



**MEETING on 'ZOOM' OF THE GAIRLOCH CONSERVATION UNIT DMG**  
<http://www.deer-management.co.uk>

**Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020, 9.30 am**

### **Attendance**

John Wills	Grudie (Chair)
Sir Paul Nicholson	Diabaig
Sir Nicholas Bacon	Diabaig
Tamara Lawton	NatureScot
Megan Rowland	NatureScot
Doug Bartholomew	Beinn Eighe NNR
Linzi Seivwright	Caorann
Duncan MacKenzie	Gairloch
Seamus MacNally	Torridon (NTS)
Rob Dewar	NTS

### **1. Apologies**

Tim Bowie, Eisean Dubh, near Diabaig  
Ronnie Buchan, Gairloch & Conan Estates  
Donnie Beaton, Diabaig  
Sinclair Coghill, NatureScot

### **2. Matters Arising**

There were action points from the 16<sup>th</sup> January minutes which are covered later in this meeting.

### **3. Office Bearers**

John Wills as Chair and S MacNally as Secretary / Treasurer.  
Seamus is leaving the post as retiring from the NTS around the end of March next year.  
A successor was discussed and at the next meeting there will be a vote to appoint someone. To that end if anyone is willing to do this job please put your name forward before then, so that all candidates may be considered. Thank you.

#### **4. Finances**

The amount of money within the Bank of Scotland's Treasurers Account stands at £1179.73

Total expenditure up to March 2020 was £4249.40 and included membership of ADMG and Facilitator's fees.

Discussed membership fees of the group and agreed to raise them to £300 to help cover costs. Invoices for membership to be sent out soon.

#### **5. Covid-19 implications and SNH, now NatureScot**

One of the down-sides is that it has reduced the number of hunters on the ground as shared accommodation is a problem.

NatureScot not able to shoot during the lock-down, like others.

John asked if this has had an effect on habitat and how this will have a bearing on any planned cull at Beinn Eighe.

Doug replied he had seen more deer than usual during the quiet time and as visitors returned to the area this seemed to keep some deer away. He still envisages night and out-of-season shooting continuing.

John hoped there would be a stage when higher levels of deer would become acceptable.

Nico asked if the in-house analysis of deer by NatureScot would be available for the group to see, and Doug replied they would be happy to share this information, and hoped that by keeping pressure on the deer this would reduce the overall cull.

Duncan asked if the Reserve had considered using drones to scare deer, as a crofter had tried this within the estate, and the answer was, not at this stage. Linzi, anecdotally had heard of it working on a Uist croft.

Rob asked Doug about the findings of the Strath Caulaidh report. The report concentrated on the woodland areas and targeted high impact areas on the open hill, and it found an increase in regeneration and that woodland objectives are being met, due to the present culling regime.

Doug asked how others had found the return of visitors.

Gairloch have seen a vast increase in camping and walkers seem to be everywhere. Very similar all over, including waste left by campers which is a problem exacerbated by closure of public toilets.

Kinlochewe toilets have been open and are run by a local charity, not the Council. The Reserve's small campsite was also open and it at least has a toilet.

NatureScot have recently employed a ranger to check on people, covering an area from Ben Wyvis across to the west coast. It is hoped they can be employed again next season, and earlier too.

The issue of fires was raised and it was generally agreed that a complete ban on them especially at peak times would be a good move. John wondered if Linzi

knew who best to lobby to see if such a ban could be introduced. Local politicians would be a start and even the Association of DMG's might take it forward. Considering the make-up of our membership, John thinks we are uniquely placed to lobby for no fires.

Muirburn is generally much safer than indiscriminate fires as there are rules and timescales to be adhered to.

How does the DMG instigate bye-laws that might control the lighting of open fires?

## **6. Culls**

Linzi has put the cull figures into the present Working Plan.

## **7. Working Plan 2020-21**

Grudie appear to be seeing an increase in DVCs (Deer vehicle collisions), and wonder if more improved signage might help?

A new addition to the plan is a Welfare Indicator table.

It would still be useful to get an idea of how many hinds have had calves this year.

Would be helpful if Designated areas were moving towards favourable condition, and any updates on this should be sent to Linzi.

Gairloch are happy with the way the woodland at Bad an Scalaig is developing, with it being used more and more by deer. It was originally part of their wintering ground.

Linzi reminded us that the government are in possession of two papers at the moment, including the Deer Working Group (DWG), and anyone with comments on these should send them in. In the mean time the Group should probably continue with things like the Habitat Impact Assessments which are due to be updated again next year.

As the DWG downplays the importance of deer management groups it might be prudent to send a group response to government, especially where there is common ground. The GCU is after all one of the oldest groups based on collaboration and conservation and it could be beneficial to make its thoughts known.

Therefore, can everyone submit their comments on the recommendations of our group to Linzi, please?

Crofting- Gairloch and the Grazings Committee of South Erradale area are collaborating on a new fence which help protect the crofts from deer.

## **8. Any other business**

Linzi commented on another impact of Covid-19, namely the low price of venison. It seems a good time to encourage any local uptake of venison. Gairloch are exploring the possibility of processing some carcasses, and in light of the extra work involved in this, are considering taking on an under-keeper.

## **9. Date of next meeting**

Wednesday the 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021, at 9.30 AM, via Zoom.