

Meeting minutes

The Gairloch Conservation Unit

9.00am 3rd May 2024

In attendance – John Wills - Grudie/Sam Gibson - Grudie/Tim Bowie – Eisean Dubh/Doug Bartholomew - NatureScot/Ian Sargent - NatureScot/Joan Cumming – Project Manager Glen Torridon Partnership/Tom Turnbull – Chair ADMG/Seamus MacNally/ Ronnie Buchan - Gairloch/Linzi Seivwright/Donnie Beaton - Diabaig/Ben McKeown - NatureScot/Paul Bolton – NTS Torridon

1. Apologies: Sir Nicholas Bacon, Tom Chetwynd, Duncan Mackenzie, Russel Cooper
2. Minutes of last meeting & matters arising – nothing raised except a correction to the agenda.
3. Tom Turnbull gave an update on ADMG AGM in early March which was very well attended. DMNRO's were the main topic of conversation. These should be used to promote nature restoration rather than avoiding damage. There is a lack of information on how these will work but they have the potential to cover very large areas of land and there is a risk that land managers are not being consulted. Turcan Connell have given legal advice to ADMG while consideration is given to a formal response to the Scottish Government. There may be changes to Section 10 of the Deer Act as well as a requirement for all shooting deer in Scotland to possess at least the DSC Level 1. ADMG are concerned this would exclude guest stalkers and the young. The ADMG also oppose the change to the close season from 30th September to 30th March. Land Reform is also very much in the spotlight where it is proposed holdings exceeding 3000 h/s will require a land management plan and communities will be required to be notified of sales exceeding 1000 h/a. There is also a biodiversity consultation on degraded sites. There is the possibility of a venison subsidy based on the three year cull record being trialled in the Cairngorms National Park. The work of The Common Ground Forum continues, and members are encouraged to support this.
4. Joan Cumming gave an introduction to The Glen Torridon Partnership: This is a partnership between NatureScot at Beinn Eighe, the NTS at Torridon, The Woodland Trust at Bein Shildaig, Couldoran Estate and Ben Damph Estate. A memorandum of understanding has been signed. There are other smaller estates becoming involved. A development plan is being drafted and the founding partners are finding common ground which includes deer management planning, rhododendron control (which has already started by stem injection across holdings of varying sizes), woodland creation and native woodland restoration as well as fresh water habitats. Scottish Forest & Land

will have more funding for deer management including training stalkers and community stalking schemes. Heritage Lottery Funding has been secured for a scoping study for the potential of further deer management including for paying for training stalkers and increasing the sale of local venison (this is capacity building). Deer will remain a valued part of the partnership. Ian Sargent commented that there were no definitive plans about deer management, and they recognised there would be overlaps with other DMG's. They see huge potential in multiple areas and further funding will be available for collaborative work. Linzi Seivwright raised the question of fencing and Ian Sargent said that deer movements are complex (there may be studies to better understand this) and Joan said that fencing in enclosures and the impacts restricting the movement of deer needs more consideration. Ian added that the partnership would be open with the group as the project progresses. Joan emphasised that the focus will not be on deer densities but rather the impact on habitats they plan to restore. Linzi suggested that as the GCU deer management plan is now more than five years old it might be time for a review – the group will reflect on this 9as within the group objectives will have changed). There was further discussion on counts using drones and Ben McKeown made the point that HIA's are fundamental. Joan said understanding occupancy better would greatly assist future planning.

5. Completed cull updates 2023-24: Torridon House – 10 stags/Eisean Dubh 2 hinds & 2 calves/NatureScot 92 stags, 42 hinds, 11 calves, 2 roe bucks, 2 does, 9 sika stags & 9 sika hinds. (Note: figures emailed in by NTS/NatureScot as these minutes are drafted)
6. Spring counts: Diabaig, Torridon and Eisean Dubh all counted by drone in 2023. Ronnie Buchan said that Gairloch were unable to count this spring.
7. Finance including subscriptions: TB reported that the current balance is £2264.73 with the only outgoing since the last meeting being the ADMG website hosting for £120.00. TB will apply for internet banking.
8. Any other business: The Chair announced that he would like to step back before the autumn meeting, and we need to appoint a successor. The group thanked John for his extraordinarily long commitment to the group (regarded as the oldest in Scotland having formed in 1964).
9. Date of next meeting: 9.00am 4th October 2024 at NatureScot offices Anancaun