

# East Loch Shiel Deer Management Group

## Report - Spring 2019

Summary report

Compiled by - S. Fox ELSDMG Chair.

Group Report - Part 1. Updated 02/05/2019.

Eastern Working Group Report - Part 2.

Western Working Group Report - Part 3.

Actions to be completed with a date by if needed in green.

### **Part 1.**

Introduction: -

- This report, parts 1, 2, and 3 are a supplement to the ELSDMG DMP Action Plan – Working Document.

SNH Deer Management Group Assessment 2019: -

- Our Assessment against the Benchmark and Public Interest is scheduled for the 8<sup>th</sup> May this year. [Chair, Vice Chair, Western Working Group representative, SNH.](#)

ADMG ‘Benchmark’ and SNH ‘Public Interest’ criteria: -

- There are 101 criteria set out in the Benchmark and the Public Interest.
- 37 of these have now been identified as ‘priority’ by SNH.
- Our group has come under criticism for not covering all the criteria at every meeting even though they are covered in detail in our DMP.
- As there simply is not the time to go over the entire 101 ‘ADMG Benchmark’ and ‘Public Interest’ criteria at each meeting the officers of the Group place our Key Priority Criteria on meeting agendas for detailed consideration. [Chair, Vice Chair.](#)
- Where practical, criteria are addressed between meetings via email and telephone leaving more time at the meetings to concentrate on our group Key Priority Criteria. [Chair, Vice Chair, SNH, Members.](#)

Deer Management Plan (DMP): -

- Following consultation, the 9<sup>th</sup> Edition DMP Background Information and the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition DMP Action Plan – Working Document were both adopted unanimously by the Group at last November’s meeting.
- Both are live documents to provide for adaptive management. Each will be updated from time to time, usually on not less than an annual basis with updates notified. Members, stakeholders &etc. are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the updates as notified.
- The 9<sup>th</sup> Edition DMP - Background Information will be reviewed and updated this summer. [Chair, Vice Chair.](#)
- The 1<sup>st</sup> Edition DMP Action Plan – Working Document was updated in November 2018, January and April 2019.
- The DMP, the Action Plan – Working Document and this report are publicly available and published on the ADMG website. [Chair, Secretary.](#)
- A proposed updated Constitution has been circulated to Voting Members and proxies with a vote on adoption scheduled for our meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> April 2019. [Chair, Voting Members. Comments by 15/04/2019.](#)
- Our DMP’s are adaptive and the group or properties within the area will respond to changes or circumstances as they arise. We do not attempt at this stage to cover every possible eventuality that may or may not occur.

- There have been no significant changes to land management objectives since the preparation of our current DMP.

#### Attendance and meetings: -

- Working group area attendance is shown in working group reports below for the last 4 years. Overall, property members attendance is 84%.
- The meetings are generally well attended by members, often with two or three people from individual properties. There is good participation by all present which is encouraged.
- The SNH WMO has previously suggested on a number of occasions he would encourage non-engaging properties to engage with the group. [SNH](#).
- Ordinary Group Meetings are open to members, neighbours, stakeholders and the public. We are to vote on holding the Autumn meeting in a public place to facilitate and encourage wider attendance. [Chair, Voting Members](#).
- Group management meetings, telephone and email exchanges between the officers and group members take place between the DMG meetings. [All](#).

#### Group boundaries

- A plan correcting the group and property boundary information has been prepared with working group areas and strategic fencing also included.
- There have been email communications between ELSDMG chair and NoSWoG vice chair regarding ELS & NoSWoG boundaries and the relationship between the two groups.

#### Counts: -

- A helicopter count of the whole of ELSDMG open range took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2019.
- Culls have been/will be recorded on either side of the count. [Info; All please to Secretary by 29/04/2019](#).
- Informal but regular assessment of open range recruitment is to be replaced by formal counts which will be carried out during May 2019. [To be delegated at meeting 29/04/2019](#).
- Open range mortality counts will be carried out during May 2019. [To be delegated at meeting 29/04/2019](#). Whilst in the past mortality was judged by experienced deer managers, discussed regularly and considered prior to agreeing culls we will now move toward formal counts for which there is some scepticism as to how effective these may be and how any count data may be turned into a useful statistic. There is no detailed guidance in BPG on how to conduct mortality counts or interpret any data gathered. SNH may offer more guidance? [SNH](#).
- FES is to provide population density, recruitment and mortality data for their areas. [FES by 01/06/2019, please](#).

#### Population modelling: - [Chair, Vice Chair. By 31/08/2019](#).

- It has been incorrectly assumed by some that our population model is the SNH published model spreadsheet and has come under criticism for that. An email pointing this incorrect assumption out was sent to SNH 13/12/2018.
- An 'Example pop model' which was issued by SNH to the group 27/02/2019 suggested as an alternative has been considered and is inadequate for our purposes.
- The ELS population model currently demonstrates the whole group population, also subdivided into open range and enclosed woodland populations.
- The first part of the ELS population model looks back over the period from the 2009/10 to 2016 counts in order to calibrate the model. The second part forecasts forward from the 2016 count to the 2022/23 season.

- When the 2019 count figures, map, recruitment, and mortality count figures along with the FES data are available the ELS Population model will be updated. Our model allows for adaptive management via periodic data inputs. [Chair, Vice Chair. By 31/08/2019.](#)
- HIA data, count figures, shelter, forage, and deer condition reports will be considered prior to agreeing on cull targets for next season.
- A group-wide strategic fencing map has been prepared. Strategic fencing condition will be considered prior to agreeing on cull targets for next season.

Cull targets: - [Chair, Vice Chair, Members. By 31/08/2019.](#)

- Cull targets, (as noted in population modelling above) will be considered and presented for agreement prior to the commencement of the main stag season.
- Last season culls will be compared to targets and reported on with the population model update.

HIA: -

- HIA detail is shown in working group reports below.
- At least 180 open range plots of Blanket Bog and Dwarf Shrub Heath to PBG are completed or underway for this season.
- Requests for an analysis spreadsheet for woodland HIA's were made to SNH 08/09/2018 and 24/11/2018.
- SNH WMO is invited to provide clarity at our spring 2019 meeting as to why our stated Habitat Impact Targets are not satisfactory. [Chair has written to SNH 15/04/2019 for guidance. SNH to respond, requested response in time to prep for meeting.](#)

Designated sites: -

- Are shown in working group reports.

Native woodlands and woodland cover: -

- Are shown in working group reports.

Peatland restoration: - [SNH at meeting 29/04/2019](#)

- SNH was invited to promote 'Peatland restoration' at our last meeting. Whilst no mention was made of the ecological benefits or other local benefits it was explained that there were significant grant funds available that would allow restoration at no cost to the landholding.
- At the last meeting peatland restoration was raised by the group with the SNH WMO emphasising the grants that are available but without reference to the ecological or local benefits. The SNH WMO is invited again to promote 'Peatland restoration' at the Spring 2019 meeting with the emphasis being on perceived ecological and local benefits. With Blanket bog/Peatland just 3.4% of our group area there may be limited opportunity for restoration projects. The reduction in sheep numbers by over 13,000 plus followers over recent years will be delivering significant reductions in impacts on these sensitive areas.
- S. Fox briefly discussed then sent a link to GT of SNH of a JNCC article which raises concern over the re-wetting of peatlands. <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5905> Comment on this is invited from SNH at our next group meeting. [Chair written to SNH 17/01/2019 and 15/04/2019 re peatland promotion and comment re the JNCC article.](#)

Historic and cultural features: -

- The group has been in contact with the Historic Environment Team at Highland Council which has been invited to raise any concerns in this regard with ELSDMG.
- Historic Environment Scotland monitor scheduled monuments on rotation of between 1 and 10 yearly intervals and advise owner/occupiers of the condition.

- There have been no concerns raised with the group either from the HC Historic Environment Team, Historic Environment Scotland, from members, stakeholders or other.
- A strategic fencing map has been produced.

Standards of Competence - Training - Certification: - **Chair, All members.**

- The ELSDMG 'Skill-Experience-Training-Certification Log' will be passed around at the next meeting asking members to add/update any information and to highlight any training needs the group may be able to help with.
- The standards of skills, experience, knowledge, training, and certification within the group are good. Please do raise any gaps in training the group may or should help with. **Members ongoing.**

Public health and wellbeing: - **Chair, All Members.**

- DSC1, DSC2 and 'Trained Hunter' status are recorded in the DMP and up to date on the ELSDMG 'Skill-Experience-Training-Certification Log' (Appendix 10 ELS DMP Background Information).
- SQWV registrations are recorded in the DMP on the ELSDMG 'Skill-Experience-Training-Certification Log'. All properties are encouraged to join the SQWV or similar scheme.
- Deer managers advised (as noted below) via group emails of deer and other diseases etc. Notifiable diseases are covered in the BPG Health & Welfare Section on this link. <https://www.bestpracticeguides.org.uk/health-welfare/>
- Many domestic and international tourists come to the area in the hope of seeing wild red deer, as well as the other wildlife, landscapes, flora and fauna our remote area has to offer. Most DMG members will offer advice on where best to walk or cycle as well as offering other activities that may be enjoyed. Guided walks, tours, and signage are offered within the DMG area to enable tourists to get the very best from the area and wildlife.
- Stalkers, managers and staff assist in rescue or help locate lost, injured or unwell walkers or visitors to our area as required.

Economic benefits and costs: -

- The economic costs of deer are well understood within the group. Our population model highlights the negative effect of deer migration into the commercial woodlands from the open range through poorly maintained fences although these have not been given a monetary value. Clearly, there is an economic cost to the woodland enterprises in impacts to the woodlands and the cost of continual culling operations. At the same time, there is restriction or loss of sporting income, primary and secondary jobs, &etc. from the open range sporting enterprises.
- The membership has been encouraged to appeal the NDR Sporting Rates Assessments the imposition of which will have a further negative effect on the economics of deer management. **All Members**
- There have been no significant management changes to consider since the adoption of our DMP's last November. This will be kept under review and considered when changes occur. **Chair, all Members.**
- The selection of game dealer is discussed or opinion canvassed via email periodically with members agreeing on and using the selected game dealer. This helps maximise benefits from venison production whilst at the same time reducing carbon costs. One negative of this policy of 'all our eggs in one basket' is, should the selected game dealer become insolvent the whole group potentially loses its venison income for a period and this has occurred three times in recent history. Collaborative venison marketing was covered via email communication last August. A similar approach will be used this year. **Chair, Members.**

Deer management issues: - **All Members.**

There have been recent group email communications including -

- Collaborative venison marketing,
- Scottish Venison videos,
- ESCOPE subscription,
- Best Practice Guides,
- CWD,
- CWD Visitors template,
- Field Guide to Disease & Conditions of Deer,
- Lyme disease,
- Code of Practice on Deer Management,
- ADMG Principles of Collaboration,
- African Swine Fever,
- Scottish Deer Health Survey,
- Edition 1 Action Plan Working Document updates,
- HIA data,
- Cull returns split either side of the count,
- ADMG Health Check,
- SNH DMG Assessment 2019,

And other general group communications between officers, working group and group members.

Deer welfare: -

- Deer welfare indicators for consideration include – Changes to and condition of cover and forage available – population counts – population density - recruitment counts – mortality counts – HIA – deer condition reports, &etc. These will be considered each year at the population model update or in between if circumstances dictate. **Chair, Vice Chair, all Members to advise.**
- Notifiable diseases are included in the health and welfare section of the BPG.
- All deer management in the group will be carried out in accordance with Wild Deer Best Practice Guides. **All.**

Communications: - **Ongoing as appropriate.**

Information on the ELSDMG is published on the ELSDMG section of the ADMG deer-management website including –

- Contact details,
- ELS DMG Deer Management Plan – Background information & Action Plan Working Document,
- Group meeting minutes since June 2015,
- Meeting agenda,
- ADMG Health Check Summary 2018,
- And in addition to those communications shown above, there is direct communication with members, neighbours, stakeholders and etc. who are able to communicate or participate with the group as appropriate.
- Deer management issues, group business, &etc. are often addressed between meetings via telephone and emails.

S Fox 29/04/2019.