

Minutes of the East Loch Sheil DMG held at Conaglen House on 2nd November 2018

Present:

*Steve Fox, Carnoch (Chairman)& MDMG
Ewen Maclean, Ardgour/Glenscaddie (Secretary)
David Mosgrove, Conaglen (Vice Chairman)
David Mckenzie, Conaglen
Ross Maclean, Conaglen
Shaun Corrigan, Ardgour
Peter Sinclair, Resipole
Kenneth Knott (FES)
John MacDonald (FES)
John Jackson (FES)
Graeme Taylor, SNH*

Apologies:

*John MacDonald, WHV
Lynda Campbell, ADMG
Harvey Phillips, Inversanda
Robin Maclean, Ardgour
Ross Dunsmore SGRPID*

Matters Arising:

Chairman's Welcome and Apologies.

SF began the meeting by welcoming all members, explaining that H Phillips had given him guidance on his thoughts and a proxy vote.

J Macdonald WHV indicated to SF that all votes on matters should be taken by R Dunsmore on behalf of SGRIPD.

Those present were advised a voice recording of the meeting would be taken. There were no objections.

Minutes from Previous meeting:

SF signed a copy of the minutes from the previous meeting to confirm they were a true representation of events. GT observed that some of the action points were not clearly defined.

ADMG Assesment

SF briefed the group on the ADMG assessment carried out: Victor Clements on behalf of ADMG carried out a pre-assessment on ELS DMG in order to establish the progress of the group toward satisfying the 'Benchmark' and 'Public Interest' criteria. Overall VC's findings were very positive and he says we will have moved from being bottom of the league table to being certainly within the top 1/3rd of groups. We are now looking forward positively to the SNH spring review. As a group can we give David a special thanks for all his exceptional hard work in bringing both the updated DMP's and the ELSDMG Group forward.

GT stated that where there are differences between VC's report and SNH observations, SNH will comment. ACTION GT

GT stated that the report was fair and he was supportive of the assessment, however issues remained.

Main issues were: Designated sites, population modelling, agricultural damage.

Group Priority from Benchmark and Public Interest SF stated that The officers of the Group have considered that our key priorities which have not already been fully addressed are as follows.

DMP Background Information Edition 9 and Edition 1 of Action Plan.

Members were asked by SF whether they had viewed the DMP and whether there was a broad brush approval of the plan, the consensus was that members present approved of the plan, barring GT, who had emailed on the 1st of November a detailed summary of objections/changes suggested. It was felt that as yesterday's email hadn't yet been examined in detail by the group, it would be inappropriate to comment on the contents of the email at today's meeting.

SF asked members for any comments, and encouraged any members of the public or interested parties to comment on the plan.

JJ observed that the reproductive rates [for their enclosed woodlands] should be 65% of sexually mature hinds rather than 45% and that the calves to hinds cull was around 50:50 with a shoot the calf first policy. JJ to email comments to group shortly. ACTION JJ

SF stated that with minor alterations the plan can be taken forward with Members agreement.

GT stated that SNH will adopt the plan and highlighted the big steps taken forward but reiterated that the priorities need to be addressed.

DM stated that the group needs to have an adopted plan as the group has been criticised in the past for having a draft plan.

SF stated that HP gave proxy votes to agree and adopt both the DMP and the Action Plan.

The ELSDMG DMP Background information Edition 9 and the Edition 1 of the Action Plan were adopted subject to ongoing revision.

PS asked GT when the SNH summer 2018 survey results which were due in August 2018 would be released.

GT updated the group with a designated sites report stating that SNH only have draft reports but would hope to have full reports by the end of November. GT stated that the headline of the draft reports will remain the same as the full reports, indicating over 90% browsing of seedlings on two of the designated sites. Once reports are fully finished GT will send round to group. ACTION GT.

DM stated that he has started a canopy cover map and that indicated 70%- 90% canopy cover on survey results pertaining to Conaglen Estate.

GT stated that the main reason for trees not growing is herbivore impact, not canopy cover.

It was agreed that DM and GT should meet to discuss specific designated sites. ACTION GT and DM.

Action Plan

Members discussed the Action Plan.

KK asked how regularly it would be updated. DM confirmed that this is a live working document.

SF stated that as amendments are made, changes will be circulated round the group. DM suggested colour coded text would enable any changes in the document to be clearly marked.

West and East Sub Groups.

SF informed the group of the discussions around forming separate sub groups.

Sub – Group proposal is based around what should be broadly separate deer sub populations. At the West end of the line primarily Woodland deer and management objectives with some open range deer outside of the fences. At the EAST end primarily Open Range deer with sporting management. West and East Sub Groups to be formed with each producing their own Deer Management Plans under the main Background Information plan just adopted. Plans to be produced, consulted on and adopted in time for the SNH spring review. Plans to define and achieve objectives and conform to the ADMG Benchmark and the Public Interest criteria.

There has been virtually unanimous support from those who responded, other than J Macdonald WHV who stated “my personal view is that I would not like to see the group divided, where the open range area of Ben Resipole to the west becomes cut off and part of a separate sub group with once again varying land and deer management objectives from those within enclosed woodlands. This just shifts a problem to another area so it would be a no vote from me.”

SF showed the group a plan of the area with the dividing line.

PS asked if the group works well as two sub groups why couldn't it work as one group?

DM stated that the Action Plan works primarily for the Eastern Area as the Western area needs a lot of work.

PS raised his concerns about non contributing members and felt that he had contributed significantly in the western end while others hadn't.

KK expressed a desire to push things forward in the Western End and sort out detailed actions for the Sunart Oakwoods group, asked if it still existed.

GT stated that the same principles apply to deer on open range hill and forestry.

PS explained that the SOG hadn't met for many years but there was a desire from some members to restart the group. KK asked PS if he would be the point of contact and attempt to contact members.

PS agreed to try to move things forward with help from FES. ACTION PS and FES.

KK stated that lack of engagement from smaller members was pushing the group towards dividing into sub groups, asked if we could postpone the group division till next meeting.

DM disagreed that it was the smaller members, asked that FES provide more data before the next benchmark meeting, highlighted that this was one reason why we would fall down the league table.

KK stated that he had prepared data but wasn't sure where it had gone, was going to look into it ACTION KK.

SF stated that FES had dropped a small amount of data to him as the 2016 SNH review meeting was about to start.

GT stated that there is no difference between east and west, the risk to SNH is the same and the disparity is not accurate.

A discussion took place on the deer which are being sucked in from the eastern end of the group into the FES ground and being culled heavily, RM confirmed that deer from Glenscaddle are being drawn into Glenhurich, with fences in poor condition.

DM stated that FES need to ensure their fences are secure.

KK stated that tree planting and new species was very successful on FES ground, RM confirmed that this was due to a massive increase in deer being culled.

Discussions took place between Conaglen and FES around fencing between Glenhurich and Glenscaddle, KK suggested a sub meeting with DM ACTION DM and KK.

KK confirmed FES will not commit to writing a DMP for the western end, it has to be collaborative.

GT said SNH will assist. ACTION GT and KK.

GT proposed the group signing up to a Section 7 would make the process much simpler, with assistance from SNH and an independent chair to drive things forward. Group was unanimously opposed to voluntarily signing up to a section 7.

PS suggested that with the correct information from all members in the Western end of the group then the issues over sub dividing would be resolved.

DM stated that we are dealing with 2009 population information and info from FES.

JJ advised that FES are to carry out population density assessments this season and agreed to provide updated information on various aspects of the plan. ACTION JJ

SF concluded that rather than splitting the ELSDMG into two sub-groups at this meeting a 'working group' for the West of the ELSDMG area to be formed by the members of that area and this will be referred to as "The Western end Working Group" and not call it a sub group. This was met with unanimous approval.

Estate Reports

Stag Culls:

Ardgour-1

FES 98 stags, 68 in Glenhurich and 6 in Ardery

Resipole- 7 open hill, 2 woodland

SNH- Claish Moss-0

Conaglen- 36- 10 out of fenced woodland block.

Carnoch-7

Glenscaddle-20

Glen Gour-6

Condition Reports

All members reported lighter than usual condition and a late rut.

Poaching

None reported

Proposed Hind Culls

Members intention generally to shoot less this season, with only very poor calves being shot.

Deer Counts

SF asked if group was in line for a SNH funded count

GT confirmed yes, between November and April, SNH would like assistance in the helicopters with members of the group, also assistance looking at photographs afterwards appreciated.

Count figures would be available within 2 weeks then density maps etc. to follow.

FES are to carry out population density assessments this season.

Recruitment counts.

It was agreed that in total 200 to 300 hinds and calves be counted about a third each from Conaglen, Ardgour and the Western end open ground each May to establish the surviving hind: calf recruitment ratio to be used in our forward looking population model.

Mortality

SF asked how we carry out and turn mortality counts into useful data?

DM suggested members walk the same piece of ground year on year and report back with opinions.

GT concurred, keep note of numbers and observe.

This to be carried out with the Recruitment counts.

HIA

SF asked if the new BPG for HIA was available yet?

GT confirmed not completed yet, GT will chase and make available ACTION GT

SF advised that Best Practice have discontinued the publication of hard copy Best Practice Guides, also they will no longer circulate any information to you. Henceforth members are to be responsible

for their own upgrading of knowledge and raised concerns about how members would access new guidelines.

GT stated that last updates sent out by post 2014, will check for new updates. ACTION GT

SF asked how many plots of dwarf shrub heath needed done per group.

GT 30 plots per habitat unit per member, however units with collective objectives can spread plots between them.

GT suggested looking at the SNH maps and deciding within the group sensible numbers.

GT reiterated that completing the HIA's was key, then data can be analysed.

The group has made a commitment to carry out HIA's in 2019, all members concurred.

SF queried that with only 3.4% of the ELSDMG area classed as Blanket Bog is it necessary to carry out any BB HIA at all?

Designated Sites

SF asked about the condition of the designated sites in the West end of the group and what managements actions need to be discussed between owners of designated sites and SNH.

GT confirmed that meetings with individual owners are needed. ACTION GT & Individual owners.

FES representatives left the meeting.

Agricultural Damage

A discussion was held around agricultural damage in the Clovullin area of the group.

GT confirmed that Police Scotland had deemed the croft ground between the A861 and the village to be unsafe for shooting high caliber rifles and that the night license previously issued by GT was now revoked.

GT stated that it was the landowners responsibility to ensure that the problem was solved, not up to the individual crofters to deal with the issue through fencing.

EM asked why this was a priority action for SNH within the group, given that the area in question comprised 0.7% of the group's landmass.

EM confirmed that Ardgour Estate would look to ensure that the major part of the hind cull this year would come from the lower ground around the village and this would ease the problem, but raised concerns about public safety.

EM also confirmed that an offer to part deer fence the croft in question had been rejected by the crofter.

GT stated that there were 3 other complainants within the croft area, but was not allowed to reveal the names because of SNH data protection laws.

DM questioned the process involved, and asked that the grazings clerk for Clovullin township raise a formal complaint in writing to the group and attends the next DMG meeting to address the concerns.

GT concurred that this would be the correct action.

ACTION EM re culling measures.

ADMG No ADMG representative available, apology received.

Next regional meeting 21st November- Inverness

SNH update, including spring review – what is outstanding?

GT updated group regarding peatland restoration grants available.

AOB

SF highlighted that it may be necessary for the DMG and sub working groups to meet between now and next meeting.

Date for Next meeting

Spring 2019- SF asked that meeting moved away from summer avoiding main holiday period.

Approved at meeting 29/04/2019. Signed S Fox, Chair ELSDMG.