East Loch Shiel Deer Management Group Bulletin

Summer 2025

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East Loch Shiel

Deer Management Group - Bulletin - Summer 2025

This Bulletin is a supplement to the East Loch Shiel Deer Management Group (ELSDMG) Deer Management Plan

Deer management in East Loch Shiel delivers vital Environmental, Economic, and Social benefits - the three pillars of Sustainability.

- **Environmental Stewardship**
  The East Loch Shiel Estates and Deer Managers have been working for decades to protect and restore local upland habitats. Through initiatives such as installing deer exclosures, reducing grazing pressure from domestic livestock, and so on, they've encouraged woodland establishment and regeneration, supporting biodiversity.
  These long-term efforts are bearing fruit: areas previously damaged by overgrazing and historic farming practices, are now showing strong signs of recovery. Improvements include woodland expansion, increased vegetation height, greater biodiversity, and natural re-vegetation of peat haggs — tangible and ongoing progress toward ecological restoration that also contributes meaningfully to the nation's carbon balance and net zero ambitions.

- **Economic Contribution**
  This environmental work also sustains a robust rural economy. Estates in the region generate essential income for local businesses and residents. Deer management supports skilled employment — both directly through experienced managers and controllers, and indirectly across sectors such as hospitality, services, and supply chains. It also underpins the production of healthy, quality-assured venison, adding further value to the local food economy.

- **Social Value**
  Beyond jobs, habitats, and social cohesion, these activities help maintain the natural beauty and accessibility of the East Loch Shiel landscape for locals and visitors alike. By nurturing healthy ecosystems, the community preserves its cultural identity and strengthens its connection to the land.

Woodlands – Consideration and progress.

- The ELSDMG area is identified as one of Scotland's Deer Management Priority Areas with NatureScot representatives highlighting that this designation recognises the substantial positive impact of our work on habitat preservation and restoration as part of an Atlantic Rainforest cluster.

- **Trees on carbon rich organic soils**
  An article by V. Clements in the Scottish Gamekeepers Association magazine challenges the assumption that growing trees always mitigates climate change. It highlights that trees planted or established on carbon-rich organic soils can turn these soils from carbon stores and sequestration sites into carbon emitters as tree respiration dries out the soil, leading to the release of stored carbon. You can find the article here:
  https://www.scottishgamekeepers.co.uk/latest-news/2023/2023-09-14-in-the-atmosphere-in-the-trees-or-in-the-ground.php
  The soils in the East Loch Shiel area are predominantly peaty podzols, peat, and peaty gleys, whilst the higher ground is mainly montane soils or bare rock outcrops and screes. A detailed soil map can be accessed here:
  https://map.environment.gov.scot/Soil_maps/?layer=1&extent=165442,757301,222368,785049

Peatlands are widely recognised as vital to the nation's carbon balance, and the organic peaty soils covering much of the ELSDMG area — even when shallow — are significant carbon sinks, storing more carbon than even mature commercial forestry. However, when trees become established in these soils, their respiration can dry out the ground, releasing stored carbon at a rate that may exceed the sequestration capacity of the trees themselves and halting further soil carbon accumulation.
Therefore, additional consideration should be given before planting or encouraging tree establishment on organically rich soils to ensure the broader benefits are substantial enough to justify the resulting carbon emissions. However, with much of our open range consisting of heathland over organic carbon-rich soils, there should be a strong emphasis on protecting and preserving these vital soils. While undisturbed heathland soils may accumulate no more than a millimetre of peat annually this slow growth nonetheless represents a net carbon gain. Scaled across the ELSDMG area, even such modest accumulation contributes significantly, potentially amounting to thousands of tonnes of carbon being absorbed and stored each year.

- **Sunart Rainforest Project**
  The Sunart Rainforest Project builds on the success of last year's North Sunart Woodland Collaboration, which united local landowners to explore ways of enhancing native woodland habitats around Loch Sunart. Following discussions led by NatureScot, the initiative has expanded and is now being spearheaded by the Sunart Community Company.
  With funding from NatureScot's Nature Restoration Fund, matched by contributions from FLS, SGRPID, and the Woodland Trust, the project is gathering vital ecological data—including deer populations, grazing impacts, and invasive species mapping—across the area. The ultimate aim is to help landowners produce coordinated woodland management plans that promote biodiversity and native woodland regeneration without harming the local economy.
  A project chairman and a coordinator have been appointed, supporting the working group and engaging the wider community through training and awareness of the local rainforest ecosystem. Community involvement is key, with plans to publish updates and data on www.sunartcommunitycompany.co.uk.

- **Conaglen Estate - Ongoing Woodland Enhancement**
  Over many decades, Conaglen Estate has been at the forefront of woodland management and habitat restoration in the East Loch Shiel Deer Management Group area.
  Recent highlights include extensive native woodland creation within both the Doire Donn SSSI and Ardgour Pinewoods SAC/SSSI, with over 165 hectares of enclosed land either planted or designated for natural regeneration. Notably, 69% of Doire Donn's designated area is now part of active woodland schemes, supporting oak regeneration and improved biodiversity.
  The Estate is also diversifying former commercial conifer plantations at Duisky and Glenscaddle, with plans to restock nearly 300 hectares using more varied and ecologically rich species. Deer movement is being carefully managed to support successful regeneration.
  These initiatives mark further significant long-term ecological gains, reinforcing Conaglen Estate's commitment to sustainable land stewardship in the region.

- **FLS Progresses Woodland Recovery at Callop**
  In another welcome development for the Ardgour Pinewoods SSSI, Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) has established two new woodland enclosures at Callop during 2023. One of the blocks lies within the designated SSSI area and encloses a former commercial clear-fell site, now earmarked for restoration. The aim is to encourage natural regeneration of native tree species in both enclosures. After a few years, FLS will assess the results and may carry out targeted enrichment planting if necessary.

- **Native woodland expansion at Resipole**
  There are active plans at Resipole Farm to extend the ancient woodland within the Sunart Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) through natural regeneration. The target is to establish natural regeneration across approximately 94 hectares over a 5-year period using cattle grazing to create ground disturbance in key areas.
  The expansion of the woodland will promote resilience and diversity within the ancient woodland and support greater biodiversity. Deer management will continue throughout the woodlands, will utilise existing deer fences and only require a minor addition of stock fencing to prevent cattle from straying onto a local footpath.

Net Zero Power and Heat

- **Hydro Schemes Powering Clean Energy in East Loch Shiel**
  Hydroelectric generation schemes across East Loch Shiel DMG member estates are making a big impact—together they provide over 4.63 MW of installed capacity and generate around 16,000 MWh of electricity annually. This renewable output directly offsets the need for coal-fired power, significantly cutting carbon emissions.
  While coal-fired stations release around 874 kg of CO_2 per megawatt-hour, river hydro produces under 13 kg.[1] Thanks to these green schemes, more than 14,000 tonnes of CO_2 emissions are avoided each year.
  The Sunart Community hydro scheme also contributes, generating an estimated 423 MWh annually and helping prevent a further 364 tonnes of CO_2 entering the atmosphere.
  ELSDMG members bio-fuel, air and ground source heat pumps with a combined installed capacity exceeding 280 Kw are supplying heating and hot water as an alternative to coal, gas, or oil and are leading to further significant reductions of CO^2 emissions. These initiatives demonstrate how local action can support national energy goals, security and environmental stewardship.

Stay Informed with the latest Deer Management Updates

- **East Loch Shiel Deer management Group**
  The most current Deer Management Plans (DMPs), updates, and information relating to the East Loch Shiel Deer Management Group (ELSDMG) are freely available on the ELSDMG section of the ADMG website. All stakeholders are encouraged to refer to this resource to stay up to date and informed. [2]
  ELSDMG is updating its external communications list. If you wish to receive communications relevant to your interests, please opt in and confirm your email address for the DMG to use by writing to this email eastlochshielchair@gmail.com and briefly say why you are interested in deer management for this area. You may opt-out at any time by writing to this email address. ELSDMG will only use your email address for DMG business and this will not be passed on or sold to other organisations or persons.

- **Association of Deer Management Groups**
  ADMG are keeping us well updated via their **E-Scope** newsletters. You can subscribe to **E-Scope**, if you have not already done so, on the ADMG website. [2]

[1] Carbon Footprint of Electricity Generation (parliament.uk)
[2] ADMG | Association of Deer Management Groups | ADMG (deer-management.co.uk)