

East Loch Shiel

Deer Management Group Report – Spring 2020

Compiled by - S. Fox & D. Mosgrove.

Group Report - Part 1.

Eastern Working Group Report - Part 2.

Western Working Group Report - Part 3.

COVID 19: With the pandemic ongoing, much of our deer management is adversely affected. Many activities are postponed. Please do follow all government guidance in this regard.

Part 1.

Introduction: -

- The ELSDMG Reports, parts 1, 2 & 3 are a supplement to the ELSDMG DMP Action Plan – Working Document.

Lorraine Servant (LS) was introduced to the group as the new SNH WMO/liaison at our last DMG meeting in November 2019. The group looks forward to a positive and constructive relationship with SNH.

SNH Deer Management Group Assessment 2019: -

- I am pleased to be able to tell you that our SNH review was carried out on Tuesday 7th May 2019.
- We achieved a good score which is reflective of all the hard work and commitment you have made between you. Our score was 96% on the Benchmark and 94% on the Public Interest.
- Our Group was one of, if not the most improved DMG between the 2016 and 2019 assessments.
- We are now ranked in the top quartile of Deer Management Groups.
- The 'Assessing Progress in Deer Management – Report to Scottish Government from Scottish Natural Heritage September 2019' however, included a piece on the ELSDMG which the officers of the group disagree with, on which we have sent a response (15/01/2020) directly to the Cabinet Secretary of the ECCLR, the ECCLR committee at Scottish Parliament and the Chairman of Nature Scot (SNH).

Deer Management Plan (DMP) and communications: -

- The current DMP, the Action Plan – Working Document, Constitution & DMG business documents are publicly available and published on the ADMG website.
- The 9th Edition DMP - Background Information was reviewed and re-issued. The 1st Edition DMP Action Plan – Working Document was reviewed with the latest update in January 2020.
- Our DMP's are adaptive and the group and 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 is direct communication with members, neighbours, stakeholders, etc. who can communicate or participate with the group as appropriate.

Attendance, meetings and communications: -

- The Spring 2020 meeting is postponed due to the Coronavirus situation.
- Working group area attendance is shown in working group reports for the last 9 meetings. Overall, property members meeting attendance is 86%.

- 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.
- Ordinary Group Meetings are open to members, neighbours, stakeholders and the public. We agreed to hold our Autumn meetings in a public place to facilitate and encourage wider attendance. Our November 2019 meeting was held in the Ardour Memorial Hall.
- Group management meetings, telephone and email exchanges between the officers and group members take place between the DMG meetings, as evidenced by Officers email files which e.g. can demonstrate extensive ongoing communication between meetings. E.G. SNH WMO & ELSDMG Chair appeared together on over 500 messages Oct 14 to Jan 2020 (including some non ELSDMG items). ELSDMG only business – ELSDMG Chair and Vice-Chair appeared on 1064 messages between Jan 2015 and Jan 2020 and a typical non-office bearing ELSDMG member appeared with the ELSDMG Chair on 151 messages between Jan 2015 & Jan 2020.
- Periodic DMG and sub-group reports help update and inform members, stakeholders &etc.

Counts: -

- An SNH funded helicopter count with support from DMG members, of the whole of ELSDMG open range took place on the 9th January 2019 and the requested shapefile information link was provided on the 14/01/2020.
- Sensible recruitment and mortality assessment methods were proposed by LS who advises that for adult deer we use the SNH standard of 2% but vary as needed based on the observations of the stalkers. For calves, carry out sample recruitment counts late spring by which time the winter mortality will have occurred. This then gives the actual 'post-winter mortality' recruitment figure with no need to calculate further. This method will be adopted going forward.
- FLS is to provide up to date population density, recruitment and mortality data for their areas.

Population modelling: -

- The ELS population model (ELS Population Model Autumn 2019 East-West split) now updates our earlier models to demonstrate the whole group population, also sub-divided into the Western and Eastern Working Group populations following the January 2019 count.
- The 2019 count figures, map, recruitment, and mortality figures along with HIA data, shelter, forage, and deer condition reports were considered while updating the Population Model.
- Our population models allow for adaptive management via periodic data inputs.
- Our population models demonstrate the migration of deer from the open range into the 'enclosed' woodlands, mainly from the Eastern Working Group area into the West.
- While the forestry landowners continue to allow the significant migration of deer into their woodlands the Eastern Working Group open range landholdings are forced to constrain their culls. Furthermore, the Eastern Working Group area landholding's deer population will have to be maintained at a much higher level of approximately 1/3 higher than needed for their own maximum sporting cull requirements.

HIA: -

- HIA's planned for this season are postponed due to the Coronavirus situation.
- Overall, HIA data submitted to date shows our open range impacts are within our group target.

Designated sites, Native woodlands and Woodland cover: -: -

- Are shown in working group reports.

Peatland preservation and restoration: -

- The SNH WMO promoted 'Peatland restoration' at the Autumn 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 already be delivering significant reductions in impacts on these sensitive areas.
- LS highlighted the focus on climate emergency which is high up within the SNH priorities and encouraged the group to look actively at peatland restoration. The main thing is to encourage conditions for the growth of Sphagnum Moss to absorb CO² which would also reduce the risk of wildfire severity.
- LS referred to her email (that was circulated on October 23rd) in reply to the concerns raised over re-wetting of peatlands (as highlighted in the ELSDMG Spring 2019 report.)
- Whilst LS agreed there could be spikes in methane emissions following re-wetting of peatland the later information she provided suggests these will only be short term, whereas the long term benefits will outweigh these. LS advised that the local peatland officer at Lochaber Fisheries Trust will advise on potential peatland restoration works.
- The SNH webpage <https://www.nature.scot/climate-change/nature-based-solutions/peatland-action> is the first port of call for peatland improvement. We are advised here, however, 'The funding round for 2019-20 closed on Friday 17 May 2019.' and that 'since the Scottish Government's announcement of funding for peatland restoration their focus is now on COVID-19 control and peatland restoration is not permitted under current guidance.'

Historic and cultural features: -

- The Highland Council - Historic Environment Team have been contacted to request them to identify features and factors affecting condition.
- Historic Environment Scotland monitors the condition of scheduled monuments on an appropriate time interval of between one and 10 yearly with the monitoring results advised to the Owner-Occupier.
- There have been no concerns raised with the group either from the HC Historic Environment Team, Historic Environment Scotland, from members, stakeholders other than concerns about historical features suffering from an absence of grazing and in danger of being swamped and degraded by vegetation.

Standards of Competence - Training - Certification: -

- The ELSDMG 'Skill-Experience-Training-Certification Log' is to be updated periodically. The updated log with named personnel is 'Confidential' to the group and maintained by the Chairman, whereas an indicative log is published without individuals' names on the ELSDMG section of the ADMG website.
- 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.

Public health and wellbeing: -

- All properties are encouraged to join the SQWV or a similar QA scheme. SQWV registrations are recorded in DMP. The ELSDMG membership of SQWV now equates to around 82% of the land and cull in the DMG area being processed under this scheme.
- Deer managers have been advised 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 may assist in rescue or help locate lost, injured or unwell walkers or visitors to our area as required.

Economic benefits and costs: -

- Collaborative venison marketing was covered via email communication in September 2019. The selection of game dealer is discussed and negotiated via the DMG 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. (Donside, Killoh and Yorkshire Game.)
- Fyne Game, our current agreed on game dealer has advised that they will no longer be able to collect or receive deer until further notice due to Coronavirus.
- Also, Fyne Game's *'main customer has advised that at the end of March they will pay [Fyne Game] just 20% of the amount they owe [us]. The next payment will follow in June. As you will appreciate this puts our cash flow under extreme stress. When we receive funds we intend to try and pay our suppliers, starting with the oldest debts first.'*
- The economic costs of deer are well understood within our group. Our population model highlights the negative effect of deer migration into the commercial woodlands from the open range through poorly maintained fences although this has 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 loss of deer through poorly maintained fences is detrimental to the open range sporting interests in regard to Sections 5, 10, 11, and 13 of the 'Benchmark' and Sections 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 14 of the 'Public Interest'. Whilst at the same time being detrimental to the enclosed woodlands interests in regard to Sections 5, 10 and 11 of the 'Benchmark' and Sections 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11 and 12 of the 'Public Interest'.
- State-owned forestry FES already is responsible for carrying out a major part of Scotland's deer management. This comes at a cost to the public purse. Culls are carried out by highly effective, skilled rangers and contractors who can account for many hundreds of deer each per year. FCS cull around 30,000 deer per year on the National Forestry Estate at a nett cost to the public purse of £4,900,000 (2014/15) equivalent to £163 per deer culled. Just under 18,000 or 60% of deer were culled at night and/or out of season (2013/14). The FES cull sustains approx. 64 FTE directly employed jobs plus 30 to 35 people on short to medium-term contracts. (Source, FCS publication – Deer Management on the National Forest Estate 01/04/2014 to 31/03/2017.)
- A recent article in the 'Shooting Times' reports the numbers of deer shot in state-owned forestry is increasing with 37,000 culled during 2017/18. Out of season and night shooting is increasing too with 75% of stags shot out of season during 2017/18 and citing the widespread use of thermal imaging devices increasing the effectiveness of night shooting.
- In the Scottish Gamekeeper Autumn 2019 Magazine issue 82 there is a further extensive article informing us that *"Public agencies are considering thermal and night vision equipment with a view to potentially legalising its use for lowering deer numbers."* With comment and opinion from SGA and the late Ronnie Rose MBE.

Deer management issues: -

There have been emails circulated on the following subjects. Should anyone like any of the below re-issued, copied or updated please do let the Chairman know.

- 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,
- Peatland restoration,
- Fyne Game collections and payments,

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

Deer welfare: -

- Deer welfare indicators for consideration include – Changes to 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.
- Notifiable diseases are included in the health and welfare section of the BPG.
- Deer management in the group will be carried out following Wild Deer Best Practice Guides.

East Loch Shiel DMG

Eastern Working Group Report Spring 2020

Compiled S Fox & D. Mosgrove.

Part 2.

ELSDMG Eastern working group area meeting attendance: -

Number of attendees.

Landholding property members *	Sum 2015	Win 2015	Sum 2016	Spr 2017	Win 2017	Spr 2018	Win 2018	Spr 2019	Win 2019		%
Ardgour *	2	3	3	3	1	2	2	2	2	9/9	100
Carnoch *	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9/9	100
Conaglen *	3	3	3	3	1	2	3	3	3	9/9	100
FES/FLS *	2	1	1	1	1		3	2	1	8/9	88
Inversanda *		1	1	1				1	1	5/9	55
Property Members *	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5		
Attended *	4	5	5	5	4	3	4	5	5		40
% * attendance	80	100	100	100	80	60	80	100	100		89%
Other											
ADMG	1			1	1	1			1	5/9	
SNH		1	1		1	2	1		1	6/9	

- Working group meetings, telephone and email exchanges between the officers and Eastern working group members take place between the DMG meetings.

Habitat Impact Assessments: -

- Ardgour, Carnoch, Conaglen, and Glenscaddle have established baseline open range HIA data which has been submitted to the DMG to consider with the Population Model update.
- Eastern Working Group HIA's planned for this season are postponed due to the Coronavirus situation.
- FLS carry out their own woodland HIA which also indicates their open range condition. FLS are in discussion with SNH as to the suitability of this approach.

Designated sites and Collaborative Woodland project progress: -

- The collaborative woodland application and preliminary proposals were reported on at the November 2019 DMG meeting.
- The proposals continued to progress with a virtual meeting as late as the 26th of March.
- Coronavirus is currently affecting further progress.

Native woodlands and woodland cover: -

- Historically afforestation has been implemented well, with consideration given to deer and welfare at the time.
- Various woodland proposals are under development and consideration will be given as to the effects on distribution, density & etc. on deer and welfare as the proposals develop.

Public health and wellbeing: -

- HFTSH entries for Ardgour, Carnoch, Conaglen, and Glenscaddle. All FES land is open to the public. Information signage and car parking is in place on many of the main access areas.
- DSC1, DSC2 and 'Trained Hunter' status recorded in DMP.
- SQWV registrations are recorded in the DMP.
- Deer managers advised (as noted in part 1) via group emails of deer and other diseases etc.
- Stalkers, managers and staff may assist in rescue or help locate lost, injured or unwell walkers or visitors to our area as required.

Non – Native species: -

- There are no reports of non-native deer or feral pigs in the ELS Eastern Working Group area. Feral goats are present to the South of the A861 public road in an adjacent DMG area. There are no recent reports of goats in the ELS Eastern Working group area.

East Loch Shiel DMG

Western Working Group Report Spring 2020

Part 3.

Compiled S Fox & D. Mosgrove.

ELSDMG - Western working group area meeting attendance: -

Number of attendees.

Landholding property members *	Sum 2015	Win 2015	Sum 2016	Spr 2017	Win 2017	Spr 2018	Win 2018	Spr 2019	Win 2019		%
Claiash Moss SNH *		1	1		1	2	1		1	6/9	67
FES/FLS *	2	1	1	1	1		3	2	1	8/9	89
Resipole Farm *	3	3	2	2		1	1	2	1	8/9	89
Property *Members	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3		
Attended/ represented*	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	3		22
% * attendance	67	100	100	67	67	67	100	67			81%
Other											
ADMG	1			1	1	1			1	4/8	
Sunart Estate SGRIPD								1#	1#	#2/8	

Non-decision making deer controller.

- Working group meetings, telephone and email exchanges between the officers and Western working group members take place between the DMG meetings.

Other Working Group or area meetings, developments and progress: -

- Local meetings have been held to address deer management issues around Anaheilt and Scotstown common grazing's.

Habitat Impact Assessments: -

- Resipole Farm and Sunart Estate have established baseline open range HIA which has been submitted to the DMG to consider with the Population Model update.
- FLS carry out their own woodland HIA which also indicates their open range condition. They are in discussion with SNH as to the suitability of this approach.

Designated Sites

- Within the ELS Western Sub Group Area, there are two designated SSSI sites where deer management is potentially relevant to blanket bog or a woodland feature equating to 638.29ha or 5.15% of the Western Sub-Group area.
- Both of the above areas are owned by SNH and it is understood that the Claiash Moss Blanket Bog SSSI is deemed to be in favourable condition. The 70ha forming the previous Ariundle Oakwood SSSI, which has now been merged with the Sunart SSSI designation is assessed in

Mixed Condition, because the wider (5,540ha) Sunart SSSI has one feature (upland oak) which has been assessed to be in non-favourable condition.

- SNH have not confirmed the area of designated woodland features within the 70ha previously designated as the Ariundle Oakwood SSSI, but they have confirmed that with the NSWG and the Ariundle Oakwoods area there is a total of 335.34ha (6%) of woodland features which have been deemed to be in unfavourable condition.

Public health and wellbeing: -

- DSC1, DSC2 and 'Trained Hunter' status recorded in DMP.
- SQWV registrations recorded in DMP.
- Deer managers advised (as noted in part 1) via group emails of deer and other diseases etc.
- HFTSH entry for Resipole Farm. All FES land is open to the public. Information signage and car parking is in place on many of the main access areas.
- Stalkers, managers and staff will assist in rescue or help locate lost, injured or unwell walkers or visitors to our area as required.

Non – Native species: -

- There has been an unquantified report of sika deer but none have been reported as culled.
- There are no other reports of non-native deer or feral pigs in the area. There are no recent reports of goats in the ELS Western Working Group area.