

Gairloch Conservation Unit Deer Management Group

Part 2: Group Operation



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2.1 DMG Objectives and Targets

The purpose of the Gairloch Conservation Unit (GCU) is to manage deer on a collective basis, in accordance with Scottish Government strategy (Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach, 2008), the Code of Practice on Deer Management (2012), and in a manner that integrates different land-use objectives, recognising that compromises over objectives may be required where conflict occurs. The main objectives, targets and actions for the DMG's deer management during the period of this Plan are set out in Part 2 of the plan and summarised in Part 1: The Working Plan.

2.2 Area & Boundaries & Membership

GCU group area covers some 42,600 ha and has 7 main members although cull returns are received for several smaller crofting units to the west of the group. The group maintains good communication with neighbours to the north and south and whilst there is some deer movement between the group and Heights of Letterewe (to the north) and Coulin (to the south), overall the deer population is largely geographically contained within the group area. The group operates under its own constitution and is a member of the Association of Deer Management groups.

2.3 Planning Process, Meetings & Reporting

The group holds two principal meetings each year in spring and autumn and the DMG has a strong level of participation from estate members of the group with a good attendance at the biannual meetings with all properties being represented by owners and or stalkers/managers at meetings. These meetings are well attended by members and in addition, advisory representatives from Scottish Natural Heritage and The Forestry Commission.

Agendas are circulated in advance for these meetings and minutes produced soon afterwards, with the minutes circulated to all Members and attendees. Minutes and Agendas are publicly available on the DMG's website.

A key element of the spring and autumn meetings is to agree cull targets amongst the membership, taking into account the results of any recent information that might be relevant. The spring and autumn meetings also review:

- Culls achieved against cull targets set at the previous meetings;
- Deer numbers, based on latest counts and such indirect monitoring as might be carried out by members as well as updates on planned counts for the year;
- Any changes in deer management required based upon evidence gathered from monitoring procedures as set out in the Working Plan.
- Any current issues in the Group area. If necessary, issues will be prioritised and a plan of action agreed upon.

The Deer Management Plan will be delivered through the **actions** set out in **Part 1: The Working Plan**.

- Prior to meetings, Members will complete an annual return. The return will enable key information to be collated prior to the meeting.
- The Working Plan, with any maps and spreadsheets will be circulated along with the Agenda to all Group Members prior to meetings.

- The Working Plan will be discussed at the meeting, and progress against targets noted. The Working Plan will be continually reviewed and actions agreed and implemented by DMG members on an annual basis.
- An **Annual Report** will be published summarising the plan delivery to date and the Working Plan will be revised setting out targets and any specific actions for the following year.

2.4 DMG Constitution

Gairloch Conservation Unit is constituted as a stand-alone Deer Management Group (DMG), this being formally adopted on 8th April 2015. The Group operates a Membership system, where estates are members and others are encouraged to join. Anybody involved with the management of wild deer within the DMG area, will be encouraged to participate in the execution of the relevant Deer Management Plan.

2.5 Deer Management Plan: Update and Review

The Deer Management Plan provides an agreed framework for a coordinated and co-operative approach to deer management in the local area. The actual implementation of the Plan will be agreed on an ongoing basis at the Group's spring and autumn meetings, with scope for the Membership to adjust and adapt the Working Plan to meet changing circumstances. A review of the entire Deer Management Plan will be conducted in 2021.

2.6 WDNA, Code of Practice on Deer Management & Wild Deer Best Practice Guidance

Members support and full endorse:

- The long term vision for deer populations and their management as laid out in "[Scotland's Wild Deer - A National Approach](#)".
- [Code of Practice on Deer Management](#)
- [Wild deer Best Practice Guidance](#)

2.7 Dispute Resolution

- A request to do this should be made in writing at least two weeks prior to any meeting.
- All Group members are encouraged to deal with disputes in the first instance with those parties concerned, be they other Group members, external parties or Government Agencies.
- Dispute Resolution within the DMG is covered under the Group Constitution.
- Failing that, the Chairman of the Group will seek to facilitate an agreement. This may involve the opportunity to air relevant issues at a meeting of the Group.
- Representatives from the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) are available to assist with disputes, should it prove impossible to resolve issues within the Group. Should this arise, The Group accepts that the findings of ADMG will be implemented.

2.8 Culling Operations

To maintain or reduce the deer population means that individual culling decisions become proportionately more important, including the accurate reporting of culls. Open discussion of culls will be required at all meetings.

- All DMG members agree to make sufficient resources available to carry out the culls outlined in this plan, and to make arrangements with immediate neighbours to assist in a culling programme where time or weather have precluded the target cull in being achieved.
- If extra resources are required for any reason, then further resources should be sought from other DMG members.

2.9 Data & Evidence Gathering: Deer Count Protocols

It has been agreed that where possible, the DMG will continue to count deer by foot. This will provide consistent deer count data across the Group area. An indication of winter mortality will be provided for each management unit along with cull returns for the spring meeting of the Group.

2.10 Data & Evidence Gathering: Cull and Larder Information

Each management unit within the Group is treated as a separate reporting unit. Members will complete an annual return, which will include some larder data for the purposes of monitoring stag age structure and deer welfare.

For the purposes of population modelling, the deer count represents a snap-shot in time and the population will largely be treated as a whole. An annual culls will therefore be agreed by Group members to reflect where deer are during the season and according to any specific targets Members may have.

2.11 Data & Evidence Gathering: Habitat Monitoring Protocols

2.11.1 Background

A key element of a demonstrably effective and environmentally responsible management plan is that it should highlight habitats relevant to deer management, set out clear objectives for those habitats, carry out monitoring and detail the actions and reporting to be implemented to achieve the targets set.

The environmental objectives will be linked to Scottish Government policy but the DMG will be expected to manage localised deer impacts to deliver and sustain good condition of a range of designated and non-designated habitats.

2.11.2 Habitat Objectives for the DMG

Within the DMG area, there are three main environmental objectives:

- To deliver favourable or recovering condition on designated sites;
- To manage existing and new native woodland and to improve woodland condition where this is being impacted by deer;
- To manage impacts in the wider non-designated area such as peatland which along with woodland contributes to Scotland's ability to store carbon, and habitats which support a range of species, many of which are unique to the area. In particular the DMG will focus monitoring on dwarf shrub heath and blanket bog/peatland habitats

In addition to delivering the cull plan as set out in this document, members have agreed in principle to

undertake habitat assessment, particularly in those areas where there are designated sites.

Habitat Impact Assessment will be conducted so as to:

- Collect and interpret habitat data on a regular basis to inform deer management;
- Set up a baseline to allow changes in impacts to be measured over time;
- Understand the methods used by government agencies.

A further aim will be to map habitat types across estates, particularly with a view to establishing areas of high carbon-sensitive habitats across the DMG range. All estates within the group should establish areas within their boundaries where there is scope for habitat improvement particularly in relation to peatland improvement work.

2.11.3 Wild Deer Best Practice Guidance & Monitoring data sheets

The proposed method would involve using Best Practice Guidance Habitat Impact Assessment for Dwarf Shrub Heath and Blanket Bog. These guides describe the methods used by SNH to monitor deer impacts. These methods are also a key part of how other agencies monitor deer impacts.

Each estate/management unit would be required to do a minimum of 30 plots (with the proportion of DSH/BB plots relative to the proportion of habitat present). This would be repeated every 3 years. Following on from this individual group members may be in a position to apply for Moorland Management Agri-Environment Climate Scheme or Peatland Restoration schemes.

For those with native woodland, the SNH methodology for the Monitoring of Native Woodland on Designated Sites will be used. The numbers of plots per landholding would likely be a minimum of 30 (depending on the size of area of woodland). This would also be repeated every three years. Following on from this, members could then seek to apply for one of the Forestry Grant Scheme options.

A formal Strategic Review of woodland expansion according to the Scottish Government Forest Strategy will also be undertaken to identify opportunities for further woodland expansion (which may be eligible for funding through the Woodland Creation option of the Forestry Grant Scheme).

2.11.4 Random Plot Generation

SNH has assessed areas to be monitored for each DMG. A series of random plots has been generated for each property within the DMG to enable individual properties to set up and undertake monitoring which will be representative of significant habitats within the Group area.

2.11.5 Timescales

Under the initial guidance of SNH, suitable sites will be selected and a monitoring schedule for each habitat agreed for the DMG.

2.12 DMG Policies and Principles

2.12.1 Association of Deer Management Group's Principles of Collaboration

As member of this DMG, we:-

- Acknowledge what we have in common – namely a shared commitment to a sustainable and economically viable Scottish countryside;
- Make a commitment to work together to achieve that;
- Accept that we have a diversity of management objectives and that we respect each other's objectives;
- Undertake to communicate openly with all relevant parties;
- Commit to negotiate and where necessary compromise in order to accommodate the reasonable land management requirements of our neighbours;
- Undertake that where there are areas of disagreement, we will work to resolve these.

2.12.2 Culling Policy

- It is not possible to draw up a single policy for all estates. Culling policy currently varies from estate to estate, and there are different factors which govern this.
- Despite other commercial pressures, estates are encouraged to work with their neighbouring estates in aiming to establish an overall population target ratio of 1: 1 stags to hinds.
- Estates are also encouraged to shoot dependents first on welfare grounds.

2.12.3 Competence & Training Policy

Members of the DMG recognise the need for deer to be managed by trained personnel. A Trained Person is an individual who can produce evidence of training to cover the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 852/2004, and Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 as they apply to wild game. An approved qualification such as the updated Deer Stalking Certificate Level 1 or the Certificate in Wild Game Meat Hygiene (large game), is the most robust way in which stalkers can show that they have the appropriate knowledge.

The Group recognises that the requirement for deer to be culled by competent and qualified personnel is in the public interest. The DMG will promote and encourage competence in undertaking deer management activities through the following actions:

- As a minimum, each reporting unit, and any other individual involved in the culling of deer, will have or will have access to an individual with the above qualifications.
- Members will be encouraged to highlight changes in competency qualifications in the annual return.
- The DMG will assist where possible in the provision/facilitation of training for anyone lacking necessary qualifications or for individuals who wish to enhance their skills.
- Following Wild Deer Best Practice Guidance to safeguard public safety, food safety and deer welfare.
- Providing opportunities for Continual Professional Development in all aspects of deer management.

2.12.4 Communications Policy

Members of the Deer Management Group will promote and encourage effective communication on deer management issues both within the DMG and throughout the wider community in order to promote better awareness and education of deer and deer management through the following actions:

- Deer management planning will be open, inclusive and seek local consultation;
- DMG web-site will be regularly updated to include the Deer Management Plan, Minutes and Agendas for meetings as well as any other relevant information which seeks to promote openness and transparency;
- The DMG will ensure that contact details are available for anyone seeking information or wishing to raise concerns;
- DMG members will actively promote deer management to raise awareness;
- DMG will seek opportunities to promote deer management through training, educational or awareness raising events.

2.12.5. Non-Native Policy

Sika: There are areas within the DMG where Sika deer are recognised to be established (FCS Strathglass) but Members will seek to prevent their further establishment where possible. The Group will continue to provide a report to the DMG of cases of occurrences of Sika outwith their present range.

Muntjac: Muntjac are not native to Scotland and as such possible threats to their introduction or establishment must be managed. As such, Muntjac will be managed in accordance with the [Non-Natives Species Code of Practice](#).

Feral Pigs: Feral pigs will be managed according to SNH Policy Guidance (currently in development).

Feral Goats: There is currently no close-season or industry-guidance for the management of Feral Goats. Any decision to undertake control must therefore take into account welfare of the target animal and any dependent young. Within the DMG area, Feral goat populations may be maintained at current levels where they are already established but management will be undertaken to prevent their establishment/spread where they are not.

2.12.6 Welfare Policy

Members of the DMG will promote and encourage the safeguarding of deer welfare both at the scale of the individual animal and at a population scale through the following actions:

- Carrying out all deer management activity to Wild Deer Best Practice Guidance industry standards;
- Promoting the undertaking of deer management training, continual professional development and industry recognised qualifications (e.g. Deer Stalking Certificate Levels 1 & 2);
- Discouraging unregulated stalking activity;
- Ensuring that the natural habitat supports good welfare through the provision of adequate habitat and shelter;
- Ensuring that any land management operations take into consideration possible effects on deer movements or the availability of shelter; and
- Ensuring that the necessary precautions and checks are undertaken to prevent the spread of diseases.

2.12.7 Policy for Chronic Wasting Disease

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a highly contagious and fatal transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) disease that affects deer. It has had devastating effects on many populations of wild and farmed deer in the USA, Canada and has recently been reported in Norway. It is not known to affect humans. There is no evidence of TSEs in deer in the UK but if it were to become established in the wild deer population it would have major consequences for the UK deer industry. Chronic wasting disease is a notifiable disease. This means that if you suspect it you must tell your nearest [Animal and Plant Health Office \(APHA\) office](https://www.gov.uk/chronic-wasting-disease) immediately. Failure to do is an offence. For information on how to spot CWD see <https://www.gov.uk/chronic-wasting-disease>

Members of the DMG will see to prevent the establishment of CWD through implementing the following:

- Ensuring that all visitors from the USA and Canada are aware of the risks and undertake the appropriate Bio-Security protocols prior to their visit.
- Raising awareness within the DMG and across the wider community about the risks and the symptoms of CWD.

2.13 Venison Production and Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV)

The DMG currently has no collective approach to carcass collection with each property making their own arrangements with a variety of Game Dealers. The DMG supports SQWV and membership of the Scheme is actively encouraged within the Group.

2.14. Wildfire Plan/contacts

Contact details are available from the Secretary.