

Meeting minutes

The Gairloch Conservation Unit

9.00am (by Zoom) 8th November 2023

1. Apologies: Sir Nicholas Bacon, Tom Chetwynd, Donnie Beaton
2. Minutes of last meeting & matters arising – nothing raised except a correction made by TB at the instigation of IS.
3. Update on ADMG AGM & other matters: LS provided an update as follows. Presently a lot happening in particular changes to secondary legislation including the reduction of the minimum bullet weight to 80gms, the use of night vision and there now being no closed season for male deer in Scotland. We are encouraged to look at the Biodiversity Action Plan and in particular that relating to deer where there will be new legislation and key changes. Broad targets will be set out including for densities (10 per sq. km on the open range, 2 per sq. km in priority woodland). Presently 17% of Scotland has a protected designation and this may increase to 30%. Both Torridon & Beinn Eighe will have priority woodland. There will be a tidying up of the legislation too.

There is some good news too in particular the success of the Common Ground Project (<https://thecommongroundforum.scot>). The deer world has not always been harmonious but this has brought a broad range of people together creating a more positive environment to work in. It combined workshops and mediation and delivered some positive outcomes. LS explained that in some quarters there was fear and uncertainty about the multitude of changes and the Common Ground Project was there to take everyone with them. We are encouraged to examine The Common Ground accord and perhaps the GCU might consider signing this? Agenda item for May 2023.

Heading for the Scottish hills – LS asked us to keep our details up to date. The ADMG are holding a dinner in London later in November for those who cannot always attend events in Scotland. There will be a presentation from The Atlantic Salmon Trust on their Laxford River Project on the Reay Estate. The ADMG AGM will be on the 13th March 2024.'s. This includes making sure they are up to speed with counts, population models and habitat surveys. Scottish Venison is to launch a Scottish Venison Strategy with a summit on 20th November 2023 (details are on the ADMG website).

4. Update on The Torridon Partnership: This is a partnership between NatureScot at Beinn Eighe, the NTS at Torridon, The Woodland Trust at Bein Shildaig/Couldoran and Ben Damph. A memorandum of understanding has been signed on collaboration but presently there are no management objectives. Treestory have completed a scoping study (from a walk over survey) for Glen Torridon and the immediate area (a map of

which IS shared on-line with the group). There has been no real discussion about deer management but options are complete fencing, partial or strategic fencing or no fencing. Progress is limited and individual estates are examining their own funding sources. The group have employed a Development Manager – Joan Cumming who started on 6th November. Joan will be a facilitator and seek funding opportunities.

Rhododendron management continues to be a high priority and is ongoing.

5. Completed cull updates 2022-23: TB said he will collate data after the end of the current hind season.
6. Report on spring counts Torridon/Diabaig/Eisean Dub: TB and PB reported that while delayed by weather this was very effective giving detailed and accurate data at a very reasonable cost. JW will ask Gairloch if they have counted.
7. Finance including subscriptions: TB reported current bank balance £309.73. We no longer receive a subscription from The Gairloch Estate and although our outgoings are modest (ADMG plus LS) current subscriptions will not cover forthcoming outgoings. TB proposed that subs are increased as per attached schedule which is based on the five year rolling average of cull figures. IS commented that while NatureScot would not want to carry the bulk of the costs for the group this was probably the right way for now. LS explained that if she attended remotely or only was acting on behalf of the ADMG then her costs would be moderated which might assist.
8. Any other business: JW reported challenges in the collection of stags by the game dealer (Simpsons). Simpsons had explained that large numbers being culled by contractors impacted their ability for collection & processing. LS said the market needs a variety of processing (in terms of size/location) to work effectively and we need to support smaller producers. The Scottish Government may extend the hind season. Culling stags earlier in the season should be considered.

IS reported on the progress with the Beinn Eighe community stalking scheme. Currently 11 local people are registered. The stalking taking place on Fridays and Saturdays will be in a designated area at no cost with the venison being retained by the stalker. In addition, it might be that through the Torridon Partnership that local venison processing may take place. There may be scope too for a mobile processing unit. The ADMG are also looking at running regional butchery courses.

IS asked what the position was in regard to the groups over all deer management plan? This was last completed in 2016/17. It does require updating particularly in regards to the movement of deer and looking at landscape scale data could be very valuable.

9. Date of next meeting: 9.00am 3rd May 2024 at NatureScot offices Anancaun