



MEETING OF THE GAIRLOCH CONSERVATION UNIT DMG

<http://www.deer-management.co.uk>

Thursday 16th January 2020, 10.00 am
SNH Field Station, Anancaun

Attendance

John Wills	Grudie (Chair)
Duncan Mackenzie	Gairloch & Conan Estates
Ronnie Buchan	Gairloch
Sinclair Coghill	SNH
Russell Cooper	F&LS
Ian Sargent	SNH
Doug Bartholomew	Beinn Eighe NNR
Donnie Beaton	Diabaig
Linzi Seivwright	Caorann
Seamus MacNally	Torridon (NTS)
Tim Bowie	Eisean Dubh, near Diabaig
Terry Doe	NTS
Donald MacLeod	Kinlochewe

Apologies

Sir Paul Nicholson, Diabaig
Tamara Lawton, SNH
Sir Nicholas Bacon, Diabaig
Neil Morrison, Coulin

SNH

Ian Sargent handed out a paper which outlined their objectives for deer management and explained why they do not want fences. Also some of the highlights from the Strath Caulaidh report.

Discussion

Linzi showed slides including the population model for the DMG, and the aspirations of the group members with regard to such things as density. A high stag cull in 2018 at Beinn Eighe gave to 2 options for the model:

- The stags were from the group's area, or
- They were mainly from beyond the group area.

Either way, present stag numbers are below the group's target. This is further highlighted by including SW Ross DMG. When their sub-group, which relates to this area, is included with the GCU stags, there is still a predicted shortfall in population of 167 stags.

There is a need to be more clear about SNH's objectives within the DMP, as originally, a density of below 2km² was what they desired.

From their own ground counts this figure is nearer to 0.9km² which means the objective has been achieved and the need to continue to cull heavily is not necessary.

Sinclair suggested reducing hind numbers by another 100 or so to allow stags to move on to the ground, but that argument does not necessarily hold up in an area like the GCU, when deer densities are already among the lowest in the country, and there is ample space for stags to establish should they wish.

Donald asked if SNH are aging the deer that are shot, so that they could prioritise ones that are cull-able, rather than taking them from across the age range.

Doug suggested they are going mainly by the weight to estimate age.

Linzi put forward the idea to use thermal imaging to see what is on the ground.

This might allow a more accurate target to be set for culling, and in turn the population model would reflect a more realistic picture. This would allow everyone to plan accordingly.

Historically, Terry reminded us that in 2001 a fence was put in place to prevent a big influx of deer from Letterewe coming on to Reserve land.

Up to 49 stags and 22 hinds were culled on the Reserve before 2012, and then a change in management suddenly saw this leap to around 100 stags being shot.

The group has a major conflict, where on the one hand it is encouraged to use the population model and cull targets to determine management, yet on the other hand one member is working unilaterally and complicating the picture for most of the others.

The group do not want lethal control, but Beinn Eighe requires something to encourage deer to keep away.

ACTIONS

- *Can disturbance be used more to reduce the need to cull?*
- *SNH to finalise the SC report taking on board the points raised by the GCU*
- *SNH to report back to GCU on objectives for the reserve, and deer management actions stemming from the final report*
- *SNH to say how they will assess the population throughout the year (possible use of thermal?)*
- *SNH to agree protocols with GCU for Out of Season shooting*
- *Can they report back to the group before the next scheduled meeting in June?*
- *The Deer Management Plan is due to be refreshed in the near future and it makes sense to invite Coulin and Kinlochewe, and perhaps Ben Damph, to accompany the group on that journey.*

Date of next meeting: **3rd June 2020.**

Addendum to minutes from Doug:

- Our ground count was not a complete count and is therefore not representative of the density on the ground. Also as explained at the meeting a count on one day is not representative of the deer usage of the NNR through the year.
- I think Sinclair suggested that the group could meet their stag requirements with fewer hinds and should look to reduce hinds by 100-150 hinds and could identify ground that could be used for wintering stags.
- There was also discussion about creating woodland elsewhere to create areas of shelter for stags.
- Beinn Eighe had an action to consider using some of the practises used at Mar Lodge (from Linzi)