

East Loch Shiel DMG Spring Meeting Date: - 22nd April 2025

Venue – Conaglen Gunroom.

Time: - 09:30 A.M.

A request is made to the attendees at the start of each meeting that a voice recording be made to help with the preparation of the minutes only and not for publication or distribution.

Present:

Steve Fox (Chairman)(Carnoch)
David Mosgrove (Vice-Chair)(Conaglen)
Ross Maclean (Conaglen)
John Taylor (FLS-Glenhurich etc)
T Chetwynd (ADMG)
Mary Paton (SGRIPD)
Ross Dunsmore (SGRIPD)

Shaun Corrigan (Ardgour)
John Jackson (FLS – Glenhurich etc)
Peter Sinclair (Resipole)
Jim Jackson (Resipole)
A MacMaster (NatureScot)

Apologies:

Ewen Maclean (Secretary)(Ardgour & Glenscaddle)
Robin Maclean (Ardgour)
Rory Sinclair (Resipole)

Harvey Phillips (Inversanda)
E Campbell (Ardery)
John MacDonald (Sunart Estate Etc)

1. **Chairman's welcome, any apologies:** - SF welcomed all to the meeting.
2. **Introduce attendees:** - Introductions were made and apologies recorded.
3. **Chairman's opening remarks:** - With a number of attendees are going to another meeting locally whose start time had been bought forward. SF advised this meeting must be finished by 11:30 to allow those attending time to travel to that meeting.
SF advised that our constitution is due for review and update if needed and will be followed up by an email asking all to consider and make any comments or suggestions by June 2025.
4. **Minutes of the previous meeting – and matters arising:** - The minutes of our last meeting held on the 02/04/2024 were accepted as being a true representation of that meeting and were approved.

The officers of the Group have considered that our key priorities which need to be addressed at this meeting are as follows.

5. Estate reports.

- a. 2024/25 season cull figures: - Attendees reported on their 2024/25 culls. 195 Stags, 121 Hinds and 58 Calf's were reported as being culled in the WWG area. 116 Stags, 147 Hinds and 50 Calf's were reported as culled in the Eastern WWG area. 27 Roe and 3 Sika were culled throughout the group. **(NOTE: These figures include any notified before or since the meeting.)**
- b. Condition reports: - Round robin reporting on the condition of deer culled and observed to date in the season took place. Generally, the condition of the deer was seasonally average to very good.
- c. Changes in land management objectives: -
SGRIPID reported that their 10 year shooting leases ended in 2024 and the areas was now split into 3 parts - Ardery, Ranachan & Other Hill Land, and were only leased for 2 years until 2026 whilst a review was undertaken. This allowed 2 local crofters to have leases and J MacDonald had the Common grazings and Ranachan.
FLS suggested that their adopted Drimnattorn and Glen Hurich Management Plans would deliver an increase in native woodland cover e.g. more focus on riparian areas and a longer-term reduction in commercial cover.

Carnoch reported a plan to re-fence the previously felled commercial block, but doubted that it would affect the deer much as they would still have the ability to move around/above it. RMacL and Conaglen Team offered to help push deer out of block before the last section of upper fence was secured if this was helpful.

Woodland Enclosure Update – Conaglen.

DM provided a summary of progress woodland enclosures progress:

Conaglen remains committed to woodland expansion and will continue to implement rotational fencing as part of its long-term strategy.

A significant area at Duiskey, being approximately 504ha, has now been fenced for restocking. Restocking had been underway during Winter 2024 & Spring 2025 of mainly commercial species on 260ha of that the fenced area.

In addition, it was planned to fell a further 60ha inside the new fence in 2025 and a further 60-120ha of felling was proposed inside the fence in 2026-27.

A significant effort was made to drive deer out of the closed woodland block before the final section of fence was secured and Conaglen have adjusted culling efforts both inside and observations/culling where required outside the new fence; but it would take a couple of seasons to assess deer numbers and movements in the area.

To compensate for this enclosure Conaglen have allowed deer access to an adjacent 130ha block which was closed from deer until Winter 2024 and additionally the new fence was designed to leaving two areas of 60ha and 205ha of established adjacent woodland cover outside the fenceline for deer access/shelter.

DM commented with regard to the 6 Native Woodland Schemes that were established in 2023 across the designated sites of Ardgour Pinewoods SSSI/SAC (3 new enclosures with approx. 48ha planted in Spring 2023 & approx. 53ha enclosed for nat. regen) and The Doire Donn (3 new enclosures with approx. 10ha planted & approx. 55ha enclosed for nat. regen.). These areas were fenced and planted where appropriate and are checked by staff regularly for deer ingress and fencing issue.

The biggest problem to date has been general public leaving gates open which has allowed some deer access, but thankfully that has been observed and the problems dealt with reasonably quickly.

Annual woodland monitoring surveys and reporting are scheduled for May each year to assess enclosure success.

- d. Deer welfare: - No welfare issues were raised.
 - e. Habitats, shelter and forage availability: - SF advised the current Habitats and Impacts Log is published on the ADMG website. (See also 5. C above, and 8. Below re additional or compensatory culls.)
 - f. Poaching and DVC's: - No poaching was reported at the meeting nor any DVC's. It is likely the spike in DVC's reported at the last meeting was probably due to the increased traffic with the ferry being off.
6. **Deer count:** - NatureScot confirmed they were not planning to carry out a group wide count this coming season i.e. 2025/26. Our last helicopter group wide count was in 2022. FLS suggested that they were considering completing a Drone Count of some of their holdings but there were no specific details.
7. **Population Model.**
- a. Confirm final cull figures for 01/04/2024 to 31/03/2025: - As 5a. above.

A request was made to NatureScot to supply the DMG with cull figures for non-participating area landholdings from their statutory returns to help ensure the integrity of our population models. NatureScot responded that they would not share this information.

b. Recruitment and mortality counts: - Recruitment counts and mortality assessments were delegated for late spring.

8. Proposed stag cull. Sporting members agreed that this coming seasons cull would be based on the 2024/25 cull achieved with variation if required to account for the population model outcomes, woodland creation, or areas of localised unacceptable impacts.

9. Game dealer – Members comments on service: - Members are using Ardgay Game and Highland Game. There were no major issues of concern reported and service was generally satisfactory.

10. Update Training Log: - SF asked if there were any identified training needs and asked members to let him know of any required additions/alterations to include in the ELSDMG training record. A Training Log Sheet was left for members to update records as appropriate.

Update from ADMG: - TC from ADMG spoke at length about the proposed Section 6ZB. This is a brief synopsis.

DMNROs by Any Other Name – ADMG Response to the Natural Environment Bill

The recently published Natural Environment Bill introduces new intervention powers for NatureScot, aimed at achieving environmental, climate, and biodiversity targets. While the term Deer Management Nature Restoration Orders (DMNROs) is absent from the Bill, ADMG warns that equivalent powers are present, albeit under different language.

ADMG expresses serious concern over the lack of clarity and subjectivity surrounding who may be targeted and how decisions will be made. The Bill risks undermining the voluntary, collaborative model of deer management across the Highlands, which currently covers over three million hectares and operates with minimal government cost.

Key criticisms include:

- Absence of detail on how new powers would apply in fragmented lowland ownership.
- Lack of incentives and support mechanisms, despite prior recognition of their importance.
- Potential for disruption to existing collaboration, especially if national deer density targets are reduced further.

ADMG urges the Scottish Government and NatureScot to focus on support, facilitation, and recognition of the sector's contribution, including the development of a strong venison market. The group highlights the need for investment in future deer managers and rural communities, warning that continued regulatory pressure could jeopardise the progress made to date.

Recent engagement with Ministers and MSPs, including a field visit to Glenfalloch, aimed to build understanding of practical deer management. ADMG calls for a balanced approach that sustains collaboration and avoids pushing the sector to a breaking point.

The full ADMG article that TC referred to and read from ADMG is in the **Issue 25 - Spring 2025 SCOPE** magazine can be viewed on the following link: -

[23545-Playfair-Walker-ADMG-Scope-newsletter-SCREEN-070325.pdf](#)

Update from FLS:

It was reported that generally no changes on local policy/actions were expected to take place in the coming season.

FLS confirmed that they can erect new fences to secure crops if there was a viable business case and need and a partial replacement of the Loch Shiel fence was being considered. It was also confirmed that there was now a budget for fence maintenance again where there was a need and viable business case.

Update from NatureScot:

AM provided a update on the new Muirburn Scotland Legislation - in summary; Licences and Official Training would be required for all parties wishing to undertake burning from September 2025 and these would only be issued in certain circumstances taking into consideration depth of Peat etc.

There currently were no details available on either Training or Licensing process and the general instruction was to contact the NS Licencing Section later in 2025 for further information.

SF raised concerns about wildfire risk and suggested that NatureScot might consider leading a public awareness initiative, potentially including measures such as discouraging the sale of disposable BBQs or use of camp fires etc. NatureScot responded that they did not view this as an area of concern and did not propose any further action.

A short discussion took place between the members after this update, and it was generally commented by all members that, also as reported in the National Press, as the fuel load built up in future years, post burning restrictions, it was expected that accidentally started wildfires will start to cause significantly more problems and the legislation was mis-conceived and would likely do more harm than good.

Update from Neighbours. No neighbours update was received either in advance of, or during the meeting.

Stakeholders and public comments. No stakeholders or public comments were received either in advance of, or during the meeting.

AOB.

Sunart Rainforest Project.

It was announced that a Sunart Rainforest Project is progressing, with the project area extending well beyond the original NSWG boundary. It encompasses the (neighbouring) NSWG DMG area, SGRIPD open hill ground lease area, Resipole Hill, Resipole Woodland, Claish Moss, and Achnanellan to the North, extending further to the boundaries of Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) Glenhurich to the North and to the East at Scotstown - most of which lies within the East Loch Shiel DMG.

NatureScot advised that the Sunart Community Company will be leading the initiative and responsible for securing funding. Funding has already been obtained to support the next stages of the project, including a drone count of the area in the near future.

Given the scale of the project and its location, members expressed concern that the initiative had progressed without prior notification, consultation, or involvement of the ELSDMG, despite the majority of the area falling within our group's remit.

NatureScot further indicated that, following the count, a significant deer reduction will be required, involving Forestry and Land Scotland and members of the Rainforest Group. This raised additional

concerns among members, particularly regarding the potential knock-on effects for neighbouring landholdings and the wider DMG area.

In the spirit of collaborative working, it was agreed that, in future, ELSDMG should be invited to participate in Sunart Rainforest Group meetings to ensure the group is kept informed and has the opportunity to engage constructively with those delivering the project.

Proposed date for next DMG meeting Autumn/Winter 2025.

These minutes were approved on the 16/06/2026 as being an accurate record of the Spring 2025 meeting. S Fox, Chair - 16/06/2026.

Post meeting note: - *The Sunart Rainforest Project drone count was completed over the 24th to 26th of April. The results reported are as undernoted:*

- *76 km² net census area covered.*
- *In total, 778 Red deer and 31 Roe deer were observed inside the census boundary.*
- *Confirming a Red Deer density of 10.2 / km² and Roe Deer density of 0.4 / km² across the Sunart Rainforest project area at the time of census.*