

Minutes of the East Loch Sheil DMG held at Conaglen House on 1st December 2015

Present:

Steve Fox, Carnoch (Chairman)
Ewen Maclean, Ardgour/Glenscaddie (Secretary)
David Mosgrove, Conaglen
Ross Maclean, Conaglen
David Mckenzie, Conaglen
Shaun Corrigan, Ardgour
Peter Sinclair, Resipole
Rory Sinclair, Resipole
Jim Jackson, Resipole
Robin Maclean, Ardgour
Graeme Taylor, SNH
John Jackson, FCS
Harvey Philip, Inversanda

Apologies:

Colin Lavin, FCS
Lynda Campbell, ADMG

Matters Arising:

1. Minutes from previous meeting:

E Maclean (EM) passed the minutes from the previous meeting to the Chairman (SF) who signed the copy and confirmed they were a true record of events.

2. Stag Season Reports, Mortality Rates

The consensus from the entire group was that the general deer population had suffered from a combination of a late summer and a harsh winter, with stag numbers down from last year. Harvey Philip (HP) commented on the heads being less developed than usual. Many members commented on the poor condition of the hinds and stags this year.

Mortality rates were seen to have been high across the group, with the exception of the FC ground, John Jackson (JJ) also reported that some hinds being shot are amongst the largest he'd seen, weighing in around the 60-70kg mark.

3. Cull Returns, Targets for remaining Hinds

David Mosgrove (DM) has been the figure responsible for the collection and input of cull returns over the past number of years, and confirmed he was happy to continue as long as people were prompt with the return data and he didn't have to chase members of the group for returns.

Some members were able to produce the cull figures at the meeting.

The group assessment for the hind target figures was that all members would be shooting under 50% less hinds than the previous season, due to the aforementioned lack of deer on the hill, and the worrying condition of the deer left.

SF stated that he would not be shooting anything unless it really needed to be shot.

DM stated that this was a concern amongst DMG's across Scotland, and that his concern was the fact that deer moving through porous fence lines around woodland blocks will end up being shot by woodland managers, creating a dearth of deer on the open hill.

JJ stated he'd seen no movement of deer into FC woodland blocks.

JJ also stated that the FC's hind targets are significantly less than previous seasons.

There was much discussion regarding the budgetary constraints that the FC is facing at present, with the fencing budget in particular taking a massive hit, DM and RM both expressed serious concerns as to how the FC will keep fences in a good state of repair with a much smaller budget, and the likelihood that more deer would simply enter into FC plantations and be culled, further devastating the already low numbers.

JJ admitted that the situation was concerning and assured the group that the FC would attempt to cover their fencelines within their budget.

JJ admitted that Landowners were going to be expected to further contribute to shared fences, whereas currently the FC tends to pay 100% of the cost.

RM asked GT when SNH were prepared to step in and protect the deer numbers, GT then pointed out that SNH were facing a 20% cut in their own budget and jobs were at risk across the board. GT made it clear that the priority for SNH was woodland creation and it was up to land managers to manage their own deer populations.

DM pointed out that the largest cull in Scotland was taken by the FC, with the fencing budget being cut, the consequences were likely to be grave for deer moving into plantations.

JJ assured the group that protocols are in place to deal with issues that arise.

DMP Progress

DM explained to the group the progress ongoing with the DMP, some missing information was required from members, DM to send an email shortly with info required to fill in blanks.

GT stated that the DMP should be in draft to SNH by mid January, subject to final plan being submitted in April 2016.

DM stressed the importance of having a deer count completed before finalising the plan.

Deer Count

GT explained that the group would be eligible for full funding for a count in late 2016/early 2017, however with budgets being cut this could be subject to change.

However there is a set figure of 50% funding for Jan/Feb 2016, the only issue would be staffing levels as SNH like to have staff members present.

GT stated that 7 other groups are in front of ELSDMG in the queue, with 100% funding being applied.

DM confirmed Conaglen happy to cover initial costs, then bill each member of group accordingly.

SF and SC stated that the group are keen to count ASAP, it was agreed that the group would attempt to count in Jan/Feb, with 50% funding from SNH, with one helicopter and one staff member present.

GT to progress the enquiries with SNH and give the group some definitive answers.

ADMG fees

The issue of ADMG fees was discussed as the group had made no further progress on this matter since the last meeting.

SF stated that he had discussed with his accountant the implications of setting up a bank account for the group, the issue was discussed at length with many members concerned about auditing and tax implications.

It was decided that ADMG should simply produce an invoice for each member, for ease of auditing purposes, it was remarked that most other businesses in the UK are able to produce individual invoices, EM to progress matter with ADMG.

AOB

GT informed the members of the RACCE committee's progress and what the government was implementing, in line with the Land Reform Bill.

GT asked the group where members envisaged themselves in a year in terms of deer management and what members thought of the current situation, the response was overwhelmingly negative from all members.

The consensus was that the Land Reform Bill was targeted at a small group of voters unlikely to vote SNP, to produce maximum gratification of urban voters and gain political ground.

It was felt that the welfare of the deer population was not taken into account, nor the livelihoods of those involved in the management of deer.

Members questioned where the government would procure the money needed to implement new systems, when the current government organisations involved (SNH and FC) are facing massive cuts- there was an overwhelming sense of disbelief in the morals and thought processes of the current political establishment.

Date of Next meeting

Early March, after the Deer Count.

