



MEETING OF THE GAIRLOCH CONSERVATION UNIT

Wednesday 27th January 2016, 9.30 am
Torridon Community Centre

- **Attendance**

Sir Nicholas Bacon	Diabaig
John Wills	Grudie
Duncan MacKenzie	Gairloch
Ronnie Buchan	Gairloch
Sinclair Coghill	SNH
Linzi Seivwright	Caorann
Donnie Beaton	Diabaig
Seamus MacNally	Torridon (NTS)
Rob Dewar	NTS
Neil Morrison	Coulin
Charlie Hill	Ben Damph
Terry Doe	Torridon & Kinlochewe Community Council

- **Apologies**

Tim Bowie, Eisean Dubh
Sir Paul Nicholson, Diabaig
Russell Cooper, Forest Enterprise
Tamara Lawson, SNH
Peter Duncan, SNH

- **Welcome**

Welcome to Sir Nicholas, and Duncan on their first attendance. Also to Neil from Coulin Estate and Charlie from Ben Damph Estate (SW Ross DMG); and to Terry representing the local Community Council.

- **General discussion**

With regard to a deer count of the whole group, the use of a helicopter has to be considered.

The count itself must have some meaning to make it worthwhile, such as helping determine cull figures, as past counts were done without any management decisions benefitting the DMG as a whole.

Objectives across the group are quite different and so a count and the information it gives is important, especially when used in conjunction with any habitat impact assessments.

To be able to maintain a healthy herd and habitat has to be of benefit to all concerned.

A population model could help work out for example, the minimum number of stags that are required for a sporting return.

Woodlands are important for future habitat and shelter. Some complications arise however with new schemes where grants were previously received for tree establishment.

Some disquiet was voiced at the recent number of deer SNH have shot. Previously, adjacent estates did not feel a lack of deer, whereas recently this seems to be the case.

There was a feeling that a count might not be worth doing if SNH continue to cull such high numbers. It was argued however that a count would still be beneficial as it would form the basis for future management.

Seeing and counting the actual animals has to be a better basis for decision making than using dung counts which appear to exaggerate numbers.

The NNR will have its own target densities, just as other estates within the GCU will have ones that suit them. Habitat impact assessments on designated ground if deemed to be unfavourable, will however, lead to discussions with SNH on how to improve such a situation.

- **Deer Management Plan**

Linzi:

One thing the group lacks at present is recent information on the overall number of deer.

Progress of plan? – any comments received today will be incorporated into the plan.

The group has its own website as part of the Association of DMG. Links will be provided to allow anyone to access the DMP, and allow comments to be made.

Plans are quite bulky due to background information e.g. counts, culls, as well as designated sites and individual estate information.

Once all that is in place the next part is the working plan, and everyone needs to be sure they are happy to sign up to this, as this is the expectation of future work.

The more the group put into the plan the better it will look. This can include information that is shared with e.g. any holiday cottages on the estates, regarding subjects such as ticks and Lyme Disease.

Information on Deer Vehicle Collisions can also be useful to have on the website.

The assessment process by SNH which each DMG has to undergo is to identify existing public benefits delivered by that group. With much of the work in the GCU DMP done, the chart looks mostly green which is good. One red

part was about whether the GCU had a constitution or not, which happily it does and so that will turn to green also.

Linzi went through the various actions within the plan, including one which affects those with designated sites, namely to ensure sites are brought into favourable condition. A follow up to this will be to ensure help is given if necessary, to neighbours to achieve favourable condition.

Another is to maintain existing native woodland cover, which the group as a whole has already achieved. Any future planting / regeneration will only bolster this still further.

Qualifications: most already have their DSC1 (Deer Stalking Certificate) and DSC2. Ronnie is also an Accredited Witness.

Charlie hopes to organise a DSC1 course for SW Ross group, and anyone from the GCU wishing to attend should contact him soon.

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- **Deer in the Community**

Terry brought up a scenario, whereby if deer enter the village of Kinlochewe, SNH locally would prefer the Community Council to report this to the Wildlife Operations at SNH in Inverness, who will then contact Beinn Eighe. The question is, why can there not be a direct link between the community and Beinn Eighe?

- **Deer Count**

In 2016-17 SNH are planning more helicopter counts, funds permitting, including the GCU. Budget cuts mean nothing can be guaranteed, but by agreeing to help with the cost of a group count this would help in the decision process.

The members agreed to aim for a count next year, sharing communal costs of a helicopter and funding the hours required on an estate by estate basis.

- **Date of next meeting**

Wednesday 4th May 2016, 9.30 am, at Anancaun, to include some habitat monitoring training with Linzi and Sinclair.

Agenda items to include a discussion on the maintenance of the fence between the NNR and Kinlochewe Estate / Loch Rosque.

Also the finances of the GCU; and targets / actions required, arising from the plan.

The offer of financial assistance from SNH is based upon the successful delivery of the agreed Deer Management Plan to the expected standard, which must be completed and claimed by 28 February 2016. Their approval for grant assistance does not extend to actual approval of the DMP at this stage.