

Gairloch Conservation Unit

Minutes of meeting held by Zoom

9.30am 3rd November 2021

1. **In attendance** – John Wills (Chairman), Linzi Seivwright, Tim Bowie, Seamus MacNally, Doug Bartholomew, Russell Cooper, Ian Sargent, Megan Rowland, Paul Bolton (welcomed to the group by the Chairman), Tom Chetwynd.
2. **Apologies** – Sir Nicholas Bacon, Sir Paul and Lady Sarah Nicholson
3. **Minutes of last meeting** – 24th February 2021 and matters arising (addressed in meeting)
4. **Cull updates** -
 - Grudie 7 stags/4 hinds/1 yearling/1 calf
 - Gairloch - unknown
 - Eisean Dubh – Nil
 - Slattadale – 1 stag/5 bucks/2 does/2 kids
 - Diabaig – tbc (TB to check with Donnie Beaton)
 - Torridon – 4 stags/3 hinds/2 calves/1 yearling
 - Beinn Eighe – 14 stags/11 hinds (plus a few Sika at Kinlochewe)
5. **Update from Nature Scot on reserve plans** -provided by Megan Rowland (who is being reassigned for the next 12 months on NatureScot projects) – The Deer Working Group Report is guiding the NatureScot priorities further influenced by which require changes in primary or secondary legislation. This will form part of the governance programme in 2022. It is clear that the upper limit of 10 deer per KMsq is going to be adopted. There is also potential for a move towards land management plans which will include for example peat/woods/biodiversity rather than just deer. Deer counts will focus on priority areas (Section 7's) and alternatives to helicopter counts are being sought utilising potentially drones (both fixed wing & rotary) or satellite imagery but AI has yet to master identifying a knobber from a hind. Increasingly deer management will be led by impacts (HIA). Work continues on research for lead ammunition alternatives. In addition, trials of thermal & night vision technology are ongoing on a very limited basis (under licence from the Minister). There is also an ongoing consultation on dispatching deer with a shotgun.

Doug Bartholomew reported that stalking has been focussed where there is conflict with high priority zones. This season they have inspected the high impact areas which look good but still with some deer impact. They are now aging deer culled (average age of stags 3.7 years and hinds 3.3 years). They still expect the total cull numbers to rise particularly if we have a cold winter potentially 70 stags/40 hinds. A visit to the reserve would be welcome for the group. Ian Sargent added that a scheme to allow local people to stalk and secure a beast for the freezer is under consideration.

NatureScot are also looking at landscape scale collaborations and working with Torridon (NTS), Ben Damph (Woodland Trust Scotland), and Coulin. The aim is to share resources

where objectives align (such as rhododendron control). It is not about deer management

Linzi Seivwright reported that legislation will be consulted over the coming months. There is an opportunity to think about management plans. Tom Chetwynd (Secretary South West Ross Group) was invited to talk and explained there is evidence of deer from their group moving into the GCU area and therefore cohesive discussions between the groups would be beneficial. Tom reported that their group had been quiet over Covid, but their Chairman John MacDonald would like to liaise with the GCU. Tom will keep the GCU informed about meetings.

Habitat Impact Assessments were raised by the Chairman. None were completed at Grudie in 2021 however Beinn Eighe have done some on dry heath and blanket bog. Importance of monitoring previous plots was stressed, and several phone apps were flagged as opposed to utilising handheld GPS (View Ranger/OS Locate).

6. **Any other business** – noted that the deer grid on the Slattadale/Gairloch road had been removed followed an RTA. Highways have no funding to repair/replace so will wait to see if deer gain access. (Although not flagged in our meeting it is appropriate to report here that the ADMG is considering adopting a new logo in due course to better reflect the group).
7. **Date of next meeting** – during the week commencing 25th April 2022. Can members please confirm their availability that week so we can confirm a date for an “in person” meeting and visit to Beinn Eighe.