

Gairloch Conservation Unit

Minutes of meeting – NatureScot Offices Anancaun Kinlochewe

9.30am 7th October 2022

1. **In attendance** – John Wills (Chairman - Grudie), Linzi Seivwright (Caorann), Tim Bowie (Secretary – Eisean Dubh), Doug Bartholomew (NatureScot – Beinn Eighe), Ian Sargent (NatureScot – Beinn Eighe), Paul Bolton (NTS – Torridon), **Ben McKeown (a correction)** (NatureScot – Beinn Eighe), Lucy Stobart (Diabaig), Neil Morrison (Coulin), Tom Chetwynd (Secretary South West Ross DMG)
2. **Apologies** – Sir Nicholas Bacon, Sir Paul Nicholson, Lady Sarah Nicholson, Seamus MacNally
3. **Minutes of last meeting** – 25th April 2022 and matters arising (addressed in meeting)
4. **ADMG update** – LS outlined that a Strategic Deer Board had been created with the heads of all the government agencies to look at operations, incentives, and regulations. ADMG will be asked to participate. There may be a change of legislation through primary legislation – an Environment Bill rather than change through the Deer Act. ADMG members will be key in the delivery of goals. It will also look at Net Zero and biodiversity targets. ADMG have held two meetings with Lorna Slater (part of “the Common Ground Project”) and also engaged with Moorland Management. There is a great deal of behind-the-scenes activity. Importantly upland deer numbers are actually falling although the narrative does not reflect this.

The Land Reform Consultation may have an impact on holdings greater than 3000h/a in size with potential for statutory management plans and reviews of land use.

The Scottish Venison association has an ongoing internal review and there is hope for an increase in the supply of venison as a local sustainable food. THE Scottish Quality Venison Scheme may also be streamlined. The venison sector aims to be carbon negative by 2035. Community/Local larders are being trialled along with butchery workshops.

We should consider a health check of our deer management plan after all the previous work – possibly Spring 2023.

Deer Map – a data managing (computer modelling) tool is being trialled in the Affric Region to help model and predict where deer might be found in the future. It will be further developed in 2023.

There will be a Regionally ADMG meeting on December 6th 2022 and the ADMG AGM will be held on 22/03/23 at The Kingsmill Hotel in Inverness. Further to this there will be riparian workshops at dates tbc in the Spring of 2023.

5. **Update on Glen Torridon Partnership (Woodland Scheme)** -no material update. A riparian event is being run at the end of October. The Riverwoods film was shown in The Torridon Community Centre. There is no formal agreement in place yet but the interested parties are Coulin/Beinn Damph/Beinn Shielraig/Torridon. A site visit to Coulin might be possible in the spring of 2023. **TC will put PB in touch with Mr Cope owner of one bank of River Torridon.**
6. **Deer Count** – PB reported that the NTS have a quote for £3000.00 to complete their count by drone (with thermal imaging capacity). This service is provided by Ben Harrower. **Duncan Mackenzie is to be asked by JW if he is conducting a helicopter count.** BE to co-ordinate with NTS about possibly working together on using drone for counts.
7. **Cull updates** – (to date) Grudie 6 stags (target 15-20), Beinn Eighe 23 (target 80), NTS 6 stags (target 10-12), Diabaig 4 (target 12), Eisean Dubh target 2. Note that the NTS are applying for an out of season licence following the Highways removing the cattle grid allowing stags into woodland. The Gairloch numbers are unknown.
8. **Impact of out of season culls on neighbours** - were discussed and it appears that numbers killed out of season at BE are broadly equal the annual diminishing count numbers in The South West Ross Group. There have been a small number of Sika culled in Glen Torridon.
9. **Any other business** – JW highlighted that the group will at some point need a new Chairman as he may wish to stand down. JW also suggested it might be good to meet outside the season and that perhaps the GCU and SWR DMG's could meet at the same time?
The population modelling for the GCU does not really work so we should consider sharing our data with the SWR DMG so we get more accurate and landscape scale modelling plus efficiencies in our support from Caorann. TC will flag this at his groups next meeting
10. **Finance and subscriptions** – All subscriptions are presently up to date. The current bank balance stands at £1574.73
11. **Date of next meeting** – 18th April 2023 9.30am at NatureScot Offices