



MEETING OF THE GAIROLOCH CONSERVATION UNIT TO DISCUSS DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN

Wednesday 4th May 2016, 10.00 am
SNH Field Station, Anancaun

- **Attendance**

Donnie Beaton	Diabaig
Liz & John Wills	Grudie
Sinclair Coghill	SNH Wildlife Ops
Peter Duncan	Beinn Eighe NNR
John Weir	BE NNR
Doug Bartholomew	BE NNR
Mary Gibson	SNH
Russell Cooper	Forest Enterprise Scot.
Ronnie Buchan	Gairloch & Conan Estates
Linzi Seivwright	Caorann
Seamus MacNally	Torridon (NTS)

- **Apologies**

Sir Paul Nicholson, Diabaig
Tim Bowie, Eisean Dubh, near Diabaig
Duncan MacKenzie, Gairloch
Rob Dewar, NTS

- **Finances**

The current annual subscription from estates to the GCU to enable it to cover its membership of the Association of Deer Management Groups, stands at £75 with Eisean Dubh paying £50.

This no longer covers the cost of ADMG membership and after a general discussion it was agreed to ask estates for a **£200 contribution** which will also cover other incidental costs, such as hall hire.

An invoice will be sent out in the near future asking for £200 from each estate, which should cover membership of the ADMG for 2016-17 (the stag and hind season ahead).

Some DMGs have applied to the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund (ECAAF), for some funding as it covers deer management and things like counts

where helicopters are used. Also help with the administration of a DMG such as secretarial costs.

Detail was not discussed but in principle Linzi would consider continuing to assist the group with the many issues now facing it.

The next round of applications to ECAF will run from September until January, and it would make sense to be ready to do this as early in the process as possible.

Regarding a count of the whole GCU, this is likely to go ahead between the months of November and April, in other words this coming winter.

It will take the best part of two days for one helicopter to cover this ground at a cost of around £1000 an hour or about £7500 per day.

Each estate will pay according to their size and the time required.

Sinclair suggested the following amounts as a rough guide to costs:

Diabaig £1400

Eisean Dubh £150

Gairloch £6400

Grudie £1700

NNR £1600

Torrison £2100

The good news is that in reality 50% of the cost is the likely contribution, so **about half** the amount of the above will need to be found for this first count. Thereafter counts are likely to be every four or five years. The Group will try and make an application to ECAF as already mentioned.

- **The DMP**

The count information and cull figures will allow population modelling and the ability to forecast future management, an important factor which the Scottish Government is keen to see.

If the government hopefully allows DMGs the time to implement the plans, there is a need to be seen to accomplish things such as an annual report.

There are many projects that will look good if carried out, including more woodland expansion where the opportunity exists. More information on the condition of present woodland would also be useful.

Linzi gave an update on the feedback received since the plan was put out for public consultation.

There has not been anything from the public as such. The local Community Council (Torrison & Kinlochewe) made a few comments.

As did SNH, wishing to see more detail on Site Condition Monitoring, especially from NTS Torrison.

The NTS would like to see more invasive species control, particularly of rhododendron ponticum.

FCS also submitted comments on the plan and showed a willingness to assist with issues such as woodland expansion.

The question was asked, 'do we want a shared vision for the plan?'

Should ideally aim for something collectively. A count will help to achieve that e.g. 'we want a population of 'x' number of deer. Equally important is to have all the habitats in good condition.

Linzi will try and produce a vision statement for the group.

Part 3 of the plan will become a working document once the count and cull figures are added. It is already on the website but it can be updated as numbers become available.

Linzi will add numbering to the actions within the plan, to make them easier to follow. There will also be some mention of ECAF.

Everyone should send Linzi their latest cull figures (2015-16).

Other information useful to collect for input to the plan includes any road killed deer (deer vehicle collisions); any winter mortality; and an assessment of calf survival percentage (recruitment).

Linzi will include feral goats within a GCU policy.

There are a few places within the group area that should be invited to join the GCU.

These include:

Torridon House

Shieldaig Croft

Arrowdale

Personal contact thought best and therefore anyone within the group who knows the individuals on these properties, is encouraged to speak to them about the DMG and the advantages of joining.

- **Any other business**

Short discussion about the fact that the group is now, as from March, within a new Biosphere Reserve.

Regarding the fence between the NNR and Kinlochewe Estate, the ownership and future maintenance of the fence have now been transferred to Kinlochewe Estate. SNH are no longer involved in the maintenance.

The next meeting planned is for the chair and secretary to meet Linzi, Sinclair and Mary to discuss progress with the group assessment. It is important to score as highly as possible to show the government how serious DMGs are taking the Deer Management Planning process and how much progress has been achieved. The meeting is planned for 25th May at Anancaun.

- **DONM**

The next group meeting is going to be in the first week of October, possibly the 4th or 5th, a Tuesday or Wednesday morning, at 9.00 or 9.30, in Torridon or Anancaun. If you have a preference for either place or time, please let Seamus know.

- **Site visit**

After the meeting Peter kindly offered to take the group on to the reserve and discuss management issues within the native pine wood. It was useful to hear about their plans and understand what is hoped to be achieved through managing the deer in particular.

From there we travelled towards Grudie and Sinclair took the group through the process of monitoring dwarf shrub heath, using quadrats and recording any browsing and what plants were present.

- *Thanks to staff at Beinn Eighe for hosting the meeting and providing tea and coffee, to Peter for the site visit, and to Sinclair for the habitat monitoring.*
- *A large thank you to Linzi also for getting us to this stage in the management plan process. The group has paid her for the work completed and it will be beneficial to consider paying for her expertise in the future with assistance in the running of the plan and any grant applications.*