

Meeting minutes

The Gairloch Conservation Unit

9.30am 9th May 2025

NatureScot Offices Anancaun

In attendance – Sam Gibson - Grudie/ Tim Bowie – Eisean Dubh/Doug Bartholomew - NatureScot/Ian Sargent - NatureScot/ /Seamus MacNally/Linzi Seivwright/Ben McKeown - NatureScot/ /Ronnie Buchan (Gairloch)

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies. Sam Gibson gave a warm welcome to those in attendance with no introductions necessary and apologies were noted from: Tom Chetwynd (South West Ross DMG), Tom Turnbull (ADMG), Joan Cumming (Project Manager Glen Torridon Partnership), Sir Nicholas Bacon (Diabaig), Paul Bolton (NTS Torridon) Donnie Beaton (Diabaig)
2. Minutes of last meeting & matters arising – Tim Bowie is to update the GCU website with his contact details as Secretary and to ensure minutes of previous meetings are uploaded and accessible.
3. Linzi Seivwright led a discussion on the current and future aims of the group. Ronnie Buchan commented that Gairloch Estate will not be impacted by reduction culls to the south of them as their sporting stags are taken more centrally. Numbers have been building up with the potential to harvest up to 50 stags. They were due to complete a helicopter count this Spring, but this is carried forward to 2026. Their deer management plan will be modelled around this, and they will remain part of the group.

LS has spoken with Tom Chetwynd about taking on a facilitator role for the group as she steps away. We will need to define what we want from the group and our objectives. This could simply be co-ordinating counts and possibly including SW Ross. Letterewe are counting annually. We recognise our current population model is not working and need to understand why. A co-ordinated effort to count particularly when there might be snow would be wise. RB said they will share count data with the group. Ian Sargent suggested we review the group plan until after counts in the spring of 2026.

Action: Doug Bartholomew to obtain quotes for counting GCU area (including/excluding Gairloch) and part of SW Ross Group by end of May.

LS explained that the core of the management plan might remain the same and it could capture details of what has been achieved (for example peatland restoration/woodland regeneration). It is these outcomes that we are working to achieve and the updated

plan to include goals for the next five years. Actions could be recorded in the minutes to show progress over time adding up all the landscape scale improvements (restoration) achieved through collaboration. Seamus MacNally commented that we should emphasise that deer are an asset and that we actively manage them. Deer management must be sustainable.

4. Regrettably Joan Cumming is on long term sick leave but IS gave an update. The Woodland Trust Scotland are providing support with a person giving two days per week. A funded scoping study for rhododendron removal is underway along with training for removal. In addition, there has been training for deer counting with drones – four now trained with space for two more. The training includes legal operation of drones and deer counting methodology and they will be practising over the summer. There is the potential for them to count outside The Glen Torridon Partnership area. A core principle is getting local people involved. HIA's are underway in Bein Damph and Torridon (NTS). In addition, they are sharing stalker resources within the group. The deer larder project has slipped but the hope is for the larder and butchery unit at Bein Shieldaig to be completed by the end of 2025. There may be an expansion of the community stalking scheme. IS explained that the plan is not for trees everywhere, but their strategic document will set out priority areas including protected areas and those areas to be maintained in good condition.
5. TB reported that the current balance in the Bank of Scotland account is £1376.48 but the account is now a "Community Account" and we pay a monthly fee of £4.25. Subscriptions will be due to cover contributions to ADMG shortly and IS suggested that NatureScot are able to make a larger contribution.

Action: TB will draft a set of subscriptions for the year 2025/26 based as before on the five year rolling average cull per member and send to SG for review/approval.

6. The group collectively recorded their sadness at the passing earlier in the year of Sir Paul Nicholson. In addition SG proposed a vote of thanks to LS for her significant support for the group which is much appreciated.
7. Date of next meeting: Potentially either 10th or 17th of October but depending on the plans members have for stalking.