no group is the same. Challenge for this group is that group has expanded considerably to include an increasing number of properties with different objectives- challenge will be to have the right meetings for the right people, discussing relevant issues and keeping everyone engaged, interested and onboard.

RC- This Group seemed to be at the forefront of what collaborative land management can offer and expanding beyond just deer means that although things might become more complex, much more informative and useful. Worthwhile to take the approach the Group is taking. Unfortunately more that you do, the more you are expected to do. But have to keep

doing the right thing and this group seems to be doing that through the way the Group is structuring the plan.

MN- Have a complication in terms of area the majority of the members in the UDD Group are also members of the East Cairngorm Moorland Partnership. As move forward there may be overlap. A lot of what being proposed is already under discussion with the ECMP- don't want to duplicate the work.

LS- One output being able to quantify what the Group is delivering on the ground. If the ECMP is already doing that, then agree that there is no need to duplicate. Someone needs to have that information to feed back. Having the opportunity to create smaller working groups might be useful. LS to look into the ECMP and check that no duplication – need to make sure everyone's efforts are focused and not duplicated. Collaborating at a landscape scale is such a powerful thing that if there is something that the ECMP is missing that we can pick up or vice-versa. Angus and Grampian Moorland Groups also.

AM- Advantage of having members of both groups and UDD LMG will likely evolve. Agreed with structure that LS has set out. Topics will evolve and key will be for the new plan to be light touch with non-deer issues to give the Group flexibility and to avoid duplication.

DF- Point that one thing that ECMP doesn't talk about is deer -so as it stands clearly benefit of both groups currently. Think about delivery on the ground and how it is packaged and presented. ECMP is looking at landscape scale projects – packed as one large project – haven't done yet but something to think about.

AW - Have discussed issue of duplication before and has made the decision not to join some of these other groups because lots of Groups with slightly different emphases is not necessarily helpful. Need an integrated approach to management -may be a case to merge the groups in due course. Would support an approach to the other groups to discuss this and ways of operation. Is someone prepared to speak to other Groups and discuss?

AM- ECMP is a one off whereas the Moorland Regional groups have their own structure – but perhaps with ECMP is there an option for a merger?

AS- With respect to the Regional Moorland Groups – don't think there is an overlap. These group primarily the voice for the keeping community and focused on moorland management and grouse management. The agendas are different.

AM- More of an overlap with ECMP- will keep a watching brief on this. Group operation – general thrust is that we don't want to be getting into specifics at the meetings -should be more about strategy and leave the specifics to sub-groups. Example might be a Carbon subgroup for example which may be of interest to some but not others.

MN- Danger that deer management groups may fall off the agenda and may be replaced by Carbon. May need carbon groups on a landscape scale in short to medium term.

AM- having a land management group means that leading the way on some of this. Would rather be in the driving seat.

LS- Might be useful to investigate how the Rural Land Use Partnerships might work and get the CNPA representative along as the Cairngorms is a pilot area. LS and AM to investigate and see where they are at. AM keen to see these partnerships evolve from the bottom up.

AM- next stage is for LS to have a draft plan ready for Angus to look at for the middle of April and then the plan will be circulated to the wider Group. LS confirmed that the mapping was underway with the consultant.

AP7: AM & LS

6.	HIA Review	
	Action there for everyone to get prepared of this season and ensure that have training in place. Group to get in touch with LS if they require any help.	AP8: LMG
7.	ADMG Update	
	<p>RC- ADMG had held their AGM on Wednesday 23rd March which was the 30th Birthday for the organisation. Meeting was recorded and is available online. Around 70 people attended with 15 people online. The Chair gave a comprehensive review of the year which has also been published as the Annual Review. New issue of Scope available. Organisation is in good place financially. Working on successor to NatureScot Assessments – lighter touch health check that Groups can use to measure progress. Common Ground project about working more effectively together with critics from forestry and environmental sectors – way of communication what the sector has achieved. DeerMap – a predictive modelling tool is also being developed by Affric Highland project, but ADMG are supporting. Professor Josephine Pemberton gave an excellent talk on some of the research on Rum which is showing deer responses to changes in climate. Willie Lamont gave a talk on the Deer Dashboard – produces lots of interesting information -useful tool for future. LS gave a refresher on deer management planning. Nick Halfhide gave a view from NatureScot vision which is basically less deer than we have already. Incentives available for woodland expansion and peatland will incentivise reductions. Interesting question session. If SG wants to achieve their aims, then they need the cooperation of landowners, but agenda is a political one and is complicated with land reform agenda. Most of DWG recommendations are likely to find their way into the legislation. Not clear if there will be a new deer legislation or if it will be absorbed in the Environment Bill. ADMG have been trying to meet with any of the three Ministers but seem to be unavailable.</p> <p>Venison – Dick Playfair gave a report at the AGM and the Scottish Venison Association meets next week. Strong demand for venison and price is creeping back up. SVA facing funding situation because levy is being paid on less and less deer. Some sales being carried out direct to the consumer and Scottish Government have provided £160k for a marketing project last year. A new assessment body is in place for SQWV.</p>	
8.	Financial Report	Paper 6
	<p>LS updated the Group on the current financial position as per the Paper. Group had finally managed to open a bank account. By having a ring-fenced account, it means always need to be in funds to meet bills. £5,018.50 in bank with Secretariat to be paid and will be some underspend in terms of community meetings and plan refresh. Due to have a final balance of £2,972 by end of the financial year.</p> <p>LS presented the draft budget for 2022/23 which will be raised in the next month. Edinglassie coming on board as new member. LS also clarified that FLS are contributing centrally through ADMG.</p> <p>AM- Now on an even keel financially but asked if when get subscription if people can pay as soon as they can.</p> <p>AS- As move east the deer cull reported there is next to no income generated and is increasing number of them. If people are going to be accurate in the cull reporting, needs recognised that there is no stalking income from that.</p> <p>AM- Also discussed the possibility of having a minimum subscription of £300 for any member. Proposal was supported. AM and LS to check if minimum has been set and will keep this item under review. Proposed to pick this up again this time next year and explore a better way of calculating subs.</p> <p>MN- Group was expanded to reflect the expectation that even if you didn't have any deer, you would still need to have a deer management plan. The split reflects that and is looking</p>	AP9: AM & LS

	<p>backwards. Moving forwards the changes coming forward and if do take on wider issues in addition to deer – then the split will change. May reconsider another way of splitting next year in advance of the meeting.</p> <p>DF- Agreed that the administration cost was exactly the same regardless of the size of property and the ADMG Subscription was as per the number deer shot – maybe for future consider splitting those things separately. The admin cost could be split equally and ADMG costs addressed separately.</p> <p><u>The Group agreed the budget and the split of subscriptions as presented as per the Paper presented.</u></p>	
9.	NatureScot and CNPA Updates	
	<p>Iain Hope had been unable to attend the meeting due to technical reasons.</p> <p>MC updated the Group on the Heritage Horizons project. Have 3 DMG projects planned – South Deeside North Angus, South Grampians and a subgroup of West Grampians.</p> <p>SDNA project will aim to develop the basis of a strategic land management plan and will also look at the risks associated with private finance in the carbon markets. Went out on Public Contracts website and 3 responses. SDNA project will be announced shortly. If members want to pursue further, then a further application will be made to the lottery fund for the delivery phase.</p> <p>South Grampians about to be advertised. West Grampians not funded by HH as it had already progressed before the application was made so were not eligible- funding found elsewhere. 5 estates involved and have appointed Strath Caulaidh to start in May. Development phase to be completed by March 2023 – will see where members want to take it. Will tease out a lot of data and supporting information to enable people to make considered decisions about what management to undertake in light of the climate change agenda.</p> <p>New CNPA Partnership Plan – has been some changes. Now included a reference about the need to take into account impacts. Not convinced that reference to densities between 5-8 deer per km² will be removed. Likely to be upheld.</p>	
10.	Communications	Page 9
	<p>AM encouraged members to provide information for the Bulletin to the secretary as it is always helpful to have items. As we have the new plan and all the data being compiled- LS and AM to think about how best to put this out so that all the good things that people are doing can be highlighted and promoted.</p> <p>Draft Annual Report – LS will be asking for information from estates for the year ending 2022. Draft will be circulated before being put on website.</p>	
11.	AOCB	
	<p>AS- Attended a meeting at the Raemoir Hotel in Banchory with all the estates to the east and on the other side of the river Dee. Finzean, Ballogie, Birse, Dunecht and Learnie. All seeing an increase in red deer coming east but numbers thought to be stable. Deer being pushed around by walkers and end up in the woodland to the east – coming from south across the Dee. It was an informal meeting but useful. No immediate actions arising.</p> <p>AM thanked AS for attending and asked if he could keep the UDD group apprised of any further meetings.</p> <p>AM suggested that a Carbon group be put together to address peatland restoration. Might be helpful for people to be involved. Might be away of optimising price in a collaborative way. Dates for the meeting will be circulated and members welcome to attend.</p>	

	<p>LS- Helicopter count had been done of the Cabrach recently which showed 820 stags 2294 hinds and 635 calves – most sitting in Cabrach and Glenfiddich.</p> <p>AM might be useful to include in the draft plan the wider area and where deer are around the margins.</p>	
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Summary of Action Points from Meeting on 25th March 2022

1.	Meeting to be arranged at Auchnerran.	LS
2.	Glenavon to confirm if a count was conducted in 2022	MB
3.	AM to write to Richard Greenlaw to thank him.	AM
4.	AM to speak to Ballater School to discuss possible education event.	AM
5.	Group members to feedback any access issues to LS	LMG Members
6.	LS to update the population model with revised count figures	LS
7.	LS and AM to investigate Rural Land Use Partnerships	LS & AM
8.	Group members to ensure that HIA training and work undertaken – seek assistance from LS if required	LMG Members
9.	LS and AM to review subscriptions in advance of Spring meeting next year.	LS & AM