

The Gairloch Conservation Unit

Spring meeting 9.00m 18th April 2023

By Zoom

In attendance John Wills (Chair)/Tim Bowie (Secretary)/Linzi Seivwright (Caorann)/Tom Chetwynd (Secretary South West Ross DMG)/Ben McKeown (NatureScot)/Ian Sargent (NatureScot)/Paul Bolton (NTS)/Sam Gibson (Grudie)

1. **Welcome introductions and apologies:** - Welcome to Sam Gibson (Grudie) and apologies from Doug Bartholomew.
2. **Minutes of meeting 7th October 2022** – there were no matters arising
3. **Update on ADMG AGM** provided by Linzi – The meeting was well attended with a lot of political activity with likely changes to primary (seasons & The Deer Act) and secondary legislation (such as variations to bullet weights) a lot of which remains up in the air. There are regular meetings with Lorna Slater who is the responsible Minister as well as the Strategic Deer Board.
NatureScot were positive about DMG's and recognised the importance of landscape scale collaboration. Ruairidh Waugh from Ardgay Game gave an enlightening talk highlighting the fragility of the supply chain. 40% of his supply comes in October and is lower quality so he would encourage all stalkers to consider culling stags earlier and staggering supplies even if not an Ardgay customer. Brexit has hit exports to Europe. We do not want the small independent processors to disappear.
Russ Jobson from The Tweed River Foundation gave an insightful presentation about creating riparian woodland with the aim of keeping them cooler as well as creating shade they provide invertebrates and nutrients. Long runs of fencing are expensive. WRFT put in a funding application (unsuccessful) but there are other funding streams. Paul Bolton explained that **NTS Torridon** have trialled some small 4m X 4m plots (too small for deer to jump in).
There are a series of events including a visit to Glenfeshie on 28.06.23, and workshops for peatland restoration and riparian woodland. In addition, there are developments in agricultural subsidies, land reform, and a forestry grant scheme consultation (we are encouraged if we have had any experience of making applications).
4. **Update on Shildaig & Torridon woodland matters** – given by Ben McKeown. Scottish Government biodiversity targets are ambitious, but delivery is not settled but one key goal is that by 2040 regeneration will be successful without fences. NatureScot at Beinn Eighe are working with NTS Torridon/Coulin/Ben Damph/Ben Shildaig and close to signing a Memorandum of Understanding and agreeing the aims of the group. The main focus is native woodland condition and rhododendron removal. Currently mapping rhododendron then will apply for funding. Tree Story (consultants) are looking at

mapping potential woodland expansion and potential constraints. Deer matters will remain firmly a matter for DMG's. New woodland will be native, Caledonian, birch and willow and they will look at connectivity of blocks. Unlikely to be planting in Glen Torridon.

5. **Completed cull updates for 2022-23** – await Diabaig return (NatureScot shared by email during meeting). TB to ask Duncan Mackenzie if Gairloch might share their figures with the GCU.
6. **Impact of culling on neighbouring areas** – Tom Chetwynd explained that South West Ross DMG were happy to liaise with GCU DM will be meeting shortly and the woodland proposals with Ben Damph/Torridon/Ben Shildaig will be on the agenda. The Woodland Trust are being very open but Coulin and Ben Damph less so (plans are less advanced). Tom suggested that there may need to be better communication about the concept plan. Ian Sargent said NatureScot might share an outline (they are not seeking to create new woodland) and help communicate at a landscape scale as these plans will impact a wide area.
7. **Spring counts for 2023** – TB reported on the success of the drone surveys conducted by Ben Harrower through BH Consultancy. Paul Bolton had kindly organised this with invaluable support from Donnie Beaton and Seamus MacNally. TB to check with Diabaig if they are happy to circulate the consolidated report to the group members to see the details and value of the reports.
8. **Finance update including subscriptions** – TB advised that current account balance is £309.73. We have recently paid our annual subscription to the ADMG (£937.80) plus a fee for the ADMG hosting our website (£120.00). Subscriptions will be reviewed based on cull numbers and sent later in the Spring.
9. **Any other business** – SG asked if Gairloch was a separate group, and it was explained that they had resigned from the GCU. JW asked about the restrictions on lead ammunition (whether game dealers are applying restrictions) and IS agreed to send details. It is likely that an 85 grain lead bullet will be approved for Red Deer in Scotland in forthcoming legislation. IS explained that NatureScot have been successfully trialling a scheme for locally based stalkers to stalk (depending on experience – unsupervised/supervised) on NatureScot land to encourage community engagement etc.
10. **Date of next meeting** – 6th October 2023 9.30am at NatureScot offices – Kinlochewe (subject to TB checking with Diabaig) otherwise 13th October.