

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EASTER ROSS DEER
MANAGEMENT GROUP, HELD ON FRIDAY 8th JULY AT 2PM AT
MIDFEARN LODGE, ARDGAY.**

Present:

Mr Charlie Brooke	(Chairman)	Midfearn Estate
Mr Calum Beattie		Gledfield Estate
Mr Michael Brown		Midfearn Estate
Mr Neil Cameron		Gledfield Estate
Mr Jim Gilmour		Gruinards Estate
Mr Richard Harington		Strathrusdale Estate
Mr Kim Sawyer		Dounie Estate

In attendance:

Mr David Campbell (Management Plan)
Mr Sinclair Coghill (SNH)
Mr Gordon Robertson (Secretary and Treasurer)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Alastair Harington, Vice Chairman (Strathrusdale) and Alex Hunter (Dounie).

2. Chairman's introduction

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting.

3. Minutes of Meeting held on 19.02.2016

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 19th February 2016, previously circulated, were approved other than an update on the February 2016 cull returns. These were confirmed as follows.

	<u>Mature Stags</u>	<u>Young Stags</u>	<u>Hinds</u>	<u>Calves</u>	<u>Sika Stags</u>
Dounie	8	2	25	7	
Gruinards	9		27	5	2
Gledfield	10		22	4	
Midfearn	22		62	9	
Strathrusdale	16		32	13	
Totals	<u>65</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>168</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>2</u>

2.

4. Action points from previous meeting.

- The Grant Claim to SNH for 50% of the cost of the Deer Management Plan has been submitted and approved. Payment from SNH is expected within the next few days.
- The ERDMG Website is up and running. The ERDM Plan has been attached for public view. Further 'population' of the site will take place shortly once more photographs are received. Minutes will be published and information on subjects relating to Deer Management, Community, PR and future Meetings will be added.
- The boundary of ERDMG will continue to be appraised and opportunities for increased membership regularly considered.
- Forestry Commission have agreed in principle to become members. Level of contribution for mostly fenced woodland being considered. Balnagown Estates not joining the Group. Fountain Forestry invited.
- A hard copy of the Ecology Report from Quadrat Scotland Ltd was delivered to the Secretary. A scanned copy will be circulated to members.

NC stated that it would be preferable for all land owners with a deer population within the Group to be members. The Secretary will write to Jonathan Mason to invite Glencalvie to join as the count has indicated a population of 263 deer on the Estate.

Action GR

5. Deer Management Plan.

The Chairman thanked David Campbell (DC) for all his work in completing the Deer Management Plan. Sinclair Coghill (SG) confirmed that the Plan had been signed off by SNH, and this would enable the 50% grant to be paid to the ERDMG.

DC took the members through the Plan, stressing that this was a 'dynamic working plan' that would be regularly updated and added to as further information was received and working practices were refined.

For the purpose of this meeting, the Group concentrated on the final section of the Plan, headed **Working Plan and Action Points and subtitled Operation of the Group.** (Found in the blue section at the rear of the document).

3.

1.1 Confirmed adoption of competent population model.

2.1 FC and Fountain Forestry invited to become members.

3.1 and 3.2. Local stakeholders, Community leaders, Police and Governmental Agencies to be invited to future meetings. MB will represent Edderton CC. SC will represent SNH.

3.3 Meetings will be conducted as set out within the ERDMG Plan.

4.1 The Constitution and the Plan were both adopted formally by the Group.

4.2 The Financial Structure of the Group will be as set out in the Constitution.

4.3 The Group will take opportunities, when presented, to add value through economic packages offered under support schemes (SRDP and ECAF).

5.5. The management of Sika remains under review. The Plan states that Sika are to be culled on an 'as seen; basis, as they are recognised as an invasive species.

This topic will be revisited.

Action All.

5.8. Changes to management practices will be recorded. (Ranching, hydros, wind farms etc)

6.2 The Deer Management Plan will be analysed at every meeting to define ongoing improvements in line with SNH's Best Practice Guidelines. These publications will be added to the ERDMG Website.

Action GR

7. Principles of Collaboration. All in hand.

9. Deer Counts. Accurate foot counts will take place annually in Feb/March.

Collaboration with neighbours to assist this work. SG stressed that if the same methodology was used, it will be easy to get into the habit of carrying out this important but routine record keeping. The frequency and cost of aerial counts was discussed. RH pointed out that as the group area was mainly enclosed by fences, that there should not be any major surprises in the deer population numbers. There was no need to carry out an aerial count on an annual basis. When the time came for the next count, funding will be discussed with SNH and opportunities for grant aid via ECAF will be explored. CB will investigate whether funds might be available from the Wind Farm Fund. **It was agreed that aerial counts will be conducted every 3 years.** DC to change Management Plan to reflect this decision.

Action DC

9.3 Recruitment. The counting of sample groups of hinds and calves (late April/early May) will be undertaken by each estate so that an assessment can be made of the deer population and its general health. It was noted that recruits should only be recorded once they (hogs) are 9 months old. KS noted that this practice can be time consuming, particularly on estates with other disciplines (Fishing), but SC stressed the importance of collecting this data. He also handed GR a disc with

4.

aerial picture of the recent deer count. Some of these pictures will be placed on the website.

11.1 Habitat monitoring. Each estate will carry out their own recording as agreed. The method will be kept as simple as possible. Consideration was given to having a further training day for staff. MB attended the previous course and is qualified to give advice. SNH were reminded of the Group's desire for some form of Certification to be issued on completing of training courses. Ongoing.

12. Competence and Training. This section was fully accepted and has been adopted. KS stressed the importance of sending out a clear message that those undertaking deer stalking and management are trained experts in their field.

13. Carcass handling and Venison Marketing. GR will invite Ardgay Game to the November meeting. **Action GR.**

14. Communication. This important section will be taken forward by the Chairman, Vice Chairman and the Secretary and discussed in greater detail at the next meeting.

Habitat Management.

The Group's area has very few Designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Woodland Habitat assessment and monitoring will be carried out by each individual estate.

The guidelines for the management of Carbon and for improving the ecosystem will be followed.

Promotion of responsible Deer Management, Social Wellbeing, and Educational opportunities.

The plan is clear of the requirements and responsibilities, and members of the Group embraced the guidance set out therein.

6. Membership of DMG Website and PR

These topics were fully discussed earlier in the Agenda and are being taken forward in a positive manner designed to be fully inclusive, informative and open.

5.

7. Finance

A current Financial Statement was presented. A number of invoices from the DMG still needed to be settled. Once this has been achieved, all bills will be settled, leaving a small surplus in the Bank Account. The Secretary will write to Mr Cluff to ascertain the current status of Gruinards membership. **Action GR**

The financial requirements for future on-going management will be discussed at the November meeting. **Action All**

8 AOB

The subject of the current cull targets was fully discussed. The need to reduce hind numbers, in a collaborative matter, was agreed as follows.

<u>Estate</u>	<u>Hind reduction</u>
Dounie	40
Gruinards	40
Strathrusdale	80
Mid Fearn	80
Gledfield	40
Glencalvie	to be agreed.

GR will write to Jonathan Mason to clarify Glencalvie's position in relation to the Deer Management Plan and their cull. Data will be related to site maps and deer numbers per square kilometre.

When the Hind Cull is carried out, accurate spreadsheets of culls will be circulated on a weekly basis in order that all estates are aware of progress throughout the entire area.

9 Any other business and date of next meeting.

The next meeting will take place at 2pm on Friday 4th November 2016 at Midfearn Lodge.

6.

10. Actions.

- GR to write to Jonathan Mason, inviting Glencalvie to become members of the ERDMG.
- Review policy on Control of Sika.
- Review changes and effectiveness of Deer Management Plan.
- Place Best Practice and Information Documents on Website.
- DC to change DMP to show Aerial Counts on a 3 yearly basis.
- CB to investigate whether funds from the local Wind Farm Fund might assist with future deer counts.
- GR to invite Ardgay Game to attend the next meeting of the Group on the 4th November.
- CB, AH and GR to develop thoughts on overall Communication Strategy.
- Review future financial obligations for members of the DMG.
- GR to write to Mr Algie Cluff regarding Estate's membership.
- GR to write to Jonathan Mason for an update on the Glencalvie Estate's deer management strategy.